



Testimony before the House K-12 Education Budget Committee
in opposition to

House Bill 2690 –Establishing the legislative award for excellence in teaching program to provide merit-based bonuses to teachers in certain school districts, establishing the every child can read act to focus on third-grade literacy proficiency and requiring the state department of education to provide summary academic achievement reports

by

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Madam Chair, Members of the Committee:

[Game On for Kansas Schools](#) is a nonpartisan grassroots effort among Kansans who share a belief in high-quality public education as a right of all Kansas students. We advocate for Kansas public schools to ensure our teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members have the resources necessary to deliver quality education to all Kansas students. We inform communities across the state about issues and legislation affecting their students, and our membership extends statewide.

We support efforts to improve third-grade literacy and recognize that this bill is better than some third-grade literacy bills we've seen in other states, but we think this bill will do more harm than good. As parents, we request that the legislature listen to the concerns that will be expressed by teachers, local school boards and the State Board of Education. We oppose shifting the high density at risk funding to this proposed program. This shift would negatively affect some districts more than others, and this funding would no longer be available to be used for salaries and programs rather than just teacher bonuses. We think the negative impacts of this lost funding stream would likely outweigh any benefits.

We are also concerned that, at a time when our teachers are feeling unappreciated, overworked and under attack, this bill may be viewed as an insult to teachers. The implication is that teachers aren't doing their best to improve outcomes for students, and they need to be incentivized to do better. We support efforts to reward teachers for their efforts, but do not think this bill is the right way to do it.

Additionally, we have several questions about how this bill would work. First, we note that although the bill makes an effort to look at longitudinal data, experience tells us that many lower-performing students are transient students. How do we hold districts responsible for student achievement over years for students who are in this year's fourth-grade class but were not in last year's third-grade class? Some provisions refer to increasing numbers of students rather than percentages of students. How would that be affected if a district is experiencing enrollment declines? We note that credit is only awarded for students moving up levels whereas students may make significant progress within levels. That progress would not be rewarded under this program. This bill refers to proficiency, but proficiency isn't defined.

The questions we have raised and others bring us to our final point— this bill seems to be another example of the legislature usurping the role of the State Board of Education and local boards. The problems we have outlined above point to the complexity of these issues and why they are difficult to handle through legislative action. During the interim committee meetings,

the legislature and State Board agreed to work together on progress on third grade reading. This bill does not appear to be the result of collaboration.

From our perspective, the students in our Kansas schools would benefit from having the legislature work with the State Board and listen to the concerns expressed by local boards and teachers to avoid the unintended consequences that appear likely at this point. We urge you to vote no on this bill.