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Written only NEUTRAL testimony to House Bill 2650  
House K-12 Education Budget Committee Hearing on February 7, 2024

Honorable Chair Williams and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written neutral testimony to HB 2650.

As the Superintendent of Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools / USD500 I am steadfastly committed to the academic improvement of all KCKPS students. A sustainable and realistic academic improvement reality for our at-risk students is of utmost priority. To this end, KCKPS has relied on and will continue to depend on the guidance of KSDE on what is/isn't effective and allowed as we operationalize at-risk programs. KCKPS has over 8,000 ESOL students, which if by themselves, would be the 8th largest school district in the state. The percentage of at-risk students in KCKPS has been above 80% for the past 4 years of students who meet one or more of the at-risk indicators. That dramatically scales the needs the district must meet, and we're not talking about a subgroup but the entire student enrollment.

KSDE has committed to enhanced guidance starting in the 2024-2025 school year. We look forward to strengthening engagement with KSDE on this and other mission-critical educational guidance.

While we continue to count on this support from KSDE, we also recognize the at-risk student educational challenges that are in front of public school districts. I detail some of these challenges below:

**Online Guidance Resource:**

- The requirement for each district to use a mandatory online guidance resource lacks consideration for the diverse needs of individual districts.
- A one-size-fits-all approach may not effectively address the specific challenges faced by at-risk students in various communities. Following the guidance outlined by KSDE is more appropriate.

**Unrealistic Academic Standards:**

- HB2650's provision that 75% of the identified sub-group must reach a 3 or 4 on the state assessment is an overly ambitious and unrealistic standard.
- Academic achievement is influenced by numerous factors, many of which are beyond the control of schools.

**Funding Consequences:**

- The proposal to alter at-risk funding based on the performance of a specific sub-group creates an environment of uncertainty and places an undue burden on schools.
- This introduces a continuous cycle of identification and potential funding loss, diverting resources from essential educational support.
- Punitive measures, such as the threat of funding reduction and loss of accreditation, are not the solution to addressing these complex issues.

**KCKPS At-Risk Points of Pride:**

- We have seen over the past 3 years that the students who have exited out of the ESOL program score in performance categories 3 and 4.

I strongly urge the committee to reconsider the provisions of HB 2650. Engaging in a more collaborative and comprehensive dialogue with educators, parents, and board members will lead to a solution that supports at-risk students without imposing unrealistic standards and risking essential funding.

Thank you for your time and consideration.