



Opposition Written Testimony – HB2637
House Committee on Education
Representative Susan Estes, Chair

February 12, 2026
Susan Willis, Government Liaison
USD 259 - Wichita Public Schools

Chair Estes and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to House Bill 2637.

As the state's largest school district, we strongly support efforts to reduce hunger and ensure that students are ready to learn. We understand and respect the goal behind proposals commonly referred to as "free lunch for all." However, HB 2637, as structured, creates significant unintended consequences by pitting universal meal access against two critical funding mechanisms: the financial stability of local Nutrition Services programs and At-Risk funding, which relies on free lunch eligibility as its proxy.

First, school nutrition programs operate as enterprise funds. They must be financially self-sustaining under federal regulations. The current system—particularly when districts participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)—is built on federal reimbursement formulas tied to identified student percentages and free lunch eligibility data. If universal free meals are implemented without a funding structure that fully replaces both federal reimbursement differentials and paid meal revenue, districts could face substantial operating deficits. In short, good intentions alone will not sustain meal programs; reimbursement formulas matter.

Second, and of even greater concern, Kansas uses free lunch eligibility as the proxy for At-Risk funding. That funding supports essential services for students failing to make academic progress - intervention programs, reading and math support, social-emotional resources, extended learning time, and more. If families are no longer required to complete income documentation because meals are universally free, districts will lose the primary data source used to calculate At-Risk funding.

This concern is not theoretical – we have evidence that it will happen. During the two years the federal government provided free meals following COVID shutdown, we had to move to the Household Economic Survey to provide evidence of poverty for At-Risk funding. Wichita lost over \$4 million in At-Risk funding for the two years impacted by this change. With over 37,000 At-Risk students, that funding matters greatly.

We are particularly concerned about framing this issue as a choice between "free lunch for all" and protecting school funding. School districts should not be forced into a position where expanding universal access undermines the financial structure that supports instructional services and targeted interventions. If the Legislature wishes to pursue universal meal access, we respectfully urge that it be done in a way that:

- Fully replaces lost Nutrition Services revenue,
- Establishes a clear and reliable alternative poverty measure for At-Risk funding in statute,
- Protects districts from unintended funding cliffs, and
- Ensures alignment between child nutrition policy and school finance law.

Until those protections are clearly defined, HB 2637 creates too much financial uncertainty for school districts and the students we serve. For these reasons, we respectfully oppose HB 2637 in its current form and urge careful consideration of the fiscal and structural implications for both Nutrition Services and At-Risk funding. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.