



Office of the Superintendent

Dodge City Public Schools · Unified School District 443 · Dodge City, Kansas
2112 1st Ave / Room 201 · Dodge City, KS 67801
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House Education Committee
Honorable Chair, Rep. Adam Thomas
Feb. 20, 2023

Honorable Chair Thomas and Committee Members,

The purpose of this communication is to provide written testimony in favor of House Bill 2223 for the repealing of the existing sunset on high-density-at-risk weighting. The existing sunset of this funding scheduled for June 30, 2024 would have an immediate reduction of Dodge City Public Schools school finance funding by more than \$2.23 million. We are a large, diverse district in western Kansas with more than 7,200 students. We have enrollment that is 76% Hispanic, 47% of our students are English Language Learners. Also, 67% of our students have a home language other than English. More than 20 languages are used in our communications with families. 5% of our students are migrant. Our data identifies 81% of all students at DCPS meet one or more criteria for At-Risk. Many of these numbers, if not all, puts us in the highest categories for each across the state. Dodge City Public Schools work daily to our commitment of a quality education by striving to meet the needs of this diverse population. There is no doubt that we face a complex and challenging effort. Dodge City relies on the extra-funding through high-density-at-risk funding to assist with additional staffing, programs and services. The possibility of losing this additional resource would negatively impact a large segment of our district.

Dodge City Public Schools is seeing improvement across our schools. This correlates with the specific use of at-risk funding and the focus on academic achievement. We have seen movement with four of our schools that were identified as KSDE Targeted Support Improvement and Comprehensive Support Improvement (TSI/CSI). This year, one of those schools was removed and two are very close to it as well. Solid progress is being made in the fourth and efforts are ongoing.

Funding through our At-Risk programs is purposeful that helps meet the needs and costs associated with complex challenges. We follow best practices identified by KSDE. Related staff-development and training is also a part of this. Through our Strategic Action Plan we have been able to align our KESA accreditation cycle with the focus of our district to seek the best possible practices and education for our students.

Many good things are going on in our district as a direct result of the commitment and focus we have. We were recently recognized by Commissioner Randy Watson for marked improvement on our Post-Secondary Success Rate nearly doubling it to 40.4%. While short of the level desired, the progress is notable. The 2022 Kansas Teacher of the Year, Susanne Stephenson, is one of ours.

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USD 443 does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, military status, primary language, and/or disability. This non-discrimination policy applies to admission, employment, programs, activities, and providing equal access to Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. A lack of English language skills will not be a barrier to admission and participation in the Career and Technical (vocational) and/or other educational programs of the school.



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There have been two others in the past 10 years. An obvious compliment to the efforts and progress being made here. We also take seriously the responsibility of using all our school finance funds including at-risk and high-density-at-risk.

While much more could be said, the bottom line is the funding provided for districts like ours through the high-density-at-risk funding is an essential element into our success. DCPS is in support of House Bill 2223 to allow for us future success.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. If you have further questions, do not hesitate to contact me at (620) 278-6097 or dierksen.fred@USD443.org.

Respectfully,

Fred Dierksen, EdD
Superintendent of Schools

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