

February 20, 2023

Remote Testimony to House Education Committee
Honorable Chair, Representative Adam Thomas
Deborah Bremer, Committee Assistant
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Room 286-N, State Capitol Building

Proponent House Bill 2223 – removing the sunset on the high-density at-risk weighting and making permanent supports for students of high poverty communities and schools.
Hearing: Monday, February 20, 2023, 1:30 PM Room 218-N

Honorable Chairman Thomas and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to share remote testimony as a **proponent of HB 2223**. Passage of this bill would make permanent the general education, school finance formula weighting for students in high poverty communities and schools. The bill is in alignment with [Kansas PTA Legislative Priorities 1, 2 and 3](#): preserving Article 6 of the Kansas constitution, investing in public education, and fully funding education mandates.

The Need. Kansas public schools enroll nearly 200,000 students who are eligible for the free lunch program. This means that 40% of public school students are from households with incomes at or below 130% of the federal poverty, which equates to just under \$30,000 a year for a three-person family or \$2,495 a month (Jan 2023). Among these youth, over 14,000 are living in communities and attending schools where over a third of their peers are in the same situation. Kansas private school systems have admitted less than 4,000 students eligible for free lunch ([KSDE website](#)). Youth living in poverty are much less likely to enter kindergarten ready to learn, but this does not diminish our collective responsibility to provide equitable opportunities for success, paid for through state aid via weighted funds. Public neighborhood schools enroll welcome all Kansas youth regardless of their needs. All youth have the right to a free public education, with oversight by elected state and local school board members. The Kansas PTA opposes cutting \$76 million from at-risk communities, enough to hire over 1,300 teachers to better individualized instruction. All students have a right and deserve a neighborhood school, in which funding matches the actual costs to provide quality educational experiences.

School Finance – Gannon and Montoy Agreements. High-density at-risk weighting was added to the school finance formula in 2006 and expanded in 2017, to strengthen capacity within school districts and buildings serving students living within high concentrations of poverty ([KSDE, 2020](#)). Decades of economic research on school finance has documented the strong relationship between expenditures and equitable opportunities for at-risk students to achieve college and career readiness outcomes ([Taylor, 2018, pp.7-8](#)). The Kansas Legislative Post Audit Division reported that most of the districts reviewed spent more to provide at-risk services than they received in state at-risk funding. “The 20 districts we reviewed received \$125 million in state at-risk funding but reported spending \$162 million to provide at-risk services. Most districts serve more students than they received” in state funds ([KLPD, 2019](#)). The [final Gannon 2019 bipartisan agreement](#) that passed constitutional review by the State Supreme Court included at-risk weightings, to ensure equitable and adequate funding regardless of a student zip code.

Expectation for Impact. Under the Montoy three-year phased-in agreement, when state general and special education funding peaked close to constitutionally adequate levels – student’s educational outcomes improved in Kansas ([KASB, 2020](#)). Under the Gannon SIX-year phased-in agreement, the new baseline for assessing the impact of the restored general education school funding agreement begins no sooner than this school year (2022-2023). Prior to SY23, districts operated with partial restoration of “full funding” and a six-year wait to bring back all the needed educators and instructional supports. And, just 1.5 years into the 6 year incremental restoration of state aid, student learning has been disrupted by the multi-year global pandemic. The impact of at-risk funding in Kansas over this time period is summarized here ([KASB, 2020](#)):

- “Kansas provides additional funding for at-risk students, based on the number of low-income students, but used to assist any student with problems in school.
- The number and percentage of at-risk Kansas students has been rising on multiple measures.
- Despite recent increases, the actual value of at-risk funding is lower than in previous years, whether measured per pupil, by total inflation adjusted dollars, or share of total funding.
- Under the current State Board policies for using and approving at-risk dollars, test scores rose when real funding was increasing and declined when funding fell behind inflation.
- Graduation rates and adult educational attainment have increased, with Kansas ranking above the U.S. average while providing below average per pupil funding and serving an above average percentage of low-income students.”
- And we know that the return on investment results in a more robust pipeline for the Kansas economy as well as protective factor against recession for Kansas youth. “Increased educational outcomes leads to increased annual income among Kansans ([KASB, 2023](#)).

Kansas PTA supports removing the sunset on the high-density at-risk weighting in HB 2223. On behalf of the parents, teachers, and patrons of the Kansas PTA, we urge this committee and the Kansas legislature to uphold both statutory formulas for funding general and special education. Together, this agreed upon plan will provide every Kansas student the opportunity for career and college readiness regardless of zip code. Commitment to this plan includes the general education Midwest CPI inflationary adjustment and full state reimbursement for 92% of the excess costs as noted in the special education funding formula.

We ask committee members to pass out favorably HB 2223 – removing the high-density at-risk sunset. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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THE PTA POSITION

Kansas PTA is a nonpartisan association that promotes the welfare of children and youth. The PTA does not endorse any candidate or political party. Rather, we advocate for policies and legislation that affect Kansas youth in alignment with our legislative platform and priorities. [PTA mission and purpose](#) have remained the same since our inception over 100 years ago, focused on facilitating every child’s potential and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.