



Senate Education Committee Testimony on SB 273

Dr. Cynthia Lane, superintendent
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My name is Dr. Cynthia Lane, and I have the privilege of serving as the superintendent of the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools. I am here to testify as an opponent of Senate Bill 273. While I am confident this committee and I share the same goal of sustaining an education system that serves all students well and provides them with an education suitable to this new century, this bill does little to advance that end, and actually moves the state in the opposite direction.

First, I want to be clear: The current funding formula is NOT the problem. The formula that we use to fund schools in Kansas is crafted to do exactly what a funding formula should do: It directly connects school funding to what it actually costs to educate specific kids. A student who does not speak English when they enter school will cost more to serve than a student who comes to school fluent in English. Students who grow up in poverty, students who live long distances from their school; districts are able to serve these and other students well precisely because the formula takes these differences into account, and weights funding to schools accordingly.

This is how formulas in states across the country are designed to work. It is the most conservative, fiscally responsible manner in which to fund schools. By contrast, moving to a system of block grants, disconnected from any knowledge of who the kids are, the challenges they face, and what it costs to serve them, virtually guarantees that districts who serve many students with significant needs will not receive sufficient resources to serve them well. In this plan, 80% of the poorest districts will actually lose money. And while the idea of increased flexibility sounds attractive, when resources are capped, the only flexibility we will have is in choosing which students to short-change.

I do want you to know that I also support the goal of having Kansans pay the lowest amount of taxes possible. But this must be done in a way that continues to provide students across the state with access to an education that opens the door to the American Dream. Thomas Jefferson's "well-educated populace" continues to be the foundation upon which strong communities and strong economies are built, and we will never get there if we continue to short-change public education. We must acknowledge that education is THE most important component of a thriving economy, which will ultimately support reduced taxes for everyone, and we must invest in education first.

While I am personally responsible for students in KCK, this is about far more than the welfare of just my kids. A funding system that does not provide opportunity for all kids will ultimately serve none of us well. We currently have a funding formula that works, and works for all kids. Yes, that formula is complex. With more than \$3 billion going to fund public schools in Kansas, the formula should be complex, in order to get funding directly to where the need is. What we do not have is the courage and the will to **fund** that system, and to do what is right for our children, and for our state. Remember, people will continue to move to and live in Kansas, not because we have mountains or an ocean, but because Kansas is a great place to live, work, and raise a family. Businesses across the state expect and demand strong schools, both to support their employees and their families, and to provide a qualified workforce. Doing the right thing for public schools is also doing the right thing for the economy.

On behalf of the more than 450,000 students who are served in public schools across this great state, I implore you to reject this bill, and to take the necessary steps to fund the current formula. That is right for our children, for our schools, for our economy, and for the state of Kansas.