



Senate Education Committee Testimony on SB 294

Dr. Cynthia Lane, superintendent

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The Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS) has a singular goal: “Each student will exit high school prepared for college and careers in a global society.” Everything that we do as a district, and all of our resources, **must** be focused on this goal. Over the years, we have looked for ways to do our work differently, in order to provide more and better opportunities for our students. It was this orientation that first led us to be involved in the conversations with Senator Steve Abrams that ultimately led to the bill that authorized the creation of the Coalition of Innovative Districts. We are deeply appreciative of Senator Abrams’ desire to support the work of districts that are seeking to remove barriers to student success.

This fall/winter, Senator Abrams engaged members of the Coalition in a series of conversations about the potential for the creation of a new/different funding stream for districts that are willing to do their work in innovative ways, and to be held accountable for the results they achieve for their students. We believe that Senator Abrams worked in the spirit of these conversations as he put together his new school finance formula.

It would be impossible to ignore that Senate Bill 294 has been introduced at a tumultuous moment in the history of school finance in Kansas. The *Gannon V. Kansas* lawsuit is currently before the Kansas Supreme Court, and the Kansas legislature has moved to change the way schools are funded, through the adoption of the proposal from Governor Sam Brownback to eliminate the existing school funding formula, and fund districts for the next two years through the creation of “Block Grants.” KCKPS has been very clear that the “Block Grant” proposal takes school funding in Kansas back several decades, and will ultimately harm the education of students across the state.

We believe that there are several things that any school funding formula must achieve. Most importantly, it must directly connect what it costs to serve specific students to how students are funded. There is a substantial body of research evidence (including two studies authorized by the Kansas legislature itself) that demonstrates that a student who has grown up in poverty, or a student who comes to school not speaking English, costs more to educate to a high standard than a middle class student, or one who comes to school already speaking English. A student living in a rural, sparsely populated area thirty miles from school will cost more to transport to school than one living in a more dense suburban or urban area.

A modern funding formula that seeks to educate all students to high standards **must** take these differences in student circumstances into account, and fund districts according to the specific students they serve. It must also take into account research which indicates the level at which each of these factors impacts student achievement, and weigh them accordingly. Perhaps most importantly, **any** formula can only be successful when it is **funded** at a level adequate to support all students in reaching high standards. We strongly believe that the existing funding formula does an excellent job of directly connecting student needs to school district funding, using **research** to weigh them proportionally, and that the legislature’s current challenge is to raise the resources necessary to fund the existing formula. Until we commit the resources necessary to fund schools in Kansas adequately, any other focus is premature.

While I applaud the efforts of Senator Abrams and this committee to strengthen education in the state of Kansas, I strongly urge you to focus your efforts on developing the legislative will to raise the revenue needed to give **all** students in Kansas access to a high-quality education.