

**House Appropriations Committee
January 31, 2012
Testimony from Dr. George Griffith
Superintendent Trego County USD #208**

Testimony on HB 2400

Thank you for allowing me to express my concerns pertaining to the proposed changes in “At-Risk” weighting included in HB 2400. **Specifically, I am opposed to the change in the definition of At-Risk students from those on free lunches to only those that are non-proficient on the state assessment for students in grades 4 through 12.**

If the changes in HB 2400 would be passed, there would be unintended consequences and a negative impact on Kansas children.

- 1) The current definition of an At-Risk student provides funding for districts which is used to provide programs and staff to help our most vulnerable students be successful in school. For example: changing this definition would cost Trego County USD 208 approximately \$100,000 and result in the elimination of programs and staff which are providing services to our students who are currently identified as at-risk. Some of the programs we have implemented are computer based and provide individualized instruction for our students. We also have individualized Student Learning Plans for each student so we can make sure we meet their individual needs. USD 208 has cut positions and programs over the past three years and cutting further, especially for services to those students who are currently identified at-risk, will have a direct negative impact on the education of these children. USD 208 only has 24 percent of our students classified as at-risk under the current definition and I know the negative impact would be greater for other district with higher percentages of students from low income households.
- 2) The proposed change and the resulting loss of services would result in an increase in students from low income families falling further behind their more affluent peers. There is a large body of research that indicates that more than any other factor including gender and ethnicity; poverty has the greatest impact on student success.
- 3) The change proposed in HB 2400 would move Kansas Education from a proactive educational system to a reactive one. As a proactive educational system, we help students with additional educational needs when the interventions are more effective and less costly and not after these students have experienced a level of failure. The

proposed change in the definition of at-risk students would cause educators to be reactive and only be able to provide limited assistance for students only after they have not been successful. Not only does a reactive system cost more to implement because the interventions needed are more intense, it also has a negative impact on the child's self-perception. It has been my experience that any student who experiences success gains the confidence to do more than they thought they could. I also have experience with many students who have dealt with academic failure who then expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to anything related to the area in which they have failed which is why a reactive system of intervention is more costly and not good for our children.

I am not only speaking as a school administrator representing the children of Kansas; I was a child from an at-risk home who was told and believed I would not be successful if I went into higher education. It was not until I was in my thirties and I needed to change my career that I discovered my ability to be successful in the academic area ultimately earning my Ph.D. from KSU in 2009.

I am asking that you do not pass the changes presented in HB 2400 because of the negative impact it would have on the most vulnerable children in our state.

Thank you again for considering my comments.