



LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

FROM BLUE VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT 229

**TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 251
SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION FINANCE
May 18, 2017
Submitted by: Dr. Mike Slagle, Deputy Superintendent**

On behalf of Blue Valley USD 229, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 251. We genuinely appreciate the work and effort that has gone into developing a constitutional school finance formula. We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on SB 251 and for the time you're taking to consider recommendations for improvement. We believe this legislature has a unique opportunity to establish a new school finance formula that is empirically driven and that focuses on the diverse educational needs and interests of all *students* in Kansas.

We will focus our comments on SB 251 as it lines up against Blue Valley's stated legislative priorities. The portions of SB 251 we strongly support include:

- Funding **all-day kindergarten**;
- Employing an *employment wage cost differential* that recognizes differing wage costs across various areas of Kansas (**Cost of Living Adjustment**);
- Allowing a local funding mechanism to address the additional costs associated with opening a new school facility;
- Increasing the **Capital Outlay** levy authority from 8 to 10 mills, and expanding the expenses which may be paid from Capital Outlay Funds. *As all districts face increasing capital outlay demands*, investing in new infrastructure and appropriately maintaining current infrastructure, including technology equipment and software upgrades, this authority will also allow those needs to be addressed and, more importantly, free resources for other programs and services;
- Including \$2 million for **pre-school at-risk**. While this does not directly benefit our school district, we believe it is a proven strategy for improving education outcomes for K-12 students; and,
- Using a three-year rolling average **CPI growth index** and tying that index to a base of \$4,490.

As we've studied SB 251, however, we have identified areas we believe could be strengthened to better support the state's goal of improving the educational outcomes of all students in Kansas. In keeping with our belief that we should not offer problems without also offering a solution, below you will find a brief description of our concerns along with a suggested improvement to mitigate each concern.

Enrollment Calculation

Issue: We believe the enrollment calculations of this plan have the potential to be a step behind rapidly growing school districts due to its "lag" nature. As we understand it, no summer enrollment growth will be captured by the calculations. Blue Valley is a rapidly growing district and gain about 200 students per year. Tying funding to the previous year's enrollment creates a loss to our district that would equate to ten new teachers.

Solution: An enrollment count that includes a summer growth component is needed. Another consideration might be a special enrollment growth fund districts could apply to, similar to the former Extraordinary Needs Fund, that allows rapidly growing districts to mitigate a portion of these costs.

At-Risk Definition

Issue: Defining at-risk students as only those on free lunch potentially misses students who are also in need of academic interventions. Using the free-lunch proxy, Blue Valley receives at-risk funding for about one-third of its at-risk student population. *Creating an at-risk funding floor of 10%* mitigates this somewhat, but does not achieve the goal of ensuring at-risk funds actually reach all at-risk students.

Solution: The definition of at-risk should be broadened to include not only socio-economic indicators, but other student risk indicators. These include student academic performance data, attendance data and other data that identifies at-risk students. Our identification of at-risk students, according to the state's own definition, would be nearly *five times greater* than the number of students that we would receive funding for in SB 251. *We urge the committee to mirror the at-risk funding mechanism with the state's current at-risk definition by also including students that meet at least two of state's criteria of at-risk.*

Supporting Excellence

Issue: This formula provides a basis for producing proficient, adequate educational outcomes for all students and we support that. However, our community expects – in fact, demands – that we pursue academic excellence and provide the opportunity for our students to compete in a worldwide market.

Solution: Provide a local funding mechanism whereby districts may raise local funds to go beyond adequacy and proficiency, *to pursue exemplary student educational outcomes.*

Again, we are grateful to this committee for allowing an open discussion of how we may improve the educational outcomes of students in our state. We urge the committee to consider not only how we may support adequacy and proficiency in our students, but how we may further spur the growth of excellence and exemplary student educational outcomes.

Thank you for considering my remarks and I am happy to stand for any questions you may have now or in the future. Please feel free to contact me at mslagle@bluevalleyk12.org or (913) 239-4688.