



KANSAS NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION / 715 SW 10TH AVENUE / TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1686

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House Bill 2540
Senate Education Committee
March 11, 2020

Madame Chair, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on HB 2540, a bill on at-risk funding.

HB 2540 does three things: 1) it extends high-density at-risk funding; 2) it restricts spending of at-risk money to only programs on a KSDE website list with some one-year “provisional” exceptions; and finally, 3) it demands significant reporting requirements on the efficacy of each program used on individual at-risk students.

We appreciate the fact that this bill extends the sunset on high-density at-risk weighting although our preference would have been that the sunset was simply repealed. We support this part of the bill.

The section on data collection is quite extensive and while we believe it is perfectly appropriate to seek data on the efficacy of district efforts to meet the needs of at-risk students, the extent of this data collection would appear to be overkill. In a large district it might even require a dedicated person to gather, analyze, and prepare the necessary reports. We would think that this section of the bill could be narrowed and still allow for the collection of data.

The part that concerns us the most is the requirement that at-risk dollars be spent only on a list of identified “at-risk and provisional at-risk educational programs based on best practices” and listed on the State Department’s website.

We believe that meeting the needs of at-risk students requires a concerted effort not just to find the right “programs” but also to transform educational practice. I think this is exactly what you saw in the presentation by the counselors from Beloit.

I thought about this very bill as I listened to Eilert and Litton and this is what came to me: They were not talking about “programs.” Most of what they talked about was transforming educator “practice.” While it is true that they did buy a program – the Boys Town program – much of what they are doing is changing the practice of teachers, administrators, and related service professionals to “transform the culture” of their school.

Changing “practices” to “transform a culture” is not a program that you can buy off an approved list, but it still costs money. Professional development costs money. Mentoring and coaching cost money. Professional learning communities cost money. And all of those are things that are not packaged as programs.

And putting in place a program as transformation as that in Beloit requires educators to challenge their thinking and go out on a limb in an effort to find what really works by trying new things.

Beloit is a Mercury redesign school which also reminded me of a display at the Cosmosphere in Hutchinson. Have you been there and seen the room in which you can view the twisted wreckage of a number of Mercury capsules while watching rocket explosions on a video screen? We forget that transformations are sometimes made concurrently with some failures; failures that become “teachable moments” – the times when we learn, when we have “aha!” moments.

It seems to us that the legislature would do well to encourage transformation instead of strict adherence to some preferred programs or downplaying the importance of changing educators' practices or insisting on seismic shifts in student performance within months of getting new funding or starting a new program. The provisional programs allowed in this bill would disappear after one year unless the KSDE chose to put them on the list. Starting a program in August and expecting such seismic shifts in performance by May is unrealistic.

In short, we would ask you to narrow the scope of the data collection and to remove the restrictions on spending. We appreciate the allowing for "provisional" programs, but we think the entire limitation restricts the ability of teachers and administrators to find what works for their students.