



March 11, 2020

Senate Education Committee

Testimony Neutral on House Bill 2540

Chairwoman Baumgardner and Members of the Committee:

The Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD) appears today as neutral on Senate Bill 2540. We support the removal on the high-density at-risk sunset provisions of the school finance formula, not an extension. There is no logic and rationale to retaining the one sunset on a singular provision of the school finance formula. High density at-risk and the statewide 20-mills may be the only provisions of the formula that would require regular affirmative action by the Legislature. The entire formula sunsets in 2027 and all provisions will be subject to review. After the initial three years, and with no reported issues specific to high-density at-risk and its \$50 million in expenditures, this lone provision warrants no need for extraordinary attention.

High-density at-risk funding was created to add an extra weighting for schools where a concentration of low-income students presents additional educational challenges. Since the school finance formula was amended in 2017 to make attendance centers with more than 35 percent of their pupils eligible for high-density at-risk funding, Shawnee Mission School District has had thirteen attendance centers who meet those qualifications. The population density of at-risk students requires additional funding to address the unique needs of students where poverty is concentrated. It is an important part of the larger state commitment to support the academic growth of at-risk students. The high-density at-risk formula recognizes that at-risk students are not evenly distributed across the state or even within a single district, and that schools with a high concentration of at-risk students may have challenges beyond those of other schools. We have an obligation to meet the needs of all students.

House Bill 2540 is important because it allows us to provide a variety of services for our students. The two most prominent of these services are providing intervention materials and supporting teacher professional learning. More than 12,000 students in the Shawnee Mission School District, which represents approximately 45% of our student population, meet one or more of the state's criteria for at-risk students. Through its Response to Intervention (RTI) process, Shawnee Mission School District provides an intentional and timely system to address student needs. As defined by John Hattie in his meta-analysis of education research, RTI is "an educational approach that provides early, systematic assistance to children who are struggling in one or many areas of their learning." Hattie found that an effective RTI program is one of the most successful means of improving student learning, with a documented ability to have students make up to three years of learning in one school year.

We are aware of the Legislature's interest in the recent Legislative Post Audit report regarding at-risk funding and programs. House Committee amendments improved

the at-risk components of House Bill 2540 but the bill's emphasis on forcing resources into a budgetary category that does not directly match up one-to-one with expenditures on a student adds unnecessary complexity. It further contributes to a sentiment that "at-risk funds are not going to at-risk students." The distinction in a bill may be obvious; the practice between money in an account and a kid in a classroom is not as seamless. The number of students who qualify for free lunch is used as a proxy to determine the distribution of State at-risk funding. The manner by which at-risk funds are distributed by formula and conform to the State Department of Education guidelines to serve the needs of at-risk students within the general school environment remains unsettled. The addition of "provisional at-risk" provides some temporary flexibility, but it is not a solution.

If the Legislature chooses to make any changes to the broader issues of at-risk services and programs, high-density at-risk funding will be subject to those changes. However, we support passage of House Bill 2540 to ensure the high-density at-risk funding formula provision is not lost, which would negatively impact our students.

If I can provide any additional information or answer questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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