



Oral Neutral Testimony before the

Senate Education Committee

on

HB 2540 – Requiring moneys attributable to at-risk student weighting be expended for approved at-risk educational programs

by

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Madam Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We also want to thank this committee for advancing **SB 271**, extending the high density at-risk weighting factor for two years, and the Senate for passing that bill 40-0.

As we stated on that bill, it is vital to continue the high density at-risk weighting because it provides \$50 million in additional funding to schools and districts with the highest concentrations of low income students; students more likely to have academic, social, emotional and other needs that can hinder their learning. (See page 3)

At the same time, we recognize there are concerns with overall at-risk programs because of the Legislative Post Audit study. Today's bill, **HB 2540**, makes some changes in those programs. In considering those changes, we would ask you to remember the following:

- The number of Kansas students likely to be at-risk has risen much faster than the overall student population in recent years. (Page 3)
- Under the **current** at-risk system, Kansas test scores on state assessments, the National Assessment of Educational Progress and ACT college readiness all **increased** after funding increased following the *Montoy* school finance decision, and only declined after eight years in which per pupil funding declined about 16 percent compared with inflation. (Pages 4-5)
- Kansas is only three years into a six-year plan to restore school funding to 2009 levels to address the *Gannon* decision, with only two years of data.
- Despite more at-risk students, Kansas high school graduation rates, postsecondary attainment and 18- 24-year-old educational attainment rates have all increased under the current system of at-risk funding and State Board oversight of programs and practices. (Pages 6-7)

We appear as neutral on this bill because it has both positive features and areas of concern. On the positive side, it extends the high density at-risk weighting for five years, and the House committee did make some changes to the original bill in response to concerns we raised in testimony. KASB also has no objection to the provision requiring at-risk state aid be placed in the district's at-risk fund.

However, we are concerned about the following provisions in the House bill.

First, the bill originally required the State Board to provide a list of approved at-risk programs on its website and limit at-risk expenditures to those programs. In testimony, we raised concerns that such a provision would limit the ability of local districts to develop or experiment with new programs. In response, the House committee amended the bill to allow “provisional” at-risk programs for one year, which must then be approved by the State Board.

While we appreciate this change, it raises the question of whether this simply adds complexity to current law, which **already requires** the State Board to approve all programs. It doesn’t really support the idea of school redesign, which means trying new ways to attack old problems. And just because a program or practice is “evidence-based” doesn’t mean it will work in every situation.

Second, the bill adds new reporting requirements. Districts are **already required** to report information about students, practices, programs and results. Any new reporting will take time and effort not available for something else. The questions we urge this committee to ask are: How will new information actually be used? What will it tell both local districts and the state that is useful new data?

Specifically, as page 4, line 10, shows, schools are already required to report “The number of students identified as eligible to receive at-risk services who were served or provided assistance.” The bill adds a new requirement to report “the number of students served or provided assistance under *each* program.” (Lines 14-15, emphasis added.) Because students may be served by multiple programs, it could be very time consuming to try to apportion time and cost of programs to each individual student. Alternatively, simply giving total numbers in every program would be unlikely to provide useful information.

In addition, the bill requires districts to report “a comparison of students receiving such service or assistance with all other students” by specific academic performance. (Lines 18-20.) While this sounds reasonable, remember that the only students who qualify for these programs are those having challenges, so this group will likely ALWAYS compare unfavorably to “all other students,” even if the number or percentage of such students is declining.

Finally, the bill adds requirements to report certain specific measures, including “attendance and, if applicable, state assessment score, four-year graduation rate and average ACT composite score.” (Lines 21-23.) While KASB has no objection to reporting those items (which are already reported), we are concerned that the focus is too narrow. That list includes only one of the five “Kansans Can” outcomes adopted by the State Board:

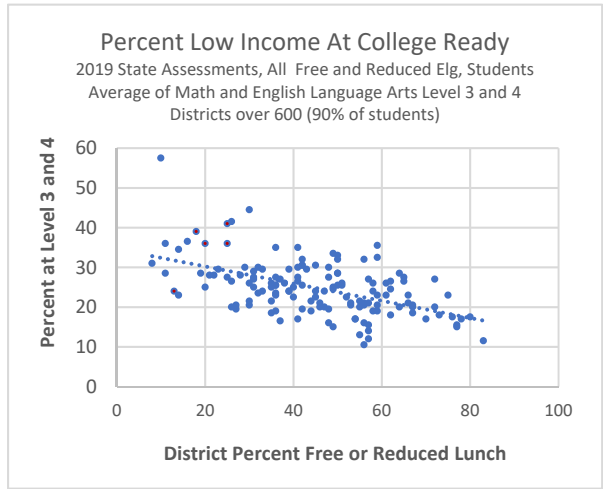
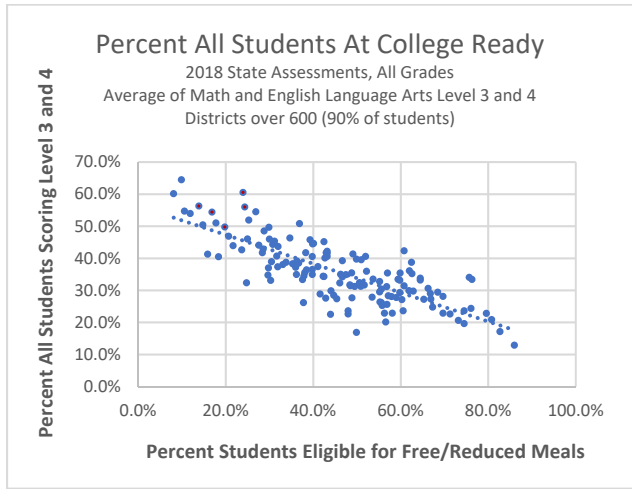
- Social/emotional growth measured locally
- Kindergarten readiness
- Individual Plan of Study focused on career interest
- High school graduation rates
- Postsecondary completion/attendance

The list certainly does not acknowledge the importance of addressing other factors influencing both academic preparation and student success, such as mental health, combatting bullying behavior, etc., including such areas as have been approved and funded by the Legislature.

We would encourage the committee to carefully evaluate whether these additional requirements will actually lead to more meaningful accountability, and what evidence supports them.

The following pages provide additional information on at-risk issues and student performance trends.

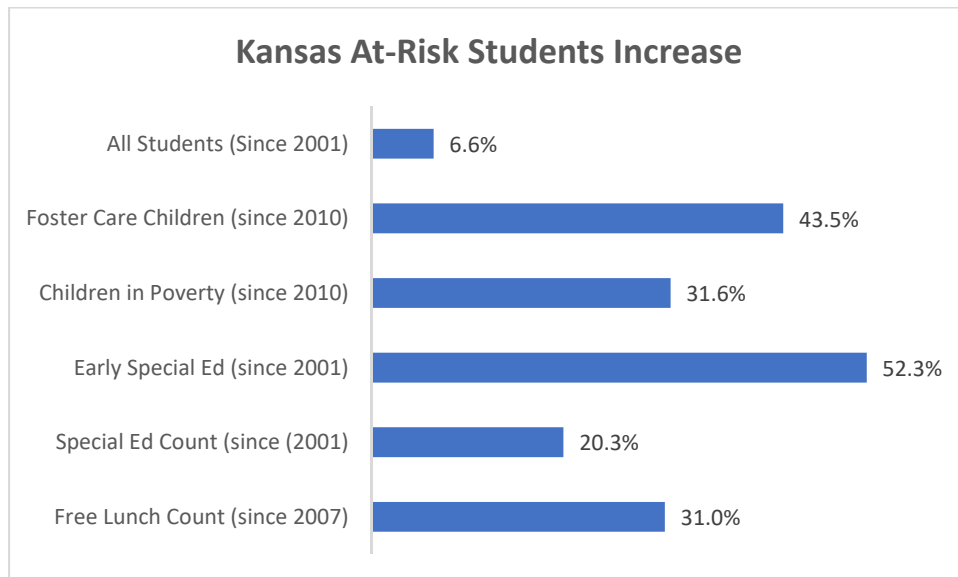
Districts with higher percentages of low-income students have lower student achievement, and the low-income students have more challenges in district with higher percentages of low-income students.



The first chart shows the strong correlation between low income students and performance on state scores – why Kansas has an at-risk weighting and used free lunch as proxy. On average, income impacts achievement.

The second chart shows that even among low income students, higher percentages of low free lunch students tends to lower performance – why Kansas has a high-density weighting.

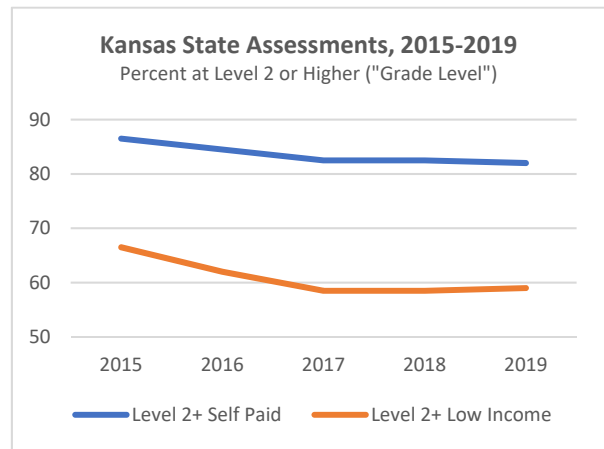
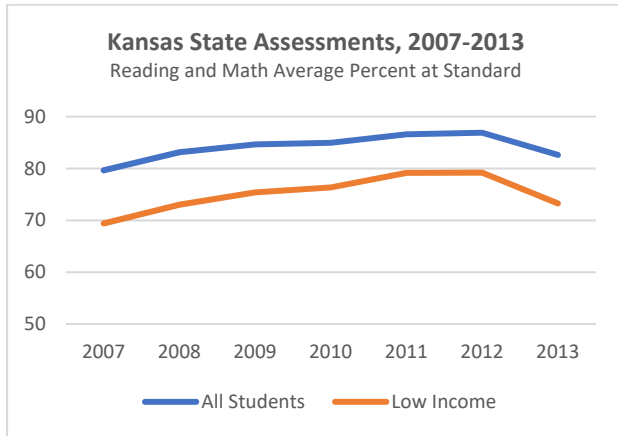
The number of low-income students – and the number students with other “risk factors” - has been increasing faster than the overall student population.



This included low income students eligible for free and reduced-price meals; even lower income students below the poverty line; students with disabilities; students in foster care, and students with severe mental and emotion needs as measured increased suicide rates.

(A) The percentage of students at grade level on state math and English language arts assessments

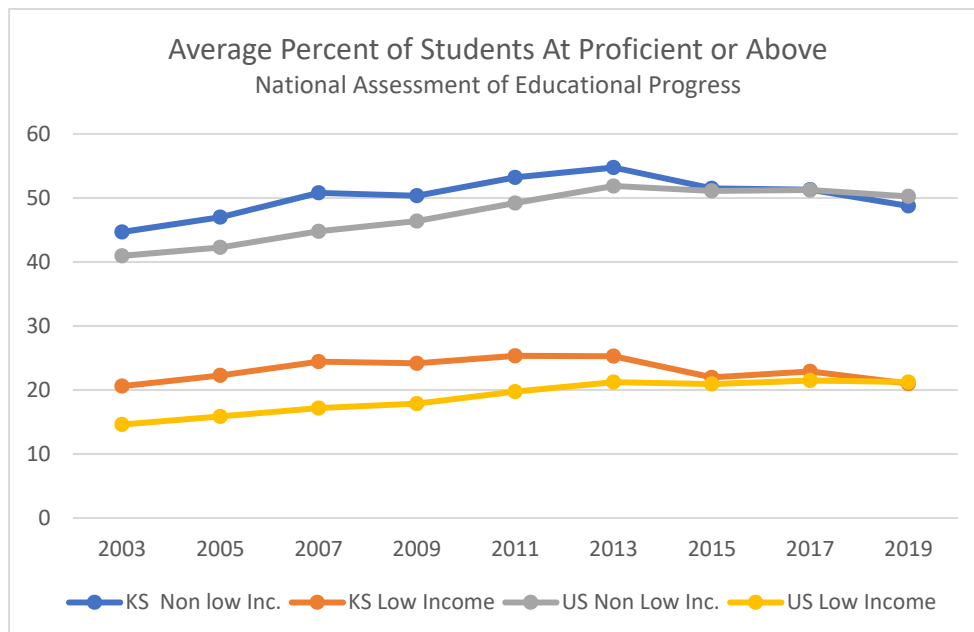
After increased at-risk and total school funding resulted from the *Montoy* decision in 2006, more students began meeting basic standards on the previous state assessment tests until 2012.



After school funding began to decline, in either actual or inflation-adjusted terms from 2009 to 2017, state assessment results declined in 2013 and continued to fall during the first years of a new testing system beginning in 2015. After additional funding following *Gannon* began in 2018 (but will not be completed until 2023), assessment declines leveled off.

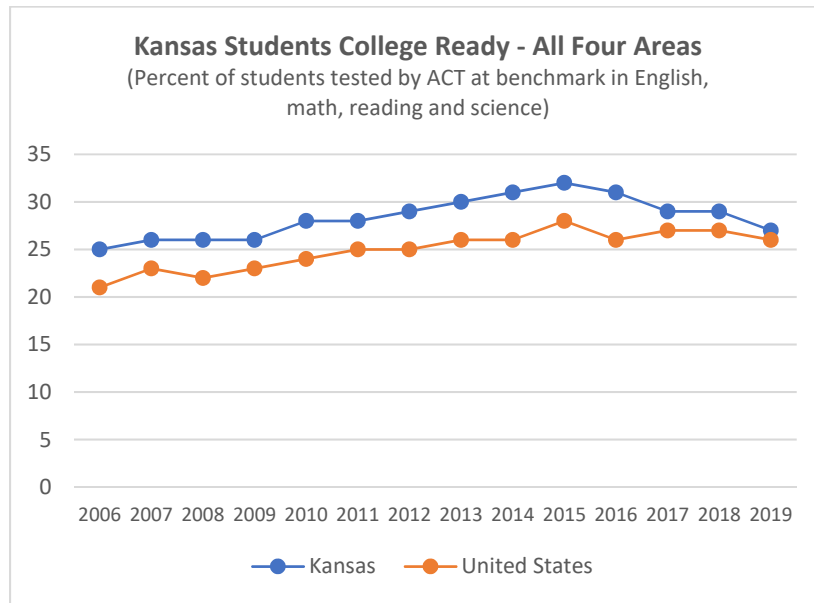
(B) the percentage of students that are college and career ready on state math and English language arts assessments.

Kansas assessments at “college ready” show a similar pattern to “grade level,” so for additional context, we are showing Kansas scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress for “proficient,” which are similar to Kansas results at “college ready.” The percent of Kansas students meeting that benchmark rose from 2003 to around 2011, and generally declined from 2011 to 2019.



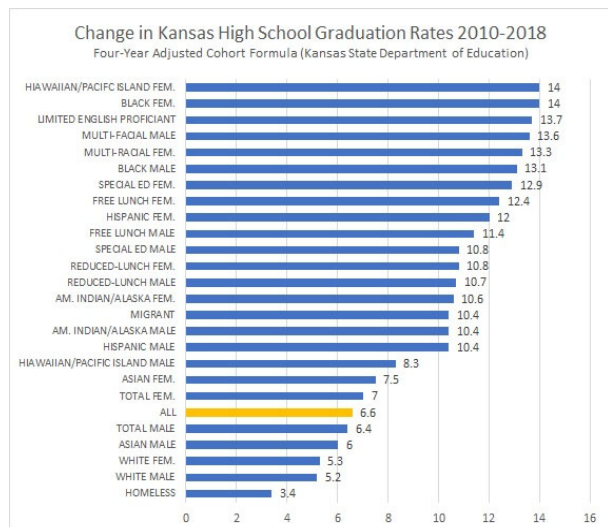
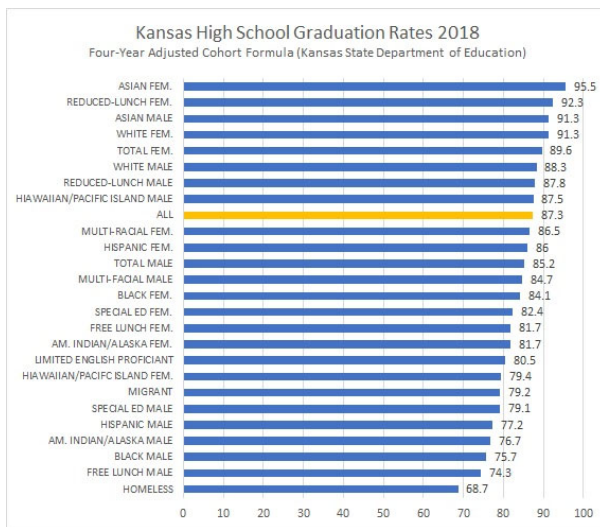
(C) the average composite ACT score

Rather than using the composite ACT, KASB tracks the percentage of students tested who meet ACT’s “college ready” benchmarks in all four areas tested. Note that Kansas was improving steadily from 2006 to 2015, including the period when funding increased, before declining over the past four years after eight years of funding that was cut or fell behind inflation, ACT results lag because a significant number students reported by free or reduced-price meal eligibility. (ACT does not report results by free or reduced-price meal eligibility.)



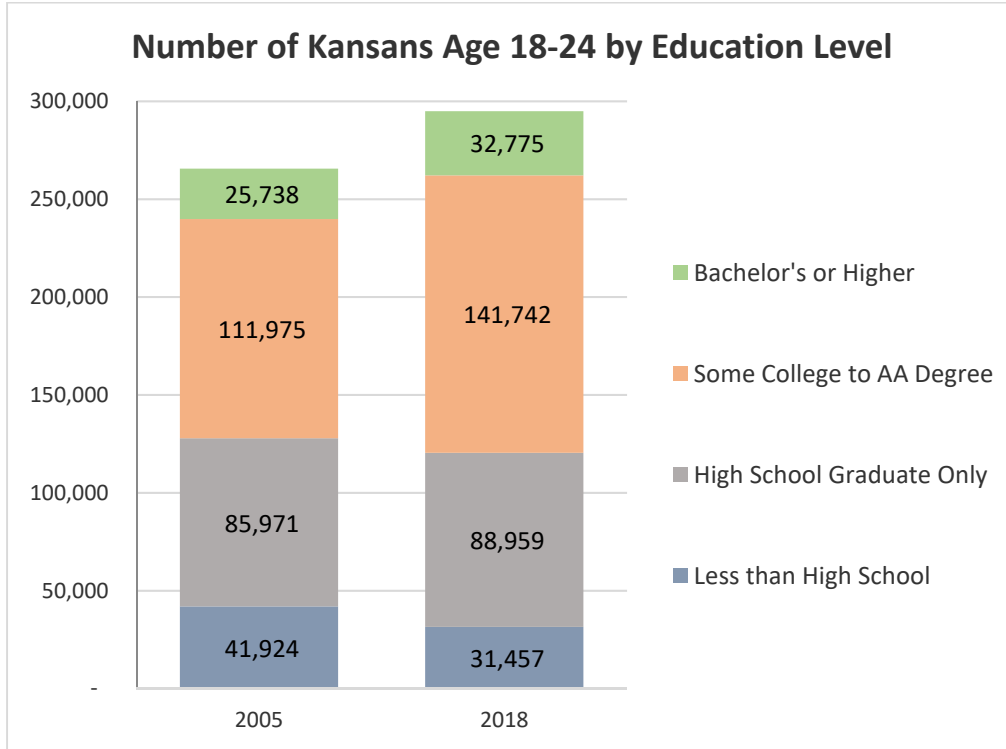
(D) the four-year graduation rate

Since the four-year graduation rate was adopted in 2020, Kansas graduation rates have improved, and rates for low-income and other lower performing groups have increased at a faster rate than average.

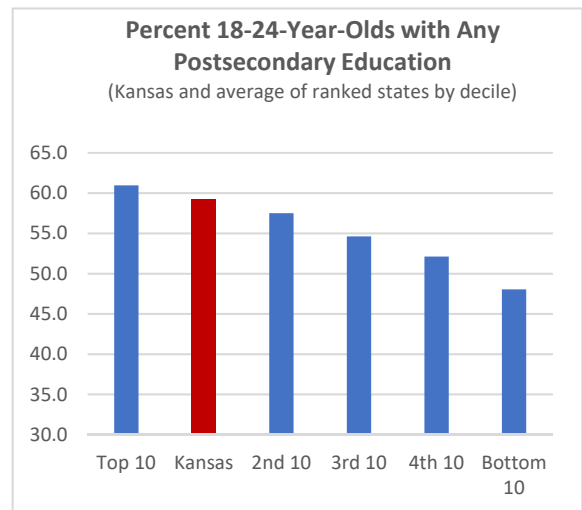
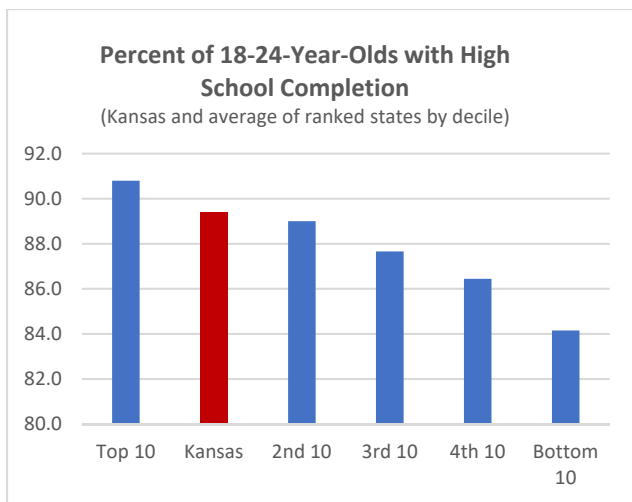


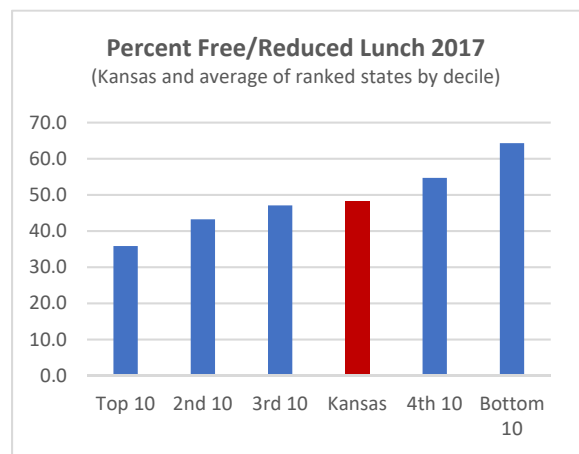
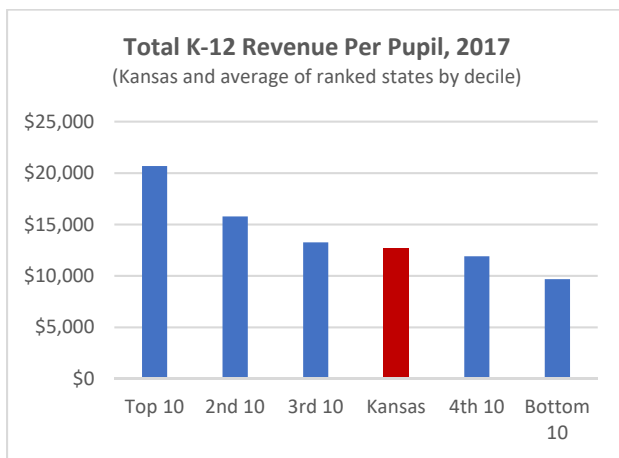
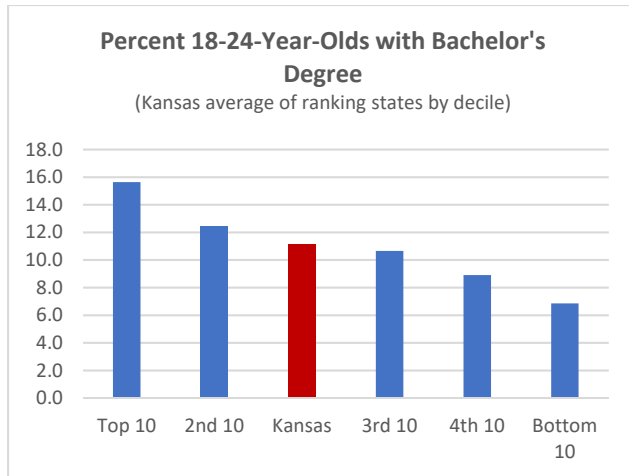
Other measures

High school completion, postsecondary participation and completion of postsecondary programs have all improved for young Kansas adults, despite the increased number of low-income and other at-risk student groups.



Kansas ranks from the top half to the top 10 states in high school completion, postsecondary participation and four-year degree completion, although Kansas ranks below average in funding per pupil and above average in low income student percentage.





Conclusions:

Kansas educational outcomes were improving under the current at-risk weighting system during and after funding increased in the late 2000's.

After funding (in real, inflation-adjusted terms) began to decline in 2010, test scores began to decline within 2-4 years, suggesting it will take some time for new increased funding to have an impact.

Funding was the variable that changed, not the use or approval of at-risk programs or practices.

Although state assessments, NAEP tests and ACT schools have declined in recent years, Kansas has shown improvement in graduation rates and young adult educational attainment – measures that actually translate into higher employment and income – despite more at-risk students.