



Mark Desetti

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Oral testimony, Proponent

Senate Bill 173 - *Extending the high-density at-risk student weighting, requiring certain transfers to the at-risk fund of a school district, and establishing requirements for school district at-risk fund expenditures and for identification of students eligible to receive at-risk programs and services.*

Senate Education Committee

February 18, 2021

Madam Chair, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to address Senate Bill 173 regarding at-risk education funding and programs. We appear today as a proponent of this bill.

Let me start by saying our preference is to pass legislation simply repealing the sunset on high density at-risk weighting as in Senate Bill 144 and would hope that should you decide to work this bill instead that you would consider amending SB 173 to repeal the sunset rather than extend it.

To the other provisions of this bill, I know that the legislature has discussed enacting tightened restrictions on the use of at-risk funding for several years. A bill creating tight restrictions on the use of these dollars came before this committee last year and I appeared as an opponent of that bill. On the other side was the Kansas Policy Institute, represented by Mr. Mike O'Neal. After a long discussion, Chair Baumgardner directed Mike O'Neal and me to work together to bring recommendations we could both agree on.

Mike, at that time, suggested to me that I write recommendations and that he and I could "negotiate" over those recommendations. I worked with my colleague Mark Tallman of KASB as well as Jim Porter from the State Board of Education and Dodie Wellshear in crafting a set of recommendations. I took those recommendations to Mr. O'Neal and, after some back and forth and adjustments, we had an agreement that we brought to this committee.

Those recommendations are embedded in this bill.

The bill includes a restriction on spending at-risk dollars by requiring the use of a set of research-based programs identified by the State Board and listed on the Department of Education's website. But the bill also allows school districts to try new ideas that have not yet been reviewed and approved in an effort to find new and creative ways to meet student needs. These are the provisional programs in this bill. The compromise we reached was to allow these programs to be used for three years in an effort to really determine effectiveness. If the provisional program is shown to be effective after three years of implementation (or earlier), then it would be placed on the approved program list. We are pleased to see that the three-year provisional programs have been included in this legislation.

We also felt it was critically important that teachers get appropriate training in the implementation of at-risk programs. To that end, we asked that districts be permitted to use at-risk funding to provide professional development related to such implementation. We again are pleased to see that professional development for teachers is included in the bill.

Finally, this bill codifies the criteria used by districts in determining which students participate in approved at-risk education programs with the addition of dyslexia. We supported the development of the dyslexia task force, we participated in the task force discussions, and we support the recommendations of the task force. We support the addition of dyslexia to the criteria used by districts.



Madam Chair, we are pleased to see that this legislation includes the work that we did last year with Mr. O'Neal to find common ground and that a bill has been crafted to reflect that work. We appreciate that the bill before you clarifies expectations and still allows flexibility to schools and districts seeking new and better ways to meet the needs of at-risk students.

For these reasons, we stand in support of Senate Bill 173.