



Education Committee
Kristey Williams, Chair

January 18, 2024
Susan Willis, Chief Financial Officer
USD 259 - Wichita Public Schools

Chair Williams and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in opposition of HB2485. One of the reasons the legislature adopted the lookback enrollment model was so that the state could better plan its budget and not have to adjust for unforeseen enrollment fluctuations occurring after the start of the state's fiscal year. Budget planning is exactly why Wichita opposes the changes in HB2485. Wichita Public Schools educates over 47,000 students annually. Planning and decisions for educational services for 2024-25 have been in the works for over a year at this point, especially with the end of federal COVID relief funding in 2024. This bill would undermine Wichita's ability to balance the 2024-25 budget without more negative impact to students. Here are our concerns:

1. Wichita has already negotiated a two-year agreement (2023-24 and 2024-25) with its teachers and classified support staff based on the formula as currently written, and those agreements were approved in August 2023. Changing the formula effective 7/1/24, combined with not knowing if that action will be final until May 2024, limits Wichita's ability to react and plan for this budget reduction other than implement layoffs.
2. Recruiting for 2024-25 has been ongoing since the fall of 2023 and will continue from now until May, with particular focus on Special Education and other hard to fill positions. With an average of 400 positions that turnover annually, Wichita must aggressively recruit and recruit early. Again, a change to the formula effective 7/1/24 and not finalized until May puts Wichita in a difficult position to either hold hiring (as layoffs could be imminent) or revoke job offers.
3. Wichita also is facing the end of historic federal COVID relief funding, and already faces a \$42 million budgetary shortfall that must be addressed. Outside of other action, a cut of this magnitude is the equivalent of **560 teachers**. A "short notice" formula change simply worsens an already significant budget deficit late in the budgetary cycle with fewer options to adjust. As currently forecasted, we will have to **cut the equivalent of another 20 teaching positions** if we lose the second preceding year lookback.
4. Counselors, social workers, psychologists, and additional para support were added with federal COVID relief funding. As we review needs assessment data, schools desperately want to keep those additional supports as students are still demonstrating great need for them. It is possible that Wichita might turn to school building closures to retain staff. If the final bill includes language districts closing schools must use current year enrollment, Wichita could still be forced to lay off essential staff after the school year commences.
5. Additionally, Wichita will have a challenging time trying to forecast the 2024-25 enrollment as it prepares for the initial implementation the enacted open enrollment policy. Wichita could grow, or it could lose students to suburban districts with capacity. Is this the right time to make additional changes to the formula?

6. Wichita hears often that it has “plenty of cash” and could manage these changes. One of the reasons that Wichita carries some cash balances currently is to lessen the impact of the loss of federal funding (Wichita must be fiscally responsible, planning ahead to meet the needs of 47,000 students). Cutting \$42 million in one year will be extremely hard on the system. Wichita would use its cash reserves to spread reductions over a two-year period instead of trying to absorb the full impact of funding loss in a single school year. Using cash to cover enrollment loss due to a late formula change was not in the plan and therefore exacerbates an already demanding situation.

As the largest school district in Kansas, Wichita must provide varied additional supports to help all students be successful. We understand and embrace this challenge. That said, designing and implementing educational services and supports for over 47,000 students with individual educational needs is a heavy lift that takes a tremendous amount of time and planning to execute. The funding formula, as it is established in law currently, provides both the state and its school districts with the necessary time to execute the planning required for serving Kansas students. Looking at time as a resource that should also be safeguarded, the advancement of this bill into law prevents both parties from having access to proper fiscal planning time. The impact is even more significant for those districts declining in enrollment, as two years of revenue estimates previously anticipated by districts will be invalidated, and rash decisions will have to be made to compensate for additional revenue reductions. The formula as written continues to provide benefits for fiscal planning for all parties.

Wichita is not opposed to adding the current year enrollment criteria to the formula to help growing districts. But Wichita stands in opposition of HB2485 changing the formula to the potential detriment of districts who, like Wichita, have already made decisions based on the formula already in law, and we would urge the committee to not advance this bill as written.