

Independence Unified School District 446

Senate Education Committee
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Madam Chairperson and distinguished committee members, my name is Rusty Arnold and I am the Superintendent of Schools serving the students of Independence Unified School District 446. I am here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 271.

The importance of Senate Bill 271 cannot be overstated because the needs of our students are great, At-risk funds have become a significant part of funding our educational system by providing the following:

- Reduction in class sizes to ensure each individual student’s needs are being met. A “typical” classroom today presents a wide array of challenges such as extreme variance in ability levels, social and emotional issues which don’t end when the kids enter our classrooms, and the harsh realities of poverty that many of our kids endure daily. For example a “typical” fifth grade classroom (8) within our district: 20 students—Fourteen at-risk students, four special education students which may also be considered at-risk for many reasons, and six that do not have any additional needs classification. Reading levels are as follows: two at 1st grade, one at 2nd grade, six at 3rd grade, four at 4th grade, five at 5th grade level, and two above grade level.

NOTE: District at-risk population rate of 70% and special education rate of 19%

- Para-educators are there to help support the needs of our struggling students. Our Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms each have full time para-educators to assist with programming that will lay the foundation for educational success moving forward. Research is clear that students not reading at grade level by the end of third grade statistically are likely to struggle educationally. Additional para-educators are used throughout our district to support one-on-one instruction, and small group instruction as appropriate.
- College and Career Readiness programs such as Career Cruising to explore careers or interest, plus support ongoing documentations of Individual Plans of Study. Our IPS are there to help students plot the path(s) they need in order to accomplish their goals and dreams.
- Supplemental reading programs such as Lexia Core 5, Power Up, Reading Plus, A-Z Learning, STAR Screeners, Essential Learning, and Accelerated Reader. Reading programs or tools such as these provide an instant diagnose of our students ability level and identify areas in which students struggle, requiring additional instruction, reading practice at the individual student’s ability level while challenging them to the achieve greater reading competency, and prescribes either computer based instruction or lessons that can be customized by the teacher and/or para-educators for individual or group instruction.

- Supplemental math programs such as Freckle, Moby Max, and Accelerated Math. These Math programs or tools provide an instant diagnose of our students ability levels and identify areas students struggle, requiring additional instruction, math computation practice at the individual students ability level while challenging them to achieve greater math competency, and prescribes either computer based instruction or lessons that can be customized by the teacher and/or para-educators for individual or group instruction.
- Extended School programming such as our Jump Start K-5 program to address both the “summer slide” decline from being out of the classroom for an extended period of time, and provide additional support for identified educational gaps of the student; as well as our Credit Recovery grades 6-12 programming to ensure continuous progress toward graduation. In addition, after-school educational opportunities are provided for our K-6 students in Kids Crew and mandatory tutoring for students in grades 6-8 failing courses.

This is just a sampling of how at-risk dollars are spent within our district and how Senate Bill 271 funds will be used effectively and efficiently across our great state to meet the educational needs of our children. I want to personally encourage each of you to visit the districts you represent to see firsthand the great things happening in classrooms and discuss funding issues with your Superintendents; in addition, I invite you to visit my district so that I can share with you our successes and challenges.

I believe adequate and equitable funding of Kansas public schools is absolutely critical to the success of our state. There is no greater responsibility of state government than providing for public schools. With the disparity of wealth throughout our great state, it is imperative that the legislature meet its obligations in providing quality schools within our borders by passing Senate Bill 271. As you well know, the Legislature took a significant step toward fulfilling its constitutional obligation by passing a five year, \$520 million school funding package which would be in jeopardy without the passage of Senate Bill 271. I am simply asking that you please do not retreat to the past because of party affiliation, politics, or fear of your commitments to the children of Kansas. I strongly encourage you to continue moving forward in meeting the needs of our children by supporting High Density At-risk funding contained in Senate Bill 271.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee and for all you do for the children of Kansas as together we are making a difference.