



Senate Committee on Education

on

SB 335

by

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Wichita Public Schools 259

February 10, 2020

Madam Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of SB 335. Wichita Public Schools educates almost 50,000 students annually. Over 37,000 of those students, 74% of our student population, meet one or more criteria to be defined as at-risk, 90% of our comprehensive schools have 50% or more of their student populations identified with at-risk factors. This extreme level of need requires many layers of support and innovation. Our goal is for our students to be equipped for college, career, and/or life. With that being said this year we launched an Early College program that allows students the opportunity to earn up to 60 college credits while obtaining their High School Diploma. This program isn't for the faint of heart, in fact this program is one of our most academically rigorous programs offered in our district. Students complete an application with an essay component where students explain how this program will change the trajectory of their life, students must get letters of recommendations, and finally parents must sign that they understand the rigors of this program and are willing to support their students in this commitment.

Fredrick Douglas once said, "it is easier to build strong children, rather than to repair broken men", we have heard about the classroom to Prison pipeline that occurs in many classrooms, here is a program that combats that and sends students who are in the bubble from the classroom to College! These students are not IB/AP Students, nor are they AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) Students, these are students who are in the middle, they have potential, but they could just as easily fall through the cracks. They sit in classrooms making anywhere from a 2.5 to 3.0 GPA, they get in trouble from time to time, not because they are bad kids, but because they are bored, they walk the halls going to class, but not too fast as they haven't realized or been told that this class could change their lives. These kids are in the "bubble" and this program captures them and inspires them to see that they can become whatever they desire, they are good enough! This program changes the Trajectory, and we need you to help US by passing SB 335 to give these kids a chance to experience college and to catch the College Learning Bug!

We are not asking for additional money, we are asking for local authority to pay for tuition for these students. Our goal is to raise the money necessary to cover tuition but we would like the statutory authority to use district funds to pay what is not raised. By granting us this authority districts will be able to negotiate tuition with local Colleges/Universities, and/or Community Colleges and Technical schools for students. Local control allows for districts to partner with local Higher Education schools to provide the best program for students and families.

Picture this High School graduation and on stage students are congratulated by the School Principal, District Superintendent, and the local College/University President. Students receive a High School Diploma and a College Certificate indicating up to 60 hours of college credit completed and ready for transfer to the Post-Secondary Institution or direct workforce opportunity of that student's choice.

We stand in strong support of SB 335, and would urge the committee to advance this bill.

