



Written Testimony on HB 2347

House K-12 Education Budget Committee

Alan R. Cunningham, Superintendent of Schools
and

William R. Hammond, Executive Director of Business and Operations
Unified School District 443, Dodge City, Kansas

February 13, 2017

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of the Dodge City Public Schools.

Census-Based At-Risk Funding

The primary exception Dodge City USD 443 has with the bill is the impact of the census-based funding for at-risk students. We believe that Section 7 of this plan will mark the return of inequitable funding for many Kansas school districts, including school districts as diverse as Olathe and Dodge City, or KCK and Shawnee Mission, among others.

The attached spreadsheet illustrates that over 265 of the state's 286 school districts currently have a rate of students qualifying for free meals under the USDA guidelines that exceeds the census-based poverty rate included in this proposed legislation. As a result, over two-thirds of Kansas school districts would receive less at-risk funding under HB 2347 than under the previous school funding formula.

Inaccurate Census Data

This loss of this funding is significant. In Dodge City USD 443, it amounts to a over one-half of the current at-risk weighted funding. The inaccurate census information grossly under estimates certain populations, which not only affects school districts with high numbers of minority and/or migrant students like Dodge City USD 443, but also impacts many of the state's larger, more property-wealthy school districts, as shown on the spreadsheet.

In Dodge City USD 443, the free meal rate exceeds the census-based poverty rate by a factor of over four (4.0). For our school district, as I am sure with others, many of our low SES, minority and migrant families simply do not participate in the census data collection. As a result, their numbers are vastly inaccurate. But, the need for educational services and support is still there.

Free Meal Eligibility vs. At-Risk Status

Research has shown that economic status is one of the greatest predictors of a student's success in school. However, not all students from low socio-economic families are at risk. In the case of Dodge City USD 443 and every other school district in the state, there are any number of other factors that make a student at risk of school failure. It has been my experience, after 43 years in public education, that there are equivalent numbers of students needing intervention (i.e. at-risk services) who do not qualify for free meals as there are students qualifying for free meals, who may not require at-risk funded services.

Recommendations

The criteria for eligibility for free meals under the USDA's School Nutrition Program are updated annually at the federal level. In addition, participation and eligibility are subject to external audit in each school district. As a result, the greatest factor among school districts when using free meal eligibility to determine weighted at-risk funding is whether or not the eligible families choose to complete the paperwork needed for participation. These families have much stronger relationships with their children's schools than to a census worker, and as a result are more likely to access the benefits of the School Nutrition program.

We encourage your serious consideration of maintaining the current formula for determining at-risk weighted funding, as it represents a consistent, universal standard for all Kansas' public schools.

We reiterate our support for much HB 2347, and appreciate the hard work and compromise that it represents. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. We encourage you to call upon us, if needed.



Alan R. Cunningham,
Superintendent of Schools
Dodge City USD 443



William R. Hammond,
Executive Director of Business and Operations
Dodge City USD 443