



Senate Committee on Education

on

SB 144

by

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Wichita Public Schools 259

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Chair Baumgardner, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of SB 144. Wichita Public Schools educates over 47,000 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, and with that in mind and with the reality that many of our students enter school with academic deficiencies, trauma effects as indicated by ACES, social emotional struggles, language barriers, and poverty obstacles. Please note that I did not say all of our students, but MANY! To use a baseball analogy many of our students are coming up to bat with 1 or 2 strikes already. And I am happy to say that with the support of High Density At-Risk funding we are able to provide these students with the needed staff, supports, interventions and exposure to dream, believe and to achieve.

Three out of four Wichita Public School Students meet the criteria to be considered At-Risk. When the percentage is that high, you have to focus on all students as it's hard to separate the 1 in 4 from the supports provided. We currently use At-Risk funding to provide smaller class sizes, programs for students from K to 12, intervention programs in both ELA and Math. We have extended day and extended school year programs. We have developed partnerships with local churches and organizations to provide tutoring in needed communities and impoverished neighborhoods outside the school day. Students are provided the opportunity to go to a local church and find a Certified Teacher there to help support them. We have developed and maintain a Homework Hotline, where you can call, facetime, or log into a Teams call to receive help with your homework Monday through Thursday. In fact we currently implementing 52% of the total 256 strategies outlined in the KSDE approved list of evidence based programs.

Earlier I mentioned the obstacles that many of our students face in Wichita, and some of you may wonder what motivates our team members? The teachers, staff and administrators are dedicated to educating all of our students, especially those who come to us with 2 strikes. We stay because we see the academic movement of students and because we experience students like Maria and Daegiona. Two of my former students who I was blessed to work with at Truesdell Middle School, one of the poorest schools in the state and at one time one of the lowest performing. Both young ladies were “At-Risk”, single parent families, free lunch, academic struggles, and academic confidence issues. Both could have fallen through the cracks, both could have become statistics. But both were exposed to intervention programs, both attended summer school, both attended extended day zero hour math class, both were supported by outstanding staff, additional staff funded out of At-Risk Funding, both were exposed to life outside of South Wichita. In fact both came here to the Capital to page for Senator Petersen during their 8th grade year, the exposure made a difference. Both of my “At Risk” students are doing well, Maria is on the Dean’s list at Newman University, Aegina is on the Presidential list at Southwestern College, both are scholar athletes. Both benefited from opportunities provided by At-Risk funding.

This bill allows for At-Risk High Density weighting to be placed into statute and removes the sunset. By passing SB 144, school districts can better plan for long term staffing and support services needed to serve students. This bill allows for more success stories like Maria and Daegiona!

We stand in strong support of SB 144, and would urge the committee to advance this bill. I am happy to answer questions at the appropriate time.

