



Education Committee
Molly Baumgardner, Chair

January 30, 2024
Susan Willis, Chief Financial Officer
USD 259 - Wichita Public Schools

Chair Baumgardner and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in opposition of SB386. 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 SB386. Wichita Public Schools educates over 47,000 students annually. Planning and budget decisions for educational services for the 2024-25 school year have been in the works for over a year at this point, especially with the end of federal COVID relief funding in 2024. While Wichita has no objection to adding the current year enrollment criteria to the formula to help growing districts, the bill as written 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 bill would become law until well into 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 but not finalized until May 2024 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 formula change on 7/1/24 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. Additionally, Wichita has over 260 staff vacancies currently, and a \$1.2 billion deferred maintenance backlog. It is possible that Wichita might turn to school building closures to better utilize staff, reduce the high-cost, high-volume maintenance burden, and better focus dollars on staff and students rather than buildings. If the final bill includes language districts closing schools must use current

year enrollment, Wichita would still be forced to lay off essential staff after the 2024-25 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 of the enacted open enrollment policy. Wichita could grow, or it could lose students to suburban districts with capacity. Any forecasts the committee is currently using to measure the budgetary impact of this bill would be highly suspect given no historical precedent for the statewide open enrollment policy. We respectfully would ask the committee to consider analyzing the impact of that change before removing any of the look back provisions.

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. The advancement of this bill into law prevents both parties from having access to proper fiscal planning time.

Wichita supports adding the current year enrollment criteria to the formula to help growing districts. But Wichita is adamantly opposed to the immediate elimination of the two-year lookback and the move to current year counts if a district is closing buildings. SB 386, as currently written, harms districts who, like Wichita, have already made decisions based on the formula currently in law, and we would urge the committee to not advance this bill as written.