

Testimony before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

on
Testimony on SB 531

by

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **SB 531**, which increases the base budget per pupil by \$59 for Fiscal Year 2010.

KASB acknowledges and appreciates the work of the Senate Ways and Means Committee and the chief sponsors of this bill to support increased funding for public education, particularly in light of the *Montoy* school finance case and the Kansas Supreme Court's directions to provide suitable funding for public education. Your efforts to improve education funding have resulted in substantial increases in student achievement, and raised our state's already high ranking on education measures.

However, many serious needs remain unanswered. Although student test scores have risen significantly, too many students still remain at risk of academic failure, largely because school funding remains far below the level determined by the Post Audit study to be necessary to meet student outcomes. Too many children begin school unprepared, in part because of inadequate pre-school programs. Our schools face a growing shortage of qualified teachers, especially in critical areas like math, science and special education, because both salaries and support for induction, mentoring and professional development are too low.

Let us be clear: raising the base budget \$59 per pupil, an increase of 1.3 percent at a time when the consumer price index rose about 4 percent for the 12 months ending December, 2007, will do little to address those problems. But anything less will be even more inadequate. That is why KASB appears today as a proponent of this bill, but will continue to advocate for a school finance plan that truly meets the needs of all students.

From time to time, even legislators who have been strong supporters of school funding express frustration at what they see as the continuing demand for “more” by school leaders. When, they ask, will it ever be enough? I would respectfully answer that schools will stop asking for more support when the state and federal government, colleges and employers, parents and patrons, teachers and other staff, stop asking *more of schools*. For example:

Although student proficiency in math and reading is at an all-time high, requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress continue to rise each year, and your Post Audit study indicated the base budget should increase approximately \$200 per year *in addition to inflation* to meet those requirements.

Although Kansas ranks near the top of the nation on the National Assessment of Education Progress mathematics tests, we are called upon to respond to a “crisis” in math, science, engineering and technology education by the Governor, legislators and business leaders.

Although the percentage of Kansans with high school diplomas and college degrees is at an all-time high, our Regents system raises questions about the preparation of students for college, and the job market continues to reward educational attainment and punish drop-outs.

Although special education expenditures and achievement scores are at unprecedented levels, parents and advocates continue to seek higher levels of services through the legislative, regulatory and judicial processes.

Although school boards have made significant commitments to raise salaries, in part by raising taxes to increase their commitment through the local option budget, teachers continue to seek not just a “cost of living” increase equal to the consumer price index, but salaries are competitive with other professions and other states.

As a result of these stubborn facts, KASB believes we must continue to advocate for funding based on what schools need to do the job they have been given, not based on what is available. We offer our sincere appreciation for those who share that goal, and commend those who believe that strengthening our public schools is the best economic development, social justice and quality of life investment we can make.

Thank you for your consideration.