



**Dr. Jill Shackelford, Superintendent
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**2010 Commission Testimony
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Thank you for the opportunity to present to the 2010 Commission. Of the 465,000 students in the state of Kansas, I represent the more than 19,000 students in the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools, their families, my staff and the KCK community; but more than that, I represent the more than 176,000 at-risk students who live in districts across the state, who may not always have someone willing to speak for them. In KCK, more than 15,000 students qualify for free or reduced lunch, 83% are minority, and 25% are English language learners. And those numbers are growing every year. This year, more than 1,000 students were homeless for some part of the year. But even though our students don't come to school with many advantages, they come with the same potential for growth and excellence as any other student in the state, and they come with the right to the same quality of services.

Every time I speak in this building, I say the same thing: "Zip code matters!" There is a strong relationship between a student's zip code, and the socioeconomic conditions that they bring with them when they enter our doors. At-risk students cost more to serve, and it is our moral responsibility to do all we can to give these kids the opportunity to learn, so that they can grow up and be successful. It is also our legal responsibility to eliminate the relationship between the zip code a student lives in, and the quality of their education. For our students, the quality of the education they receive from us will be THE thing that determines their life choices, because they have none of the advantages available to other students. This matters for our students, but it also matters for our state. These kids will stay in Kansas, and work and raise children here, and their progress and ability to contribute to our economy will impact all of us.

We know that all at-risk kids in Kansas have benefited from the additional at-risk funding that has come in the past four years. Over the past four years, at-risk funding for KCK has risen from \$11 million to \$34 million. During that time, our achievement has continued to improve dramatically, especially at the high school level. The percentage of high school students meeting the standard in KCK rose 22 percentage points in reading in that time period, and 38 percentage points in math. Similar progress has been seen for at-risk students throughout the state. We have been good stewards of the additional funding that we have received.

As members of the 2010 Commission, you have a powerful platform from which to speak to the legislature about doing what is right for students in Kansas. I urge you to continue to speak loudly and forcefully. Specifically, I urge you to continue to emphasize the following policy recommendations:

- *The legislature should continue to distribute at-risk funding based upon the number of federal free lunch students in each district.*
 - Give us the resources necessary to educate at-risk children, and then hold us accountable for educating them. Base that funding on those factors that impact a student's readiness to learn, but that are outside of our control, such as family income or language of origin.
- *Change the Bilingual Student Weighting from a FTE weighting with contact hours, to headcount and adjust to 0.2 from the current 0.395.*
 - With 25% of our students being English language learners, the current system of accounting for bilingual services is overwhelming. Allow us to spend our time, energy and resources providing services to kids.
- *The legislature should provide flexibility in funding to fund all-day kindergarten and four-year-old at-risk programs.*
 - We have been forced to take funding from other important programs, in order to provide all students with free, full-day kindergarten. We do this so that our students can start first grade "ready to learn." The earlier we are able to provide our students with quality early childhood education services, the more ready they are to be successful in school.
- *The legislature should strongly consider shifting the Infant-Toddler (tiny-k) program from the Department of Health and Environment to the Department of Education; shifting the Early Head Start Program from Department of SRS to Department of Education; and shifting the Pre-K Pilot Program from the Children's Cabinet to the Department of Education.*
 - I am a strong believer in the importance and value of quality early childhood education. Again, we don't mind being held accountable for getting all students to meet the standard, but we need the resources necessary to reach children early, through the provision of quality early childhood education services.

The past four years have been good ones for KCK, both in funding and in improvements in academic achievement. You have heard me say before that back in 1996, proficiency on the state assessment across the district was at 11% in reading, and 3% in math. We've come a long way since then. Our preliminary scores from this spring's Kansas Assessments indicate that we have finally cracked the 60% meeting the standard barrier in both reading and math. Despite the challenges they face, our students continue to score higher.

Now, we are faced with the prospect of trying to hang on to the gains we have made, and even accelerate our progress (almost 40% of our students are still not proficient), even as we have had to cut \$16 million from our budget. The cuts in state education funding that

have been made thus far have disproportionately hurt poor districts like KCK. Cuts to base state aid mean additional losses for districts like KCK with high numbers of at-risk students, because of the additional weighted funding we receive. A reduction of \$100 per pupil ends up costing KCK almost \$150.

In addition, the failure to equalize Capital Outlay funds disproportionately hurts KCK, and districts like us. Our facilities are crowded, especially at the Elementary level, and it is critical that we continue to upgrade and modify our facilities. In addition, we have used Capital Outlay funds to pay for our Laptops 4 Learning initiative, which has provided every high school student in KCK with an Apple Macbook laptop computer. This initiative has helped to jump-start our high school improvement, and it sends a powerful message to our students that they deserve the same opportunities to access and learn with technology as students in more advantaged districts.

The impact of the cuts in state aid will hurt our ability to continue to raise our academic programs to the same level as other districts. Along with less state funding, we face a rise in delinquent property tax payments, and a reduction in the assessed valuation of our tax base. Combined, these losses in revenue are creating the perfect storm, which will challenge us to maintain our progress. We have had to cut 27 teachers through a reduction in force and raise our student-teacher ratio by two, and there is no money to provide a raise for teachers (hurting our ability to recruit and retain quality staff, particularly in relation to neighboring districts).

Hopefully, you have a clearer understanding of the issues here in KCK, and the challenges that face at-risk students across the state. It is our responsibility to continue to fund education based on the needs that students come to school with, so they can have the same opportunity as any other student to achieve at high levels. It is clear that the decisions that the State of Kansas makes concerning education funding really, really matter to our kids. I understand that there is not enough money to meet all the needs that exist in our state. We are going to have to make do with less than we need, with less than our kids deserve. But I return to where I began: It is our **moral** responsibility to do all we can to eliminate the relationship between the zip code a student lives in, and the quality of their education. Whatever funding decisions the legislature makes concerning education funding during these difficult times, they must not widen the gaps that already exist between wealthy districts and poor ones, between the "haves" and "have nots".