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Testimony SB 539

Senate Education Committee

Presented by: Cheryl L. Semmel, Executive Director

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The mission of United School Administrators of Kansas (USA|Kansas*), through collaboration of member associations, is to serve, support, and develop educational leaders and to establish USA|Kansas as a significant force to improve education.

Education administrators remain committed to ensuring that each and every child in Kansas receives a quality education that will help them reach their potential and become successful, productive adults. There are 465,000 students in our public schools that we strive to bimpact positively every single day. As you know, Kansas students are making unprecedented academic achievement and we are on a path of continuous improvement. In many areas, Kansas students are performing **above** the national average and for that you should all be proud.

We are here today as a “neutral” party on the bill, as we are interested in several provisions of the REAL education act. As written, it appears that funding would increase the State’s investment in public education by nearly \$110 million. Even with that knowledge, we are mindful that this bill is very complex and one that deserves further study and evaluation. Administrators would like to review in more detail to determine how the proposed changes would impact existing programs and *overall student learning*.

Base State Aid Per Pupil (BSAPP)

The REAL education act increases the amount of the base state aid per pupil for all grade-levels to \$4,520, effective for the 2012-2013 academic year. **Administrators have long advocated for increased funding for the BSAPP, as it is positively impacts education in all Kansas schools.**

4-Year Old At-Risk and Kindergarten programs

As written, this bill increases funding for 4 year-old At Risk and All-day Kindergarten programs, by providing a full weighting of 1.0. While many school districts throughout the state have implemented and fully supported (fiscally) kindergarten and early childhood programs,

these options are still not available to all students in all schools. Students enrolled in quality early childhood and kindergarten programs typically score higher on standardized assessments and require less remediation than those who do not have the same opportunity. Again, the most significant impact is often seen in students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

USA|Kansas supports additional investments in early childhood education and all-day kindergarten.

At-Risk funding, K-12

While the bill increases the weighting for 4-year old At-Risk students, it appears to significantly reduce funding for K-12 At-Risk programs. In conjunction with increases in At-Risk funding, Kansas has seen increases in student performance on state assessments, with gains for students enrolled in the free lunch program being among the highest. At-Risk funding has been targeted to implement programs that support students requiring additional assistance to achieve academic proficiency and success. **Administrators are concerned that reductions in At-Risk funding would negatively impact the success we have seen in our most vulnerable student populations.**

Career and Technical/Vocational Education

Administrators believe that career and technical education programs are a critical part of the education and workforce development discussion. We welcome the opportunity to discuss innovative strategies for engaging students and the private industry in a conversation to create robust programs with long-term economic benefits for our workforce. The REAL education bill, however, drops the weighting for vocational education in the K-12 learning environment. This change in the funding formula could undermine some of the quality vocational and career training work that is being done in the high school setting and in cooperation with businesses in our community.

Dis-equalizing effects

Administrators recognize how challenging it is to truly reform public education. While there are many things in this bill that we support, we are concerned that some of the provisions of this bill are very dis-equalizing. **Elimination of the bilingual weighting and enrollment weightings will have a significant impact on our ability to help those students with the greatest need.** Helping students achieve proficiency on state assessments is only one part of the challenge; the greater challenge is helping students excel so that they will be successful, productive citizens in the workforce.

In closing, on behalf of education administrators, I would like to thank you for your continued support of education and for realizing the importance of investing in education. Preparing our children requires a shared commitment, collaboration, and open dialogue among all stakeholders. Thank you for being partners in education and please know that we remain interested in working with you to ensure a bright future for Kansas children.

*USA|Kansas represents more than 2,000 individual members and ten member associations:

Kansas Association of Elementary School Principals

Kansas Association of Middle School Administrators

Kansas Association of School Administrators

Kansas Association of School Business Officials

Kansas Association of School Personnel Administrators

Kansas Assoc for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Kansas Association of Special Education Administrators

Kansas Association of Secondary School Principals

Kansas Council of Career and Technical Education Administrators

Kansas School Public Relations Association