



February 4, 2020

Senate Education Committee

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 271

Chairwoman Baumgardner and Members of the Committee:

The Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD) appears today in support of Senate Bill 271. We support the repeal of the sunset on the high-density at-risk provisions of the school finance formula.

High-density at-risk funding was created to add an extra weighting for schools where a concentration of low-income students presents additional educational challenges. Since the school finance formula was amended in 2017 to make attendance centers with more than 35 percent of their pupils eligible for high-density at-risk funding, Shawnee Mission School District has had thirteen attendance centers who meet those qualifications. The population density of at-risk students requires additional funding to address the unique needs of students where poverty is concentrated. It is an important part of the larger state commitment to support the academic growth of at-risk students. The high-density at-risk formula recognizes that at-risk students are not evenly distributed across the state or even within a single district, and that schools with a high concentration of at-risk students may have challenges beyond those of other schools. We have a moral and legal obligation to meet the needs of all students.

Senate Bill 271 is important because it allows us to provide a variety of services for our students. The two most prominent of these services are providing intervention materials and supporting teacher professional learning. More than 12,000 students in the Shawnee Mission School District, which represents approximately 45% of our student population, meet one or more of the state's criteria for at-risk students. Through its Response to Intervention (RTI) process, Shawnee Mission School District provides an intentional and timely system to address student needs. As defined by John Hattie in his meta-analysis of education research, RTI is "an educational approach that provides early, systematic assistance to children who are struggling in one or many areas of their learning." Hattie found that an effective RTI program is one of the most successful means of improving student learning, with a documented ability to have students make up to three years of learning in one school year.

Specifically, the district purchases a variety of research-based reading intervention materials such as Wonderworks, Phonics Lesson Library, Corrective Reading, Rewards, Read 180, and System 44, among others. In addition, we purchase materials that support the new state mandates around dyslexic students. In math, we purchase programs such as Math 180, Math PALS, Do the Math, and more. These programs are research-based and effective at supporting student growth, but they are also expensive to purchase and maintain.

The second major area of focus is professional learning for our staff. In order for the intervention materials to be as impactful as they can be, we need to train staff in the use of those materials and in our rapidly expanding understanding of how the human brain learns. For example, we have contracted with a consultant who works with teachers to support literacy instruction for students with dyslexia. Not only does this improve learning for students with reading difficulties, it supports the growth of all students. We also work with other subject-specific specialists to bring innovative new instructional techniques that align with recent research on student learning to our teachers.

In addition to intervention materials and professional learning, we support growth for all students in a variety of other ways:

- We provide additional staffing for schools who have the greatest needs. We use a needs-based model to determine the distribution for interventionists who work with the most at-risk students. Those schools with the greatest needs receive the greatest level of support.
- We ensure that homeless students who would otherwise struggle to make it to school have reliable transportation.
- We purchase research-based screening and monitoring tools, which in combination with content specialists and interventionists allow us to target our instruction to the individual needs of each learner.
- We operate targeted programs such as Horizons High School, our alternative high school, that would otherwise be too expensive to operate.

As a result of the implementation of these programs, Shawnee Mission has seen positive outcomes. Districtwide, our graduation rates have steadily increased from 88.5% in 2016 to 90.0% with the class of 2019. This includes an increase in the graduation rate of our students identified as Homeless, which increased from 73.1% in 2018 to 75.4% in 2019. Students identified as chronically absent decreased from 16.6% in 2018 to 12.7% in 2019. Included in this number is a decrease in chronic absenteeism among our English Language Learners, which decreased by 2.2% and our Homeless students, which decreased by 2.0%.

We are aware of the Legislature's interest in the recent Legislative Post Audit regarding at-risk funding and programs. The number of students who qualify for free lunch is used as a proxy to determine the distribution of State at-risk funding. The manner by which at-risk funds are distributed by formula, and conform to the State Department of Education guidelines to serve the needs of at-risk students within the general school environment, remains under discussion. If the Legislature chooses to make any changes to the broader issues of at-risk services and programs, high-density at-risk funding will be subject to those changes. However, we support passage of Senate Bill 271 to ensure this funding formula provision is not lost, which would negatively impact our students.

If I can provide any additional information or answer questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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