

TO: Kansas State Board of Education
FROM: Kansas Association of School Boards
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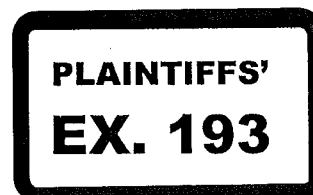
Thank you for the opportunity to submit recommendations for legislative items to include in the FY 2012 budget request for the Kansas Department of Education. KASB believes the State Board, as the elected leaders responsible for general supervision of public education, must take the following legislative positions:

1. Propose a budget based on the current statutory commitments of the Legislature, and develop a long-term plan that reflects the state's historic commitment to education funding.
2. Provide leadership in developing a state tax policy that can sustain funding for a high quality, high outcomes education system for students in every community, not just those with high local wealth; and providing equalized local option funding for districts.
3. Support a definition of constitutionally "suitable finance" for public education that includes all state and federal requirements for school districts: what the state expects, the state must fund.
4. Oppose any new requirements, whether at the federal level, in the Legislature, or through the State Board, without a cost study and new funding, or an equal cost reduction in other mandates.
5. Oppose proposals for charter schools, vouchers or tax credits that violate the constitutional role of local school boards or prohibition on using public education fund religious organizations; or any proposal that diverts public education funds to schools that are not required to serve all students or meet the standards set for all publicly financed schools.

Background

As Kansas and the nation strive to emerge from the great economic recession, KASB believes the most important factor in our future economic and social prosperity is education. Higher educational attainment leads to increased productivity, greater innovation, higher income and lower unemployment. American workers – and Kansans in particular – must be able to compete economically based on knowledge and skills.

The people of Kansas recognized this when they charged the Legislature with establishing a system of public schools "to provide for intellectual, education, vocational and scientific improvement" in the state constitutional amendment in 1966. The constitution further charges the Legislature with providing suitable finance for that system, with public schools managed by locally elected schools boards under the general supervision of the Kansas State Board of Education.



Under that system, educational achievement has improved dramatically. Using the most recent reports from the U.S. Census Bureau, Kansas ranks fifth in the nation on the broadest measures of educational outcomes, trailing only four states that spend far more per pupil. Like other states with strong educational achievement, these outcomes have helped Kansas rank among the highest income levels and the lowest poverty rates in our region. Advances in education promote job creation and prosperity.

Although significant progress has been made, KASB believes Kansans cannot be satisfied. Too many students still drop-out of school, or graduate without all the skills required for college, careers and citizenship. Continued educational improvement requires three components provided in the Kansas constitutional system: clear outcomes for accountability (under the State Board), effective local management to meet those goals (by local districts), and adequate funding for every district (from the Legislature). KASB is deeply concerned that suitable finance is under serious threat.

First, both direct state aid and district general funding budgets have been reduced by approximately \$100 million for next school year. This reduction is not simply due to the troubled economy. Based on projections of personal income growth by the Consensus Revenue Estimating Group, school district general fund and local option budgets will fall to 3.2% of Kansas personal income (KPI) in Fiscal Year 2012 – the lowest level since at least 1975. State aid to school districts will fall to 2.5% of KPI, the lowest level since 1992 when the state assumed a larger share of school funding to reduce and equalize the local property tax burden. Kansans are spending a declining share of personal income to support public education at a time when educational needs and expectations have never been higher.

Second, educational costs will continue to increase. KASB projects that Kansas public school enrollment, after years of stability, will increase from about 480,000 (headcount) this year to nearly 510,000 by 2016. This population will be more racially diverse, with more special needs students. Although Kansas test scores, graduation rates and college completion rates have all continued to improve and Kansas ranks among the top states nationally in all these categories, the rate of progress has begun to stall as districts have had to reduce budgets, programs, staff and services.

Third, KASB supports the State Board's previous position to request funding based on the statutory commitment of the Legislature. However, that request will have no real meaning if state resources are allowed to decline. The State General Fund is already projected to lose \$350 million in FY 2014 with the expiration of the one-cent sales tax. The Kansas House has passed a bill that would phase-out the largest source of state revenue: the individual income tax.

KASB believes continued reduction in state support offers only two choices. The first is to reduce educational quality and outcomes across the state as a whole. The second is to shift the burden back to local districts, which means the decline will fall most heavily on students in communities that lack the local resource to replace state revenue. In either case, more Kansas students will end up without the educational level required to compete and thrive in a knowledge-based economy.

To some, the solution seems to be using state resources to finance private schools or circumvent local school boards. KASB believes these proposals violate the Kansas constitution. It is not "choice" when the school, not the parents, really makes the choice. It is not competition when schools are allowed to play by different rules.

A recent opinion poll showed that Kansans rates their schools very high, and are strongly committed to maintaining a system that serves all students. KASB is currently compiling responses from thousands of patrons who have participated in our Kansas Conversation project over the past several months. We look forward to sharing that information with you, and working together for the continuing educational improvement expected by the people of Kansas.