



**KANSAS ASSOCIATION  
OF SCHOOL BOARDS**

Serving Educational Leaders, Inspiring Student Success



## School funding is key to the future of Kansas

*By Dayna Miller, KASB President*

*Basehor-Linwood USD 458*

It has often been noted that Kansas doesn't have mountains or an ocean coastline, but what Kansas does have are strong public schools. And our quality schools didn't happen by accident.

Since the founding of our state, generations of Kansans have committed their work and taxes to funding schools, knowing that education was an investment; a crucial factor to help their children lead successful and rewarding lives.

A quality public school education will be even more important in the future as the global economy becomes more competitive. A high school diploma plus post-secondary training will be required for most jobs to earn a middle-class salary. This is why the current debate over school funding is so important.

Over the past several decades, the education level of Kansas students has steadily increased as the investment trend in public school funding in Kansas grew slightly more than the rate of inflation.

But that funding trend stopped in 2009 and so did that trend of improving student achievement.

Since 2009, total funding per pupil has fallen more than \$700 million behind inflation through 2017. Between 2010 and 2017, average teacher salaries when adjusted for inflation decreased nearly 8 percent. Kansans are investing a lower percentage of personal income in K-12 education than they have for more than 25 years.

Not surprisingly, Kansas student achievement is struggling. State assessment scores, which had been rising through 2012, are now falling. Reductions have also been seen in national assessments and the ACT. Kansas' high school graduation rate is better than the national average, but other states are improving faster and catching up to Kansas in the percentage of students going on to higher education.

The Kansas Supreme Court recently concluded the current school finance system isn't adequate for our students as is required by the Kansas Constitution. The court said we need to do better.

We agree.

Here's why: Previous cost studies, analyses of Kansas funding trends and comparisons with other states, show that Kansas public schools are underfunded by many hundreds of millions of dollars. By the way, certain groups who oppose public schools say Kansas schools spend too much and achieve too little. Just the opposite is true. Kansas ranks 10th in the nation across a wide spectrum of student measures and spends 31st in per pupil funding. Every state that ranks ahead of Kansas in achievement, spends more. By this measure, Kansas public schools are the most efficient in the country.

But aside from that, we know that educational achievement is key to increasing personal income, reducing poverty and reducing the cost of social services. This current situation of underfunding Kansas schools threatens the future of our children, grandchildren and our state. We at the Kansas Association of School Boards, which represents schools across the state, have issued a detailed statement about the Kansas Supreme Court decision on school funding and what we think should happen. You can read it by going to <https://kasb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Statement-on-Gannon-Response.pdf>. We encourage all Kansans to stay abreast of developments on this issue and to seek out information from their local school board members.

Kansas is trying to climb out of a deep hole caused by the Great Recession and tax changes that drastically reduced revenue available for schools, public safety, social services, highways, health care and other functions of government that Kansans need.

During the last legislative session, a majority of legislators made the courageous decision to reverse those harmful tax policies. We applaud them for doing that. More tough policy decisions will be necessary during the 2018 legislative session that starts in January.

But Kansans are accustomed to making difficult choices. Just as past generations invested in our education, we owe it to the children currently in school and future generations to adequately fund public schools. It is an investment in ourselves and in Kansas.

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*For More Information Contact:*

Mark Tallman, [mtallman@kasb.org](mailto:mtallman@kasb.org), 785.271.4524 OR  
Scott Rothschild, [srothschild@kasb.org](mailto:srothschild@kasb.org), 785.271.4513

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