Oral Testimony before the
Senate Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education
on
Department of Education
by
Mark Tallman, Associate Executive Director
Kansas Association of School Boards
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the budget for the Department of Education. In December, the KASB Delegate Assembly adopted the resolution beginning as follows:

To achieve the Kansas Constitution’s goal of intellectual, educational, vocational and scientific improvement through public education, KASB supports the following.

- Full implementation of the school funding law adopted in response to the Gannon case.
- The State Board of Education’s Kansans Can Vision and Outcomes and school design principles.
- The role of locally elected boards in responding to the unique needs and circumstances of Kansas communities.

The resolution goes on to identify several “pathways to success.” We would like to share our priorities for the Department of Education budget under these pathways. The most important priority is maintaining the funding plan adopted over the past several years in response to Gannon decision.

Attract and retain qualified, effective educators and support staff

Salaries. Critical to maintaining qualified school staff is compensation. The six-year Gannon plan is designed to restore funding to 2009 levels after eight years of falling behind inflation, which also caused Kansas teacher salaries to fall behind inflation. For the last two years, average teacher salaries increased more than inflation. The Governor’s recommendation to continue Gannon funding should allow this salary trend to continue.

Professional learning and support. The Governor also recommends continuing to provide $3 million for professional development and teacher mentoring.

Give all students the opportunity to succeed

Early childhood. The Governor’s budget continues to fund Children’s Cabinet programs, the Pre-K pilot program and Parent Education program at basically current level.
Special Education. The Governor’s recommendation provides a $7.5 million increase in special education state aid for FY 2021 and an additional $7.5 million in FY 2022. However, because of projected increases in special education costs, state aid is expected to drop from 75.3 percent of excess cost in 2020 to 72.0 percent in 2021 and 69.2 percent in 2022. KASB supports funding special education at 92 percent of excess cost, and therefore supports the State Board of Education’s proposal to use savings in other parts of the school finance formula to increase special education state aid.

Increase Support for Student Health and Safety

Mental Health. For 2021, the Governor recommends increasing funding for the Mental Health Intervention Team (MHIT) Pilot Program from $9 to $13 million.

Safety Grants. For 2021, the Governor does not recommend funding the $5 million school safety grants provided for the past two years. If the program is continued, many school leaders have recommended allowing these funds to be used in areas such as threat assessment and prevention, rather than exclusively for physical building security.

Prepare students for postsecondary education and career success

Postsecondary preparation testing. The Governor recommends full funding to allow students to take the ACT and ACT Workkeys tests at no charge, which is now required by state law. This year’s graduating class will be the first in which students have been able to take these tests for free as juniors or seniors.

Postsecondary access. KASB also supports efforts to address higher education affordability, which may be accomplished through the Board of Regents budget.

Thank you for your consideration.