



John R. Allison, Superintendent
316-973-4580; FAX: 973-4595
e-mail: jallison@usd259.net

Alvin E. Morris Administrative Center
201 N. Water Street, Suite 902
Wichita, Kansas 67202

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Governor Brownback,

Schools today are not like the classrooms of 40, 20 or even 10 years ago, nor should they be. For our students to be successful in a highly competitive knowledge-based and digital economy, our schools must reflect new higher expectations.

Today's classrooms are the pipeline for tomorrow's workforce, community leaders and involved citizens. Teachers and principals work tirelessly each day to provide a safe, nurturing environment in which students can learn and grow to their fullest potential.

Over 50,000 young people walk into Wichita schools each day, some of the 460,000 students attending schools across the state. They represent the hope of families and our future. They deserve a great educational experience, one which pushes them to higher aspirations, bigger dreams and great success in life – regardless of their beginnings. The Wichita Public Schools, and each district across the state, provide the pathway!

Now is the time for the Legislature and Executive Branch to unite behind a school finance formula, with stable and adequate annual revenue, which empowers our students, teachers and support staff working each day with 21st century skills and knowledge.

We recommend a new dynamic school finance formula that reflects the differences among districts and adjusts to adequately provide resources required to support learning for all students.

Foundation Aid must be provided that is adequate to fund the diverse array of classrooms required to educate and challenge students with innate academic skills to students who struggle to learn.

Foundational aid should:

- Fund the support services necessary to provide rich educational opportunities, including counselors, college and career counselors, ELL, nurses, social workers, behavior specialists and psychologists.
- Fund technology to support district operations and updated technology for student learning tools.
- Fund vibrant fine arts programs, state of the art CTE classrooms and expanded STEM (science technology engineering and math) experiences.
- Adequately meet the changing needs of classrooms, and provide up-to-date curriculum, technology for the 21st century, transportation for the safety of students and extracurricular activities.
- Enhance teacher salaries and benefits to retain strong teachers and attract high quality candidates to the teaching profession.

- Increase support staff to provide smaller learning groups.
- Fund all-day Kindergarten.
- Expanded mental health services for students and families.
- Increase time for teaching staff to plan, collaborate, reflect and review data.
- Fund transportation for students living where walking to school is dangerous.
- Fund staff who keep the buildings running – maintenance, custodial.
- Include an inflation factor to keep pace with rising costs of supplies and services.

Targeted funding is needed for students who have economic, physical, neurological, mental health or behavior issues. The number of students who are in crisis or have experienced trauma is on the rise. The lack of adequate mental health services for families has increased the number and severity of students with mental and behavioral issues. The state needs to provide a safety net of services for families in crisis. Targeted funding should provide adequate funds to address student academic and behavioral needs:

- Targeted funds for English language learners. WPS students speak over 114 languages. There is a critical need for highly qualified bilingual teachers and job-imbedded professional development.
- Targeted funds for poverty. The greatest factors challenging students are poverty-related.
- Targeted funds for special groups of students including foster students, homeless and truants.

Facilities Maintenance to preserve tax payer resources should continue to be funded through Capital Outlay that is equalized to assist low-wealth districts. Additional funding is needed for technology to address ever expanding technology requirements – wiring old buildings, access points, staff to support the IT, hardware and software systems. Today’s students live in a digital world. Schools require an on-going revenue source to fund instructional staff to support learning through technology, and for enhanced infrastructure to support and refresh technology.

Governor Brownback, schools are critical to economic vitality. The workforce will continue to require more adults who are successful in post-secondary attainment. We can achieve these goals; however, we need your support and the support of elected leaders, including the assurance that funding will be adequate and stable to meet the needs of our diverse students.

We have been involved in conversations with school leaders across the state to discuss what elements are needed in a new school finance formula. We stand ready to work with the 2017 Legislature to develop a school finance formula which works for the wide range of Kansas districts – urban, rural, large and small.

This is about Kansas students – from 1A to 6A, from Triplains to Wichita, but it is also about the long-term success of our state. A strong, adequately funded public school system is the foundation of an economically vibrant, well-educated, highly-skilled community where people want to live, work and raise families.

Respectfully,

John Allison
 Superintendent
 Wichita Public Schools