

# Survey Says: Funding Cuts Hit Kansas Schools Hard



**Kansas' public schools are struggling with crowded classrooms, fewer teachers and other challenges after seeing their state funding cut repeatedly since the recession in 2009 -- with no relief in sight because of ongoing, scheduled tax cuts. Educators are being asked to do more with less, challenging their ability to provide a quality education to Kansas kids. That, in turn, threatens the state's economic future, because a well-educated, highly skilled workforce is increasingly important to attracting jobs that pay well and create widespread prosperity.**

The Kansas Center for Economic Growth recently surveyed school districts in Kansas to examine how funding cuts are affecting educational outcomes and programs. Key findings include:

- More students, but fewer teachers – Since 2009, Kansas schools have gained more than 19,000 students but have 665 fewer teachers. More than a quarter of school districts expect higher enrollment in 2015.
- Classrooms are getting more crowded – Almost half of districts have seen their average class size grow since 2009. Larger classroom sizes create a more difficult learning environment for students by reducing individual attention from teachers.
- Funding per pupil is insufficient and declining – 96 percent of districts say base state aid per pupil for 2015 will be insufficient and say it has not kept up with increased costs to run schools.
- More at-risk students, but less funding – Lawmakers cut millions of dollars earmarked for students at risk of falling behind or failing, even as the number of such students grew.
- Less training for teachers – Since 2009, cuts to programs that help teachers learn innovative teaching methods to improve student learning have averaged more than \$41,500 per district.
- Higher property taxes – Almost 60 percent of districts will have to rely on more local funding to make up for cuts in state resources. Almost half of districts ask parents to purchase basic classroom supplies because the districts cannot afford to provide them.
- Dwindling cash reserves – Most districts have seen a decline in cash reserves after 2009 and expect declines through 2015.

- Fewer extracurricular programs – About 30 percent of districts have reduced or eliminated athletic and non-athletic extracurricular activities, as well as arts and music programs. These programs and activities are just as important to a student's development as what they learn in the classroom.

**"We have lost instructional and administrative positions and cut programs. Our classes have grown significantly and safety and school climate have suffered."**  
- Superintendent, Southeast region

Lower state funding for Kansas schools does direct damage in the classroom. For instance, bigger class sizes mean teachers cannot give as much individual attention to students who need it. Reducing or eliminating extracurricular activities limits opportunities for student growth and development. A lack of state investment in schools harms the competitiveness of our workforce and economy. If Kansas' kids are left behind, the state will be left behind, too. The best pro-growth policy a state can have is to invest in its schools, students and educators.

The funding cuts to Kansas school districts were brought on by the economic downturn in 2008-09. But the continued lack of investment in schools stems largely from tax and budget policies adopted by the Kansas Legislature that limit the state's ability to fund districts at needed levels. The tax cuts of 2012 and 2013 are costing Kansas and our schools a lot, and these costs will continue to increase, making it harder to invest in education. To that end, we have two broad recommendations – which we spell out in more detail below – to help Kansas schools. First, the Legislature needs to make investment in education a priority and adopt the budget and tax policies that will make that a reality. Second, we urge state lawmakers to invest in Kansas schools at a level that prepares our kids to be competitive in a global economy.

## **Funding Kansas Schools**

### **Base Aid and Total Expenditures**

There are two ways to look at the funding of Kansas school districts: base state aid per pupil and total expenditures per pupil. Either way, Kansas public school districts have experienced funding cuts since 2009. Base state aid per pupil is the basic level of support provided to districts directly from the state, which is determined by the Legislature and based on enrollment.<sup>1</sup> Total expenditures per pupil include all

money spent on K-12 education per pupil during the school year from federal, state and local sources.

The state of Kansas is responsible for funding a large portion of K-12 public education – 53 percent.<sup>2</sup> Kansas lawmakers adopted a base state aid per pupil standard in 1992. Following the school finance bill passed in April 2014, it is now \$3,852 per student for the 2014-15 school year. Because of the recession in 2008-09, education funding declined substantially in many states, with Kansas making some of the deepest cuts.<sup>3</sup>

**“We will have to continue to cut staff as we are living off of reserves, but these will be gone soon. We will combine more classes and reduce class offerings to make this work.”**

**- Superintendent, Southeast region**

Cuts to education have negative impacts on student education by increasing class size, reducing funding for classroom supplies, including textbooks, and making it more difficult to attract and keep good teachers.<sup>4</sup> Figure 1 shows that, adjusted for inflation, base state aid per pupil has declined from \$4,888 in 2009 to \$3,838 for 2014.<sup>5</sup> As the costs of food, fuel and maintenance have gone up, the state has not increased funding to keep pace. These cuts amount to more than \$371 million fewer dollars going to districts, while there are more students in the classroom.<sup>6</sup>

The majority of education spending – more than 95 percent – ends up in the classroom and for support

services necessary for teaching and learning.<sup>7</sup>

These dollars pay for textbooks, classroom teaching technology, teacher salaries, guidance counselors, school nurses, speech pathologists, librarians and other resources needed to create a strong atmosphere for learning.

When we take into account total spending per student and adjust for inflation, amounts have also declined since 2009. The degree of these funding cuts was curtailed by extra federal education aid during the recession, but that money is no longer being provided. Using the most recent available data from 2013, total expenditures per pupil decreased to \$12,781– almost \$1,000 per student.<sup>8</sup> Reductions in state and total funding per student are especially concerning since investing more resources in each student improves their education.<sup>9</sup>

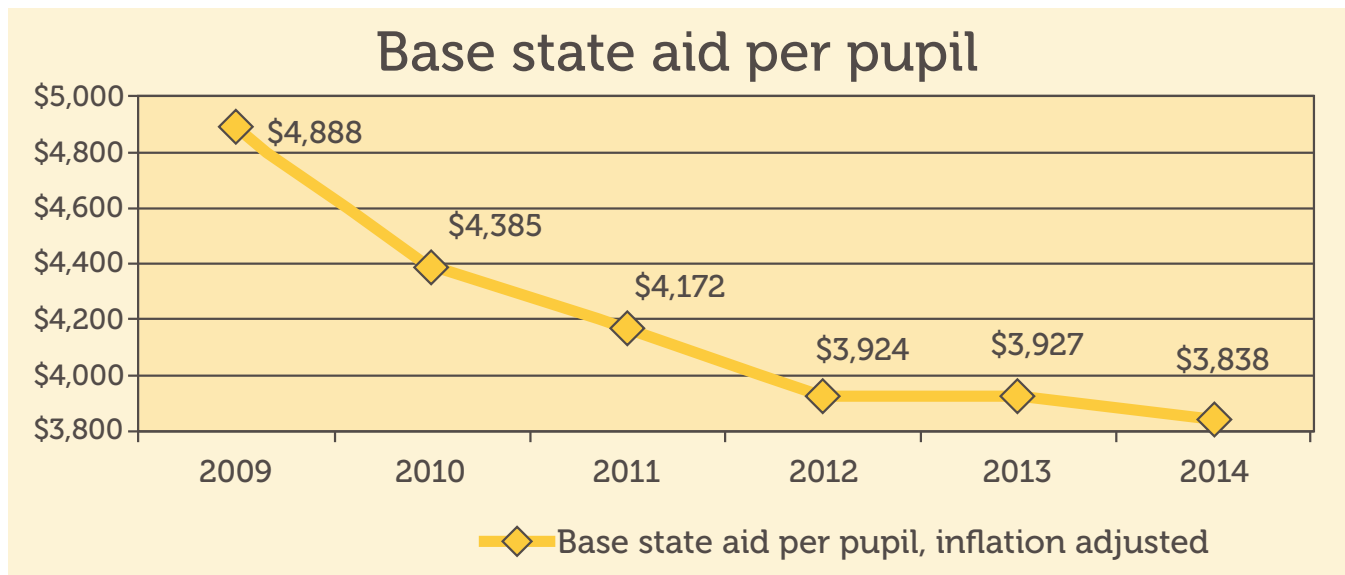
Kansas schools have had to make major adjustments as funding has been cut. Based on our survey results, we see how these changes have had a negative effect on districts: fewer teachers, increased class sizes, increases in local property taxes. Districts are also reducing or eliminating extracurricular activities necessary for a well-rounded education. All this comes at a cost to the student, leaving them less prepared for higher education and less adaptive in a changing and more competitive workforce.

## The Story from Kansas School Districts

### Student Enrollment and Class Size: Bigger, Not Better

Total enrollment in Kansas public schools has increased between 2009 and 2014 by more

**Figure 1: Base state aid per pupil has not recovered since 2009**



than 19,000 students.<sup>10</sup> Average class sizes have swung upward, too. Our survey shows that 47 percent of districts have had class sizes increase during the same period. This trend is expected to continue for the 2014-15 school year—27 percent of districts expect to see average class sizes increase.

**Figure 2: Total Expenditures Per Pupil**

Year	Total Spending Per Pupil, Inflation Adjusted
2009	\$13,747
2013	\$12,781
Change %	-7%

has declined by more than \$41,500 between 2009 and what is expected in 2015 (Figure 5).<sup>15</sup> While reductions have occurred to the base level of funding to schools, many professional development opportunities for teachers have been stopped altogether. Programs matching new teachers with mentors in their district and providing for teaching excellence scholarships have been eliminated.<sup>16</sup>

**“We had to let 12 excellent staff members go to be able to meet budget constraints. That is a lot in a small district [like ours]. We also increased our class sizes because of the staff we let go.”**  
 - Superintendent, South-central region

### Teachers and Professional Development Have Been Slashed

More students in school should mean more teachers to educate them. This is not the case. In fact, Kansas has 665 fewer full-time teachers in 2014 than in 2009.<sup>11 12</sup> The average number of students per teacher increased to 15.1 from 14.4 over the same period.<sup>13</sup> Looking ahead to the next school year, this trend will continue. Districts responding to the survey showed a net loss of teachers.

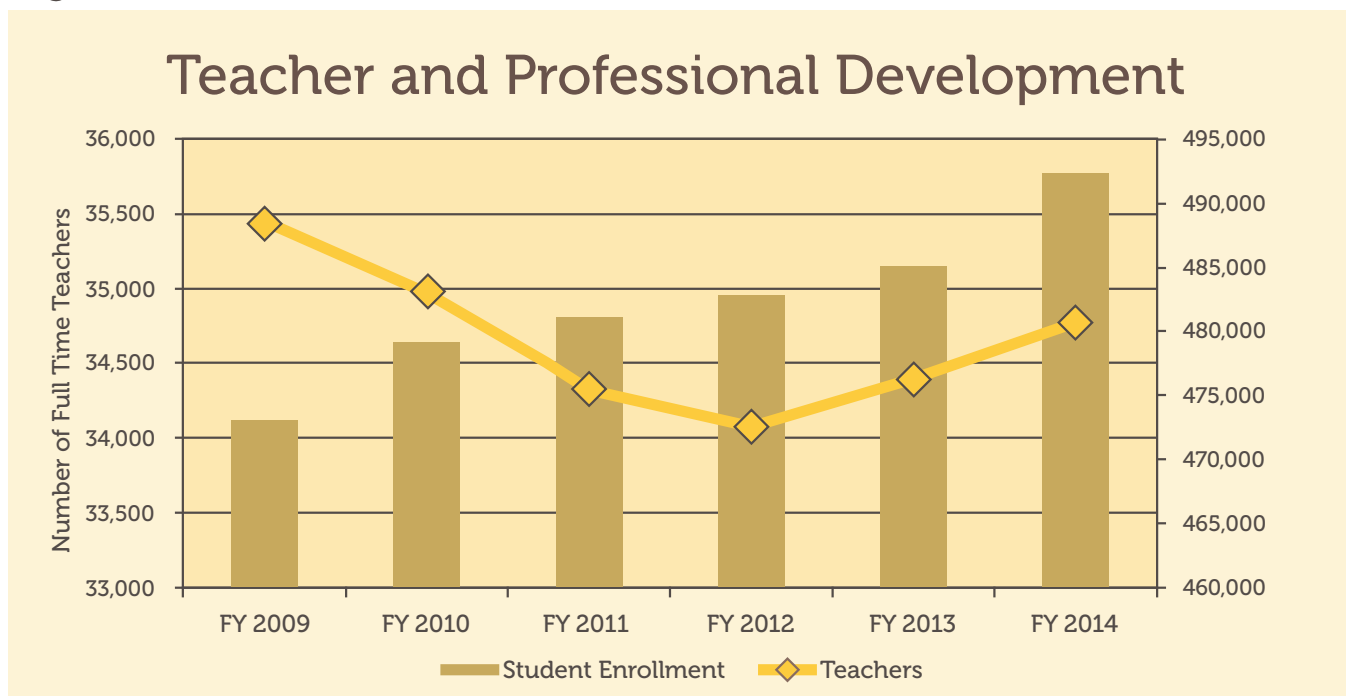
Districts also have fewer resources to support professional development. Learning new teaching methods and adopting the profession’s best practices are critical for teachers to produce the brightest, most successful students.<sup>14</sup> Yet, average spending by district on professional development

### What Districts Think of Education Funding Levels

The 2014 school finance bill passed in April – HB 2506 – increased base aid per student by \$14. This was intended to provide some financial relief, but districts do not see it that way. When asked if this increase was sufficient for their needs and obligations, an overwhelming 96 percent of districts responded that it was insufficient.

The funding cuts have forced districts to dip into their reserve funds to shore up budgets. Most districts were able to maintain or increase their reserve funds in 2009, but started spending them down as funding was cut during the recession. As the recession improved five years ago, schools

**Figure 3: 19,000 More Students but 665 Fewer Teachers between 2009 and 2014**



should have been building their reserves back up in case of the unexpected: a leaky roof, a broken heating or cooling system, mid-year cuts in funding or decreased funding because of lower enrollment, to name a few. Instead, the majority – 57 percent – of Kansas school districts saw a decrease in reserves in 2014 and expect more reserve spending when looking at the 2015 school year.

### Vulnerable Students Have Not Been Shielded

Kansas’ most vulnerable students – those with a high likelihood of performing poorly or dropping out – will bear the burden of cuts after a change in the funding formula in the 2014 school finance law. Nearly half of all districts – 45 percent – will face cuts to at-risk pupil funding, with statewide cuts amounting to about \$3.4 million in total for the upcoming school year. The cuts come despite a significant increase in the percentage of these at-risk students in Kansas schools. In 2009, just over 34 percent of students were deemed at-risk, and by 2014 this number had risen to 43 percent.

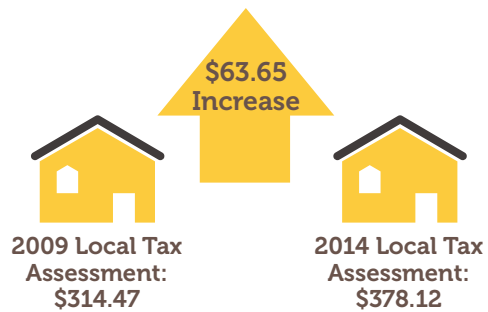
These students require extra attention and resources – and investing in them pays off.<sup>20</sup> For instance, at-risk dropout rates decline and they have a better chance of making more money over their lifetimes. Cuts, on the other hand, put them at an even higher chance of dropping out of school, hurting their job prospects for their entire lives.

### Having to Do it On Their Own

Kansans have had to chip in more because of declining state investment in education. Many

districts raise a large portion of their budgets through local property taxes. As seen in Figure 4, the average local property tax assessment in Kansas has increased.<sup>21</sup>

**Figure 4: Local Property Taxes to Finance Districts Have Increased**

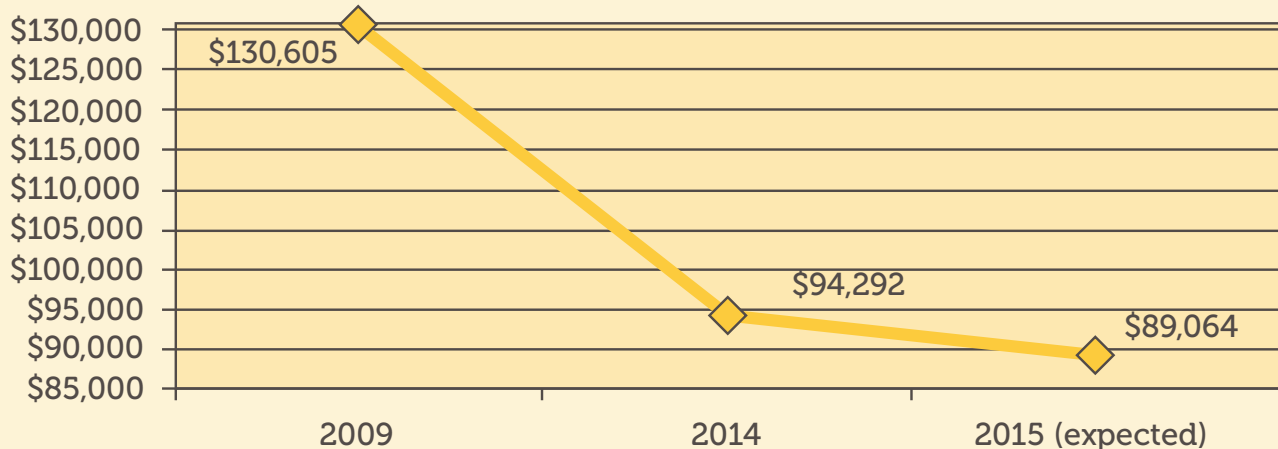


A person with a home valued at \$150,000 has seen her or his local property taxes increased by more than \$63 in the past 6 years.<sup>22</sup> When the state gives less support to schools, the costs are passed down to the communities these districts are in. This trend appears to be continuing. When asked about the possibility of raising their local property taxes in the next few years, almost 58 percent of districts responded that they would. As the state continues to cut support to districts, people in communities across the state are being asked to pay even more to make up where the state falls short.

Declines in state funding to education have not only led to more reliance on local property taxes, but families are being asked to chip in even more out

**Figure 5: Districts Forced to Spend Less on Professional Development**

## Average District Spending on Professional Development, Inflation Adjusted



of their own pockets. Cuts in funding from the state have forced 44 percent of districts to ask already cash-strapped parents to purchase some school and classroom supplies that would have otherwise been bought by the district.

**“We will either have to reduce/eliminate offerings, increase class size, or increase the tax burden on our patrons.”**  
 - Superintendent, North-central region

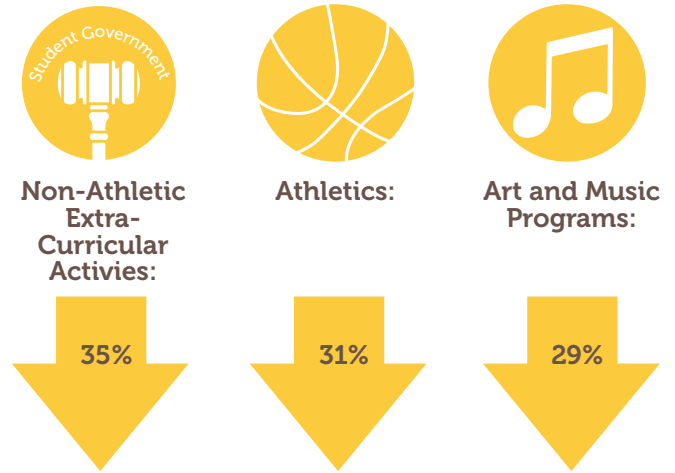
**Programs take a Hit, Too**

Extracurricular activities and some arts and music programs have been cut or eliminated between 2009 and 2014. Many of these activities are crucial to prepare students for higher education and careers. These programs and activities give students critical skills to work with others; improve student performance and attendance; and reduce the need for disciplinary actions.<sup>23</sup>

Figure 7 shows that roughly 30 percent of districts have reduced or eliminated a wide range of programs and activities. This is happening in small and large districts alike: Haven USD 312 had to eliminate its wrestling program; Wichita USD 259 cut its driver education program; Eudora USD 491 had to eliminate some junior varsity sports and its high school debate team.<sup>24</sup> If districts didn’t cut programs, they had to raise fees to fund them. Hays USD 489 temporarily increased the activity fee by \$50 per high school and middle school student for the upcoming year.<sup>25</sup>

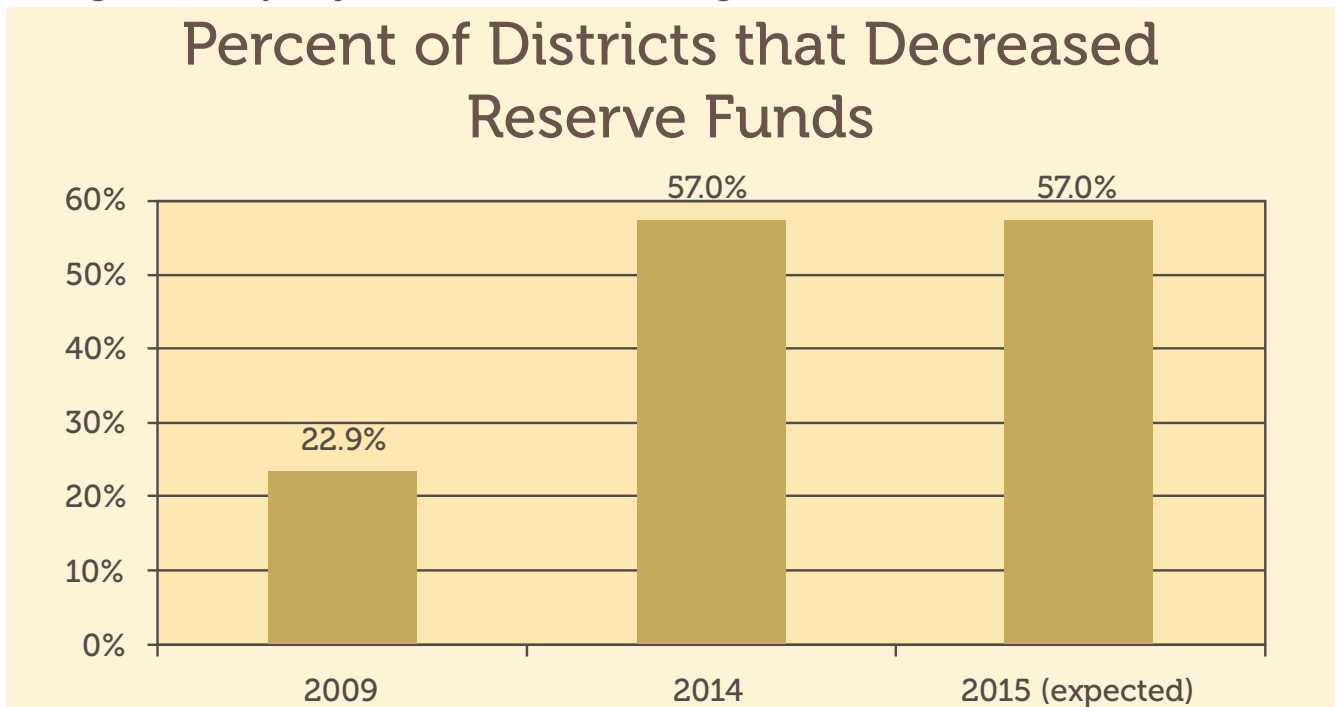
These cuts and fee increases are happening because of the lack of investment by the Legislature. All kids – from athletes to musicians to student government leaders – have seen fewer opportunities participate in activities that enhance collaboration and communication skills.

**Figure 7: Districts Have Had to Reduce or Eliminate Many Extracurricular Activities**



**“We are on the cusp of cutting programs to survive. When you cut programs, you cut yet another salary in your community thus accentuating the decline both at the school and in the community.”**  
 - Superintendent, Northeast region

**Figure 6: Majority of Districts Decreasing Reserve Funds for 2014 and 2015**



## Recommendations to Help Kansas Schools

Based on the data from Kansas school districts, it is clear that we cannot continue on the same path and expect the quality of education in Kansas to get better. Schools need resources to deliver a high-quality education. These recommendations can help Kansas school districts recover from the damage inflicted by the cuts.

### 1. Prioritize budget and tax policies that allow investment in Kansas public schools.

The tax cuts adopted by Kansas in 2012 and 2013, and the huge revenue drop that resulted, made it difficult for lawmakers to increase their investment in public education. Kansas should have budget and tax policies that:

- Provide revenue to fund public education and to keep up with increases in costs over time.
- Allow for investment in the things that bring more people and businesses to Kansas, including good schools.
- Promote balanced and equitable growth opportunities for Kansans in all parts of the state.

### 2. Support public education at a level that prepares Kansas kids for a competitive future.

As our economy becomes increasingly complex, we need an education system that prepares students for a competitive global economy. Kansas schools simply cannot achieve this at the current level of funding. We recommend:

- Reasonable increases to base state aid per pupil that allow Kansas public schools to provide a high-quality education.
- Attracting and retaining teachers by keeping salary levels competitive with other states.
- Ensuring that Kansas students have access to a well-rounded education both in the classroom and with extracurricular activities.

## Returning to Investing in Schools

Many states were affected by the recession in 2008-09, forcing them to make significant reductions in funding for services like education. The big difference is that while many other states are starting to reinvest in schools and students, Kansas seems to be stuck on cuts. We are only beginning to see the harm done by diminished state investment in education.

More than 90 percent of Kansas families send their kids to public schools, and they should be concerned about current state investment

in education.<sup>26</sup> Providing for a quality public education in our state is something the first Kansans recognized as so important that it is written into our state constitution. We need to return to those values and levels of investment to provide a strong foundation for Kansas' future.

An innovative and quality public education system has proven to be the best policy for promoting economic growth. Investing in our kids' public education is investing in future businesses and entrepreneurs who will want to stay in Kansas to give their families the same opportunities they had. Tax cuts won't bolster the Kansas economy, but providing our kids what they need as they learn and develop over the long term is a proven path for economic growth.

With the current condition of Kansas' budget, it's likely that we'll see more cuts to our schools down the line.<sup>27</sup> State cuts force school districts to eliminate important programs, squeeze more desks into classrooms and ask communities to pick up the tab for investing in Kansas' kids. We have always built on the successful investments of previous generations of Kansans. It is time that we invest in Kansas schools and kids now to build a pathway for an economically vibrant and competitive Kansas in the years to come.

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<sup>1</sup> This is known as the Base State Aid per Pupil or BSAPP. Each district gets a fixed amount of funding based on the number of students enrolled.

<sup>2</sup> See Kansas Center for Economic Growth, "Kansas Schools Struggle With Recent Budget Cuts." Available at: <http://realprosperityks.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/KS-Center-for-Economic-Growth-School-Cuts.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See Michael Leachman and Chris Mai, "Most States Funding Schools Less Than Before the Recession." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2014. Available at: <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=4011>

<sup>4</sup> See Jim Hull, "Cutting to the Bone: How the Economic Crisis Affects Schools." Center for Public Education, 2010. Available at: <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Public-education/Cutting-to-the-bone-At-a-glance/Cutting-to-the-bone-How-the-economic-crisis-affects-schools.html>

<sup>5</sup> Base state aid per pupil figures are posted by the Kansas Legislative Research Department and are available at (see p. 2): [http://kslegresearch.org/Publications/amends\\_to\\_sdfandpqa\\_2014.pdf](http://kslegresearch.org/Publications/amends_to_sdfandpqa_2014.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Inflation-adjustment analysis used Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index (CPI) on spending data from the Kansas Department of Education (KSDE). Available at: <http://www.ksde.org/Agency/FiscalandAdministrativeServices/SchoolFinance/ReportsandPublications.aspx#GSA>

<sup>7</sup> See Kansas Center for Economic Growth, "Kansas Schools Struggle With Recent Budget Cuts." Available at: <http://realprosperityks.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/KS-Center-for-Economic-Growth-School-Cuts.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> As seen in Figure 2, total expenditures per student in 2009 dollars were \$13,747. Data for total expenditure per pupil compiled by the Kansas Department of Education. Available at: [http://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/School%20Finance/data\\_warehouse/total\\_expenditures/d0Stateexp.pdf](http://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/School%20Finance/data_warehouse/total_expenditures/d0Stateexp.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> See Bruce Baker, "Revisiting the Age-Old Question: Does Money Matter in Education?" The Albert Shanker Institute, 2012. Available at: [http://www.shankerinstitute.org/images/doesmoneymatter\\_final.pdf](http://www.shankerinstitute.org/images/doesmoneymatter_final.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Data made available by Kansas Department of Education. Available under 'Headcount Enrollment' at: <http://www.ksde.org/Agency/FiscalandAdministrativeServices/SchoolFinance/ReportsandPublications.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> These numbers come from the Kansas Department of Education, based on full-time equivalency (FTE). FTE is the total number of full- and part-time teachers. A teacher who works half the time of a full-time teacher would be categorized as 0.5 FTE. While the number above is 665 fewer FTE teachers, the number of actual people affected is likely much higher as many part-time positions are reduced or cut when budgets are tight.

<sup>12</sup> Data made available by the Kansas Department of Education. Definition of data analyzed as teachers in the 'About Certified Personnel Report' where personnel data are located. Available under 'Personnel' and 'Certified' at: <http://www.ksde.org/Agency/FiscalandAdministrativeServices/SchoolFinance/ReportsandPublications.aspx#Personnel>

<sup>13</sup> Kansas Department of Education. Available at: <http://www.ksde.org/Agency/FiscalandAdministrativeServices/SchoolFinance/ReportsandPublications.aspx#GSA>

<sup>14</sup> See Phil Oliff, Chris Mai, and Michael Leachman, "New School Year Brings More Cuts in State Funding for Schools." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2012. Available at: <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=3825>

<sup>15</sup> Analysis of data from Kansas Center for Economic Growth Unified School District Survey.

<sup>16</sup> See Kansas Center for Economic Growth, "Who Pays: The Costs of Kansas' Tax Cuts for Local Communities." Available at: <http://realprosperityks.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/KS-Center-for-Economic-Growth-Local-Impacts-Report.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Based on Kansas Department of Education fiscal analysis of HB 2506, document SF14-146. Available at: <http://www.ksde.org/Agency/FiscalandAdministrativeServices/SchoolFinance/WhatsNew.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> At-risk pupils are students who are not working at grade level, are failing courses, and/or have a high rate of absenteeism. The

KSDE has an At-risk pupil guidelines sheet available at: <http://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/School%20Finance/budget/Online%20Budget%20Packet/At-Risk%20guidelines.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> KSDE data on full-time enrolled and at-risk students. Available at: <http://www.ksde.org/Agency/FiscalandAdministrativeServices/SchoolFinance/LegalMaxGeneralFund,SchoolFinanceStudies.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> See Center for Public Education, "Keeping Kids in School: What Research Tells Us about Preventing Dropouts." Available at: <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/Keeping-kids-in-school-At-a-glance/Keeping-kids-in-school-Preventing-dropouts.html>

<sup>21</sup> The specific local property tax levy that we refer to is known as the Local Option Budget (LOB), which is a property tax levy determined at the district level and whose funds are used solely for the purposes of funding that district.

<sup>22</sup> The KSDE provides a breakdown of how these mill levies are calculated at: <http://www.ksde.org/Agency/FiscalandAdministrativeServices/SchoolFinance/ReportsandPublications.aspx>

<sup>23</sup> See President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, "Turnaround Arts Initiative: Progress Report, 2013." Available at: [http://pcah.gov/sites/default/files/Turnaround%20Arts%20Interim%20Evaluation\\_November%202013\\_0.pdf](http://pcah.gov/sites/default/files/Turnaround%20Arts%20Interim%20Evaluation_November%202013_0.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Haven USD - [http://articles.kwch.com/2010-02-08/kansas-schools\\_24077680](http://articles.kwch.com/2010-02-08/kansas-schools_24077680); Wichita USD - <http://www.kansas.com/2010/04/22/1281644/wichita-school-district-to-announce.html>; Eudora USD - <http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2010/apr/22/eudora-school-district-agrees-cut-budget-add-50-en/>

<sup>25</sup> Hays USD Increases Activity Fee - <http://www.hayspost.com/2014/07/02/usd-489-sets-enrollment-dates-explains-new-or-increased-fees/>

<sup>26</sup> See Ted Carter, "K-12 Headcount Enrollment Projections for Kansas 2014-15 to 2018-19." Kansas Association of School Boards. <http://www.kasb.org/assets/Research/EnrProj0714.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> See Duane Goosen, "Woe to Education Finance." The Kansas Budget Blog. Available at: <http://www.kansasbudget.com/2014/08/woe-to-education-finance.html>