

School Finance Reform Plan - Frequently Asked Questions

Why change the formula? Why don't we just fully fund the current formula?

The current formula is almost 20 years old. Kansas has changed significantly during that time.

The current formula has been under constant litigation for many years. The time has come for all Kansans to work together so we can stop sending education dollars to the courtroom and send them to the classroom.

The current formula does not focus resources on the classroom. Districts can fund the construction of new schools and athletic facilities while simultaneously having to layoff teachers because they lack funding for the classroom.

The current formula limits local control and flexibility. The challenges and opportunities encountered by Kansas students vary significantly from one district to another. Local school boards should be given maximum flexibility to help their students rise to local challenges and seize local opportunities.

Will the new formula shift the burden of financing education from the state to the local level?

Education is the primary mission of state government and will continue to be moving forward.

The Governor's plan sets a floor for state spending on education, both statewide and by individual district. Therefore, the state could not spend less state money on education in the future than it does at the time the new formula takes effect.

Will the new formula distribute money equitably?

Kansas must provide a quality education for every child, regardless of their zip code.

The Governor's formula will include a powerful equalization mechanism that distributes money from property tax rich districts to property tax poor districts.

How does this proposed formula increase local control?

Under the new formula, there is no cap on the local option budget. This allows local school boards, if they choose, to raise property taxes, keep all revenue locally raised, and spend it on any educational purpose that fits the needs of their districts. District voters may challenge the increase through a petition that if successful, would put the property tax increase to a public vote.

The formula also breaks down the 'stovepipes', allowing more dollars to be spent at the district superintendent's discretion rather than by bureaucrats in Topeka.

How does this proposed formula break the cycle of litigation?

The proposed formula funds the statutory amount of \$4,492 for base state aid per pupil.

How does this proposed formula increase transparency?

The new formula is based on student population and property tax value – factors that are known and easily understood by the public. The current formula has weighted factors that are dependent on measuring pupil demographics, parental income and other categories in order to measure how much a district receives. These measures are constantly in flux and not easily understood.

How does this proposed formula improve predictability?

The new formula is based on known factors that will allow school district leaders to make reasonable assumptions about future funding. Drastic drops in FTEs or mill values, the determining factors in funding amounts, are abnormal.

However, the proposal does guard against drastic fluctuations if they occur. The formula's measure of FTEs and mill value will be based on a three-year rolling average.

The new plan also proposes two-year rolling budgets for funding K-12 education.

How does this proposed formula address the needs of at-risk and English as a Second Language (ESL) students?

Under the current formula, the Kansas Legislature determines how the funding is spent on programs for at-risk and ESL students. The Governor believes this decision is better made by the educational professionals at the Kansas State Department of Education and their federal and local partners. The proposed formula provides the necessary funding to ensure at-risk and ESL students meet the requirements set by the KSDE.

How does this proposed formula focus more resources on the classroom?

By breaking down the 'stovepipes,' the new formula allows local leaders greater flexibility in how they spend their state dollars.

Again - the current formula does not focus resources on the classroom. Districts can fund the construction of new schools and athletic facilities while being forced simultaneously to layoff teachers because they lack funding for the classroom. It doesn't make sense to build new schools and lay off teachers at the same time.

Where does the additional \$39 million in SGF come from?

The governor believes that education is to the state government what defense is to the federal government, its primary function and the lion's share of its budget. His budget recommendations will reflect that priority.

How does this proposed formula protect the economically disadvantaged school districts?

In addition to setting a baseline amount for each district, the new formula includes a powerful equalization mechanism to distribute money from property tax rich districts to property tax poor districts.

Supplemental Equalization ensures each district has stable funding year after year and the Property Tax Equalization Fund pays out in increasingly greater amounts to districts with low property tax valuation per pupil.

How will the state fund education if income tax rates are reduced?

The Governor has stated his proposed changes to state income tax rates will be revenue neutral. Therefore, his tax plan will not reduce the amount of resources available to fund education.