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For Immediate Release

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School funding package is “great first step”

Last night the House and Senate passed a school funding package providing an additional \$148 million dollars to K-12 education. The package includes \$120.7 million in new money and \$27.7 million in local property tax reduction. This package is based on the state’s existing revenues and cites no new sources of funding.

Arkansas City Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Ron Ballard said this morning the funding package is a “great first step in addressing the long-terms needs of Kansas education.”

Dr. Ballard said this funding package took courage on the part of some legislatures to pass. He said he has been particularly impressed by Sen. Greta Goodwin’s (D-Winfield) willingness to share information and communicate with local educators about the special session.

“Sen. Goodwin has invited our input and has gone out of her way to work with us,” he said.

The \$148.4 million is in addition to the \$142 million in new monies approved in regular session by the Legislature. USD 470 stands to gain a little more than \$1.5 million in new money for the 2005-2006 school year, although more than half – \$786,344 – of that money is earmarked for specific state and federal mandated programs, including special education, at-risk instruction and bilingual education.

A more accurate description of the amount of new money the district will be able to spend is \$735,627, or the amounts included in the base state aid per pupil (BSAPP) and correlation weighting for school districts with an enrollment of 1,662 or more students.

The estimate of \$1.5 million for Arkansas City schools is based on the district’s Sept. 20 headcount. Dr. Ballard said it is possible that enrollment could decrease by as many as 30 students in the upcoming school year, thereby decreasing the amount of new money by more than \$100,000.

A breakdown of the estimated \$1.5 million in new funding follows:

Increase BSAPP by \$150:	\$475,950
Increase at-risk weighting from 0.10 to 0.193:	\$528,294
Increase bilingual education weighting from 0.20 to 0.395:	\$54,490
Reduces impact aid deduction from 75 percent to 70 percent:	\$0
Increase special education funding from 81.7 to 89.3 percent of excess cost:	\$203,560
Provide correlation weighting for districts with an enrollment of 1,662 or more:	\$259,971
Total new money for USD 470:	\$1,521,971

Business Manager/Director of Operations J.K. Campbell said the increased weighting for special education, at-risk and bilingual education will not cover what the district already spends out of the local option budget on those programs. For example, in 2004-2005, USD 470 spent \$1.4 million on at-

risk, and only received less than half that much money from the state. The half-million dollar increase in at-risk weighting still won't cover what the district will spend in 2005-2006 on at-risk instruction.

"We will continue to spend local funds to supplement state and federally-mandated programs like special education, at-risk and bilingual education," Campbell said. "This increased funding will help to reduce the burden on the local taxpayer."

The additional funds in special education will flow-through the district to USD 465 Winfield, which is the cooperative school district providing special education services for Arkansas City and other Cowley County districts.

The package also places a cap of eight mills on capital outlay with first-time state aid provided. The maximum local option budget is increased from 25 to 27 percent. If the Supreme Court stays the last two percentage points of the local option budget, the state aid to fund the equalization will be transferred to special education.

Additional recommendations made by the House and Senate include a statement that no money from a school district's general fund could be spent for attorney fees or other costs in support of litigation against the state of Kansas or any officer, official, agent or agency of the state. Expenditures could be made from the local option budget. Dr. Ballard said USD 470's payments to Schools for Fair Funding (the coalition of mid-sized school districts that filed the school funding lawsuit against the state) and other legal payments have been made out of LOB.

Another recommendation requires that, on a per pupil basis, increased funding attributable to the \$35 increase in BSAPP be spent in the classroom or for instructional purposes. It is the public policy goal of the state that at least 65 percent of money appropriated by the state to school districts must be spent in the classroom or for instructional purposes.

Dr. Ballard said new monies would be targeted for instruction and classroom purposes. He said the funding package is "again, a great first step in addressing a dire need for competitive, professional salaries for teachers in the state of Kansas."

Kansas ranks in the top 10 percent in student achievement on national surveys, but teacher pay for Kansas teachers ranks in the bottom five nationally. Even with the additional \$290.4 million for K-12 education in Kansas, it is anticipated that Kansas teacher salaries will still remain in the bottom 10 nationally.

Dr. Ballard said new money in the areas of special programs will allow the district to free up some local funds for other projects. One example is the high school roof project, which has been on the board of education's project list for several years. Dr. Ballard said the roof project will be addressed and completed this year.

"Because we are a growing and progressing school district in terms of what we provide academically and programmatically to students, we will use the additional funds to sustain our focus on continued student achievement," he said.