You Must Vote No on the Wichita 259 School $615 Million Bond and Here's Why

Keep comments coming. You are heard. There are answers. Here's to you.
You are viewing a dynamic distribution list instead of hidden names.
The only newsletter with unavoidable visibility for elected leaders.

Magazine-style stories with behind-the-scenes.
Insights you will not find elsewhere.

A Newsletter for Politically Passionate People
and Interested Bystanders

100 Miles Per Hour in the Wrong Direction as Kansas Dumbed Down Proficiency Standards and USD 259 Pushes a $615 Million Bond

Property Taxpayers Call Him - 316-973-4580



In August 2025, the Kansas State Board of Education voted 7-3 to dumb down the state's academic proficiency scale, and now Unified School District 259, better known as Wichita Public Schools, is taking a victory lap for student improvement. As the largest school district in Kansas, USD 259 operates nearly 90 schools and special program sites across the Wichita metro area and under-educates over 43,600 students, which accounts for roughly 10% of all public school children in the state and more than half of the students in Sedgwick County.

When a bureaucratic giant that size cannot get kids to jump over the bar, the easiest trick is to lay the bar flat on the floor and brag about how many people stepped over it. That is the exact game being played as USD 259 begs Wichita taxpayers for $615 million in new bond debt, and it is the primary reason voters should vote **NO on the School Bond**.

Rigging the Testing Scale and Calling It Progress

Wichita USD 259 Board of Education
Pictured from left to right Julie Hedrick, Amy Jensen, Diane Albert, Brock Booker, Stan Reeser, Amy Warren and Sheila Brown-Kinnard.



A closer look at the 2025 scoring overhaul reveals how education officials manufactured overnight success in reading and math without students learning to read or write.

In 2024, under the previous standards, only 22% of Kansas 8th-graders tested proficient in reading, which closely matched the 25% proficiency rate recorded on the rigorous National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the Nation's Report Card. **After the state board lowered the cut scores in 2025**, 8th-grade reading proficiency magically skyrocketed from 22% to over 40% in a single year, even though national testing showed Kansas reading comprehension was actually trending downward.

A similar overnight reversal was engineered for 8th-grade math. State assessment results for 8th-grade math had been declining since 2015, sitting at a dismal 24% proficiency rate in 2024. By simply moving the Level 3 cutoff score to 540 on a 400-to-700 scale, state bureaucrats caused 8th-grade math proficiency to jump from 24% to 42% overnight.

As the Kansas Policy Institute pointed out, the state's new scoring system is the equivalent of a teacher realizing half the class is failing and dropping the cutoff for an A from 90% to 75%. Under the new scale, every grade level in both math and reading now has its proficient Level 3 threshold artificially locked at a low 540 points, reclassifying tens of thousands of struggling students with only partial, basic mastery as fully proficient.

Before the overhaul, the state department defined Level 1 as below grade level. To hide the fact that over 150,000 Kansas students were functionally illiterate and **unable to read at grade level, state officials literally scrubbed the words grade level from the failure definitions. They replaced them with vague labels that claim students have limited ability to show their skills.**

When Americans think of educational fraud, they remember the infamous Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal, where educators were indicted for erasing incorrect test answers to manufacture passing scores and artificially preserve their funding. In June 2024, the final Atlanta defendants pleaded guilty and admitted in open court that they betrayed children and destroyed the public trust.

What happened in Kansas in 2025 is the simple legal version of the Atlanta scam.

Instead of erasing pencil marks on an answer sheet, state officials took a pen to the scoring manual and moved the proficiency goalposts downward. The result is identical. Sedgwick County children are handed false reassurances of proficiency while failing

basic math and reading, and USD 259 administrators walk into the public square using those lying numbers to demand hundreds of millions of dollars in taxpayer money.

Apparently, USD 259 believes that if you cannot teach Wichita kids how to read a book or solve an algebra equation, you can just have your friends in Topeka rewrite the dictionary and fudge the math scale. That is textbook statistical fraud. When you take kids who could only hit 22% proficiency in reading and 24% in math, lower the passing threshold so the numbers nearly double overnight, and then march in front of Wichita voters claiming your schools are getting smarter so you deserve $615 million, you are running a bait-and-switch scam on every property owner in Sedgwick County.

Clear Comparison with the 7-Foot Basketball Rim



Wichita students deserve higher standards, not lower hoops. Hold your elected leaders **accountable**.

To see how absurd the district's argument is, imagine a high school basketball coach who is on the hot seat because only 15% of his players can dunk on a regulation 10-foot rim. The coach demands that taxpayers build him a brand-new, $615 million arena, promising that his training program is rapidly improving the team's athleticism.

Instead of teaching the players how to jump higher, the coach sneaks into the gym with a wrench and lowers the basketball rims to 7 feet. The next day, 30% of the team can dunk. The coach calls a press conference to celebrate his gradual improvement, while quietly ignoring the fact that 70% of his roster still cannot dunk on a 7-foot goal.

Would you reward that coach with a $615 million stadium?
Of course, down at USD 259 headquarters, **Kelly Bielefeld** probably thinks that coach deserves a statue and a contract extension. It takes a breathtaking level of arrogance to rig the rules of the game, fail to get even a third of your students over the newly lowered hurdle, and still demand a $615 million reward from the taxpayers. **This is fraud by misrepresentation**. USD 259 is selling voters a defective product by slapping a fake improved label on the box, hoping homeowners will not read the fine print before signing a multi-decade mortgage for new buildings.

Lowered the Education Bar and the Children Pay the Price

Mead Middle School



The Reality of USD 259's Numbers

Even after Kansas watered down the testing standards to make schools look better on paper, USD 259's academic performance remains in crisis. In science, a staggering **78.59%** of Wichita students scored in Level 1 or Level 2 in 2026, meaning nearly 4 out of 5 students are illiterate. In English language arts, barely **30%** of USD 259 students can read and write at a proficient level, trailing the diluted state average of 46%. In math, only **4.73%** of Wichita students scored at an advanced Level 4, compared to 12.02% statewide. **As former State Board of Education member Walt Chappell** and the Improve Learning First Coalition pointed out, at Mueller Aerospace and Engineering Discovery Magnet Elementary, which is a specialized engineering magnet school, only **8%** of students are proficient in math and **10%** in science.

Meanwhile, the national ACT exam provides unvarnished facts, because Topeka bureaucrats cannot lower the standards of a national test. USD 259's average ACT score has dropped to 16.6, sitting 2.4 points below the state average. Statewide, ACT college readiness in core subjects has plummeted from 32% in 2015 down to just 18%.

The district tries to wave its dismal 16.6 average away by noting that since 2018, the state pays for every junior to take the test, including kids who are not college-bound. **Assistant Superintendent Holly Ingram** explained that, "Once you start testing more, your scores are naturally going to adjust because now you have a lot more students taking it, students who may not be interested in college, et cetera."

That excuse is also illiterate and an indictment of the district, not a defense. If a USD 259 education leaves the average 11th grader scoring a 16.6 on basic reading, math, and science, the curriculum is failing our kids regardless of what they do after graduation.

Folks, this is the generation in Wichita and Kansas that will repair your cars and homes, and they can't read or do basic arithmetic.

Kelly Bielefeld USD 259 thinks Aerospace and Engineering means building paper airplanes, because an 8% math proficiency rate at an engineering magnet school is a sick joke on parents who thought their kids were getting an elite education. This is the ultimate educational fraud.

The district is robbing students of basic literacy and math skills while gaslighting the public into believing that the real problem is a lack of shiny new drywall and architectural upgrades. Trying to extract $615 million from taxpayers under the pretense that student learning is on the rise, while nearly 80% of kids fail science and ACT scores sit in the basement, is a deceptive bait-and-switch.

Zero Wichita Oversight and Hidden $2.07 Billion Price Tag



Many frustrated residents ask why the City of Wichita doesn't step in and regulate the school board for its failures. The answer shows why your vote on November 3 is the only real check on this runaway education USD 259 bureaucracy.

Under the Kansas Constitution, USD 259 is an independent municipal corporation with its own taxing authority. The Wichita Mayor and City Council have zero regulatory power over the school board, cannot fire the superintendent, and cannot veto this bond.

While the City of Wichita has no legal power to regulate the school board, city leaders do have indirect political influence and limited administrative touchpoints, which they ignore.

The City of Wichita controls municipal functions around the schools, such as zoning, building permits, street infrastructure, and Intergovernmental Agreements like the School Resource Officer program with the Wichita Police Department. However, the City Council and the Mayor have a massive public microphone, which they do not use.

Recently, Dr. Walt Chappell and bond opponents spoke during the Wichita City Council public comment period, because when USD 259 hikes property taxes and destroys the city's academic reputation, it drives families and businesses out of Wichita, which directly cannibalizes the City's own tax base. Yet, instead of using their platform to demand accountability from USD 259 for failing nearly 80% of students in science, Wichita politicians hide behind jurisdictional excuses and give the school board a free pass.

Folks, you can't believe everything the City of Wichita, council members, and that Mayor say about Chappell, especially the police department. He is a bulldog that doesn't give up when he smells rotten flesh. As Chappell once said,

"I don't know, maybe I am a bulldog," Chappell said. "If you bite on a bone, you don't give up. I guess I don't apologize for that. But what I do want to say to you is I'm willing to cooperate and work with you in any way we can, if we can actually get something accomplished."

Walt Chappell Coalition Vote No on School Bond



Worse, the $615 million figure the district advertises is only the tip of the financial iceberg for property taxes.

On the ballot, voters read carefully and vote no on both Questions 1 and 2. The $615 million is split into Question 1 ($407.1 million) and Question 2 ($207.9 million). The district claims Question 1 will not raise your tax rate. What they are hiding is that the 7.5-mill property tax levy Wichita homeowners have been paying on the old $370 million bond from 2008 is scheduled to be paid off and expire between 2027 and 2029. Passing Question 1 cancels that scheduled tax relief and extends the tax levy until at least 2045.

Even worse, $615 million is only the principal. Add 20 to 30 years of bond interest, and the real repayment cost to taxpayers approaches $1 billion, which could cost a $10 million Wichita business up to $500,000 in extra taxes over 20 years. Most alarming, USD 259's June 2024 Long-Range Facility Master Plan reveals that this $615 million bond is only the first installment of a massive **$2,071,211,616 construction scheme**.

Only a government monopoly completely insulated from city oversight could look taxpayers in the eye, cancel a scheduled 16-year property tax cut, and call it a zero-tax-increase plan. That is financial fraud on top of educational fraud. USD 259 already sits on $37.9 million in bond cash reserves. Yet, they use deceptive accounting to hook Wichita families and businesses into the first phase of a $2.07 billion construction syndicate, while their previous $370 million bond from 2008 left students further behind than ever.

Consequences and Conclusion

$615 Million School Bond Selling Scary Make-Believe and We Don't Buy That Here in Wichita



Approving this $615 million bond would validate a culture of statistical manipulation and reward an administration that treats taxpayers like gullible marks.

When public officials discover they can erase years of educational decline with a simple administrative vote in Topeka, and then immediately leverage those fabricated numbers t**o extract hundreds of millions of dollars from property owners**, the concept of public accountability ceases to exist.

As Walt Chappell rightly stated, "You can't spend $615 million and think that that's somehow going to help kids learn. It hasn't in the past, and it will not in the future." Pouring concrete and hanging new glass will enrich construction contractors and election campaigns. Still, it will leave Wichita children trapped in the same academic failure while saddling homeowners with decades of illiteracy in its workforce and crippling debt.

Voters must reject this School Bond and **Vote NO on both Question 1 and Question 2 of the USD 259 School Bond on November 3**.

As Aaron says, **"You've Got to Stand for Something."**

Sources

Improve Learning First Coalition Vote NO on the Wichita School Bond and Master Plan Cost Data
The Sentinel USD 259 Bond Issue Will Cost a Lot More Than Taxpayers Are Told
Wichita Public Schools USD 259 Bond FAQs and Ballot Questions
Wichita Public Schools USD 259 Cut Scores Are Changing for 2025 State Assessments
Kansas Policy Institute State Board of Ed Votes to Reduce Proficiency Standards
Kansas Policy Institute Over 150,000 Kansas Students May Be Functionally Illiterate
The Sentinel Seven Members of Kansas Board of Education Vote to Reduce Proficiency Standards
Kansas Legislature Testimony on SB 458 Restoring 2024 Assessment Cut Scores
The Wichita Eagle What Test Scores Show About Wichita Student Performance Ahead of School Bond Issue
Wichita City Council Meeting Public Agenda with Walt Chappell

This recording of a Wichita City Council public comment session shows how Dr. Walt Chappell and citizens use the council's public forum to address local accountability issues directly with city officials.

Best regards and gratitude,

The Newsletter Team

with Kate Coleman

Coleman Science and Research LLC