

## Education funding

To The Sun:

Since my first election to the Neodesha school board in 1985, I have had the opportunity to learn a lot about school district budgets and how they are funded. As a former board member and president of the Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB), I learned even more about the intricacies of the statewide K-12 school finance formula. As an attorney I understand the history of school finance litigation and where it stands today.

I am writing to express my frustration with the repeated media claims regarding the “massive cuts to K-12 education” in recent years. My frustration is with the fact that these claims simply are not true. Due to my long-term experience with KASB, I trust that organization’s numbers on the topic of school finance. Those numbers clearly and irrefutably show that K-12 education spending in Kansas has only gone up since the depths of the financial decline in 2010. In fiscal year 2010, total K-12 spending was \$5,589,549,000 and that funding has increased every year since to a total of \$5,940,258,000 in 2014. For 2015, K-12 spending is budgeted to be \$6,093,627,000, an increase of over \$504 million since 2010. Do these numbers illustrate “massive cuts to K-12 education” during that time period? Hardly.

Some have claimed that the increased spending has not gone to the classroom as it includes money for teacher pensions, bond and interest payments, and capital outlay funds. Those claims defy common sense. The single most important factor in any classroom is the teacher. Teachers earn and deserve every penny of their pensions. Every dime of pension contributions by the state is direct compensation to teachers paying the annuities for their pensions.

Bond and interest funds are what provide the very classrooms in which teachers teach and students learn. Most districts in Kansas are like mine and would not have updated classrooms without this state aid. Providing the classroom itself is certainly money reaching the classroom.

Capital outlay funds provide classroom maintenance and equip those classrooms with the tools needed to effectively teach. In school districts across the state, the technology and other equipment on which Kansas kids rely is a direct result of capital outlay funding.

In conclusion, it is disingenuous and factually untrue to claim that K-12 spending has suffered massive cuts in the last five years. In fact, the opposite is true, with the addition of

over half a billion dollars in spending from 2010 to 2015. It is about time that someone who has been involved in K-12 education for many years pointed that out. — DENNIS D. DEPEW, Neodesha