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## Unfulfilled Promises & A Clear Road That Needs No Map Response to Governor Brownback's State of the State Address

**Topeka**— Kansas educators and KNEA members listened with a hopeful ear as Governor Brownback presented his Road Map for Kansas during his annual State of the State Address. Focusing on the future prosperity of what he termed the three-millionth Kansan, Governor Brownback spoke of economic growth, the importance of education and even the need to protect our natural resources. However, as his address went on, it became clear that for the students and teachers in today's Kansas classrooms as well as the parents and families of middle-class Kansans, the Road Map for Kansas is very simply a toll road where a select few are given a free-ride. The true Road Map for Kansas success is a simple one: Full restoration of educational funding and honoring the commitments made by the Kansas legislature in 2006.

Governor Brownback spoke of irony in his address as he focused on what he calls the state's greatest obligation, education. Although the prospect of funding all-day kindergarten in Kansas public schools may be a revelation for Governor Brownback, teachers and parents from around the state have been promoting this for years. While we are encouraged that Governor Brownback has recognized the need for all-day kindergarten, this alone does not mitigate the damage done by Governor Brownback's tax policies and the cuts to public education in Kansas. Moreover, some in his own party have recommended additional cuts to vital social services, higher education, and programs to help Kansas' neediest families in the future. As KNEA President Karen Godfrey noted, "Sending a hungry child to all-day kindergarten seems to defeat the purpose."

During his address, Governor Brownback made the following statement, "**the best decisions are usually made by those closest to the students.**" KNEA certainly agrees. During the first three years of his term, Governor Brownback's administration has soundly rejected the voice of Kansas educators. From school efficiency task forces comprised of close business allies, to educational policy meetings where special interest benefactors are given preferred audience to the Governor's repeated exclusion of classroom teachers during educational policy discussions held at his Cedar Crest residence, Governor Brownback has proven unwilling to even listen to those closest to Kansas students, let alone hear and act upon their experience and professional perspective. KNEA Vice President, Mark Farr recently commented "Including perspectives from education professionals throughout Kansas is vital moving forward."

There is little irony and no road map to steer Kansas citizens away from the truths behind Governor Brownback's actual education policies. In a 2012 editorial published in the Wichita Eagle, it was predicted that Governor Brownback's tax policy would "decimate public education in Kansas" and that he needed to listen to those in his own party who called it "the worst tax policy to ever come out of the statehouse." He didn't listen, and now his grand experiment has proven these predictions to be true. Sadly, this means that Kansas students now rank 3rd in the nation in per pupil funding cuts. The number of Kansas children living in poverty has doubled in the last decade and grown from 19% to 23% during Governor Brownback's term in office. Kansas educators continue to step up and help Kansas children with whatever is needed, in spite of significant reductions in state support for public schools. From providing materials to needy students, opening classroom doors earlier and leaving them open later for students who need extra help, and actively supporting their communities, KNEA members and educators throughout Kansas keep students at the forefront.

Education is an investment in the future of Kansas. Through this investment we will reap what we sow. KNEA members and educators throughout Kansas have led the call for Governor Brownback and the Kansas Legislature to honor its commitments to fully fund public education. Kansas teachers are innovative, highly qualified professionals who are dedicated to Kansas and its students. The three-millionth Kansan as well as every Kansas public school student today deserve more than to be unwilling participants in an "experiment." Fully restoring funding for Kansas public schools, investing in public education K-12 through higher education, and promoting the health and well-being of all Kansas children is a clear road that needs no map, just a steady navigator who is committed to all Kansans and not just the wealthiest few.

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