



SHAWNEE MISSION SCHOOL DISTRICT

Task Force on Special Education Testimony by Sherry Dumolien

January 5, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to testify to the critical importance of special education funding for students in the Shawnee Mission School District, and across the state of Kansas. I urge you to support special education services and state funding at the required 92% of excess costs.

As you are no doubt aware, the statutory funding formula for special education has not been fully funded for more than a decade. The Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD) fully pays for the required (and additional) special education services that our students receive. We pay for it out of our general fund, but do not receive reimbursement for those costs. Each year, we are forced to shift funding from other areas of need to fill the budget hole that absent state funding does not fill. By law, we are required to provide all the special education services that our students need, and it also the morally correct thing to do. However, to accomplish this, we must reduce other services, and transfer those funds to pay for special education. It is also important to understand that these unreimbursed special education costs impact ALL students, as students with an Individual Education Program (IEP) are general education students first, and spend most of their time in the general education classroom.

The financial resources that are diverted away from general education towards serving special education students impact all student academic outcomes. As our schools worked to complete Needs Assessments for the upcoming school year, they identified a number of areas of significant need. Among the areas of highest need identified by schools are increased staff, including counselors, paraeducators and interventionists; lower class sizes to better support all students; increased support for students seeking Real World Learning opportunities; and

increased time and funding for professional development. Working to satisfying these needs with the additional resources freed up by full funding of special education would significantly improve academic outcomes for all students.

We also anticipate significant impact on special education services from recently-passed Open Enrollment legislation. Federal law requires school districts to provide transportation services to any special education student who requires it. A single student with acute special education needs that enrolls in any other district would obligate the receiving district to pay potentially high and unlimited transportation costs (exacerbated by the additional distance that student would need to be transported). The total cost of education increases due to these new costs that would not exist if the home district of the student had received adequate special education resources to provide services the student required.

Finally, the district is strongly opposed to any restrictions imposed by the state on the use of Local Option Budget revenue which is raised from special education funding. Any attempt to rectify the failure of the state to fund special education at the required level by infringing on the ability of local districts to make decisions based on the best interests of their students is bad for children, bad for communities, and bad for the state of Kansas.

The State of Kansas is obligated to fund special education at 92% of excess costs, and with a significant budget surplus, the time for the state to finally fulfill its legal and moral obligation is now.

Sincerely,

Sherry Dumolien

Chief of Special Education