

**Jerald J. Braun**

218 Castillian Gdns

Hays, KS 67601

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**Special Education Teacher, Hays - USD 489**

**Special Education and Related Services Funding Taskforce**

Chairperson Williams and esteemed members of the Committee,

I extend my gratitude for allowing me the opportunity to advocate for funding in Special Education in Kansas. My name is Jerald Braun, and I serve as a Special Education teacher at the West Central Kansas Special Education Coop (WCKSEC), providing services to the children in Hays, Ellis, Lacrosse, Russell, and the private Catholic schools in Hays.

In my 24-year tenure within the public school system of Hays, Kansas, I spent 16 years teaching general education mathematics at the middle school level. However, my transition to special education eight years ago introduced me to invigorating challenges and rewarding experiences. My role within the cooperative primarily involves providing gifted and talented services to middle and high school students. Speaking at the 2023 Kansas Master Teacher recognition event at the Capitol last spring allowed me to share my journey in special education. My initial aspiration in teaching was to impact the world, one student at a time. Through my position in special education, I have seen firsthand how my passion for education truly transforms the lives of children. Even after years of teaching, witnessing the radiant faces of children as they grasp the world around them continues to bring immense joy.

Yet, the realm of special education encounters challenges. Providing essential services to our most vulnerable students requires adequate resources – appropriate staffing, smaller class sizes, and specialized tools. While WCKSEC takes pride in the services

across three counties, we grapple with critical shortages of qualified teachers and paraprofessionals. Budgetary constraints restrict staffing, leading to larger class sizes for both pull-out and push-in services. As a result, co-taught classes expand, diminishing the impact of specialized services on the students who need them the most. Regrettably, limited resources hinder students from realizing their full potential.

Understanding that blindly throwing money at a problem doesn't solve it, I emphasize that fully funding special education is a targeted endeavor, positively benefiting ALL students. A prime example lies within my cooperative: funding received for special services supports students in private schools which lack these services. Public schools, through special education funding, provide essential support and teachers to private school students in need. Increased special education funding would enable districts to continue this practice and redirect resources currently used for unfunded services, staff, and resources to empower general education students and classrooms.

If Special Education were fully funded, my district could hire more paraprofessionals at livable wages to support student needs. Reducing inclusion class sizes would facilitate appropriate learning environments for all students. Additionally, resources and opportunities could be extended not only to traditionally recognized special education programs but also to the gifted population falling under the same special education umbrella.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the perspective of a special education teacher in the field. Your commitment to delivering quality public education to all students in Kansas is commendable and appreciated. Your responsibility is great, but I hope this sheds light on the plight of Kansas' most critical segment – our children.

Sincerely,



**Jerald J. Braun**  
**Gifted/Talented Special Education Teacher**  
**West Central Kansas Special Education Coop (Hays-USD489)**