

January 3, 2024

Testimony to the Special Education Task Force Members

NAME:Emily Meissen-Sebelius

TITLE: Parent of children in Shawnee Mission School District

EMAIL ADDRESS: emsebelius@gmail.com

ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY: Written Only

Dear members of the Special Education Task Force,

I am writing to urge you to fully fund special education, without changing or rewriting the formula, but at the current amount specified in statute. This is incredibly important to me as a parent of a child who receives special education services. But it is also important to me because I have two other children in the public school system, and failing to fully fund special education siphons dollars away from all children, by forcing districts to cover the shortfall. Lastly, I believe public schools benefit the entire community and state, as evidenced by the desire for families to live and businesses to locate in areas with quality public schools. We should be supporting and funding them at levels that allow continued quality and success.

I can personally speak to the benefits of special education, as my own child has thrived after being evaluated for special education services and receiving them. It has helped her immensely to grow academically and in terms of critical thinking and life skills. I am incredibly grateful for the services and the qualified instructors she has been able to receive services from.

As a parent, I also support full funding special education funding because of the real impact shortfalls in this funding have on the entire district. Our district has been covering the shortfall in special education funding, and each year this amount increases. This means the funds to provide all needed special education services comes from our general fund budget. These funds from the general budget would otherwise be used for teachers, paras, instructional materials and other important resources that benefit all children- including those not receiving special education services.

Lastly, as a lifelong Kansas resident, I strongly believe that public schools are the bedrock of our communities, in our rural, suburban and urban areas of the state. As a family, we chose to live in Kansas, and Johnson County, specifically because of the high quality public schools. Strong public schools attract quality businesses and employers, as well as create a robust future workforce for our state. Johnson County is evidence of this in practice, as well as other areas of the state where public schools serve as community and economic hubs.

As a family, we have had very positive experiences with our public schools, and I think it is incredibly important to keep public funding with these institutions to continue to improve and build upon them, making them even better for all in the community who would like to and/or need to access public education. Our teachers and staff are professional, caring and incredibly competent. They work so hard, especially over the last few years, to meet the diverse needs of children and our community. I am forever grateful for our teachers, who have helped our children navigate a global pandemic and continue to grow and learn through adversity. Over the last few years, retaining teachers and staff in public schools has been a challenge. The legislature should be fully funding special education and should be doing EVERYTHING within its power to support our public schools, teachers and students, and in turn our state economy.

Thank you for your consideration, and sincere thank you for your service to our great state.

Emily Meissen-Sebelius
Parent of children in Shawnee Mission School District
Prairie Village Ks.