



**House K-12 Education Budget Committee
Testimony on HB 2410 – The School Equity and Enhancement Act
Presented by Dr. Patricia All | Superintendent
March 24, 2017**

Chairman Campbell and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 2410, the School Equity and Enhancement Act. The Olathe school district is a growing district with nearly 30,000 students. We are a community that continues to experience growth – not only in population, but in poverty, diversity, and the number of English Language Learners we serve.

Olathe Public Schools are not about adequacy; we are about excellence. Our community expects excellence. Our businesses expect excellence. We all believe that investing in students has positive impacts for our community and the state's economy.

We appreciate the committee's continued efforts to work towards a school finance formula that invests in Kansas public school students. We recognize that meeting the diverse needs of school districts across this state adds to the challenges of this goal. As we review proposed school finance plans, we do so with the end in mind. For us, that means asking whether the plan offers both the framework and resources necessary to ensure students graduate with the skills necessary to realize success in postsecondary education and the workforce. Beyond that, however, we look closely at the accountability measures and take those seriously.

Olathe Public Schools appreciates that the committee incorporated some of the feedback heard in previous hearings, including:

- Utilizing a foundation-aid based formula that provides funding on a per pupil basis; this allows the formula to be responsive to growth in districts like Olathe.
- Incorporating weightings that provide additional and targeted resources to serve the diverse needs of our students – especially the at-risk and bilingual weightings.
- Including a mechanism for calculating inflation.

However, as you deliberate this bill, we encourage you to consider the following concerns and recommendations:

- **Invest additional resources in the foundation aid.** The proposed funding level recommended for FY 2018 does not cover increased costs, even with CPI. Further, if the goal is to include funding for programs like Career and Technical Education in the foundation aid, additional investments are necessary to support the workforce readiness goals the state has established for students.

- **Implement funding for all-day kindergarten in FY 2018** instead of phasing it in. Additional funding for voluntary, full-day kindergarten will allow us to provide early interventions that will return dividends later in their educational career and life. This is an example of an at-risk strategy with demonstrated results.
- **Fund special education at 92% of excess cost.** Although this is a priority, we recognize the cost to the state and encourage the committee to phase in funding over the next 3 years. This would allow districts to recapture general fund dollars that are currently being used to provide special education services. Nearly 35% (or \$19 million) of Olathe's special education budget is funded using general fund dollars.
- **Restore the Local Option Budget formula.** We believe the local board must have the authority and flexibility to secure local resources and to determine how those resources are used. We believe the newly proposed section on local effort is complex, removes local control and flexibility, and shifts a greater burden to our local property tax owners. We recommend you reject this proposal and retain the Local Option Budget formula; we further ask that you note the following objections to the proposed plan:
 - This plan requires a portion of the local foundation budget be used to fund At-Risk and Bilingual programs, thereby reducing flexibility in how local funds are spent and potentially impacting other programs.
 - The proposed Local Activities Budget (LAB) assumes activities are not connected to the academic focus of our schools. In fact, activities in Olathe are considered co-curricular and over 84% of our secondary students participate in one or more of these activities. Students involved in co-curricular activities are engaged in school, are less likely to be truant, are more likely to graduate from high school and gain the soft skills important to higher education and the business community. Olathe is intentional about finding ways to connect all kids as they transition from one school level to another.
- **Expand the use of the Capital Outlay Levy.** Olathe Public Schools continues to face increasing capital outlay demands such as scheduled maintenance and investing in new infrastructure including technology. Currently, these demands are exceeding the revenue generated by the statutory maximum 8 mill levy. Even though we are known for new construction based on enrollment growth, our average age of our facilities is 30 years. The district must maintain existing facilities while building new ones. We support expanding the definition to allow districts to use the funds for other building related costs such as utilities.
- **Restoring bond and interest state aid based on median assessed valuation per pupil.** Olathe believes that safe and high quality learning environments are essential for our students. We recognize your interest in policies and funding predictability related to bond projects. We would be happy to work with you to identify more solutions, but encourage you to reconsider the formula for calculating state aid.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to offer feedback on HB 2410. Please feel free to contact me at pall@olatheschools.org or 913-780-8022, if you have any additional questions.