

**Testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Education Finance
In support of Senate Bill 44 –**

Appropriations for the Department of Education for FY 2019, 2020 and 2021; increasing BASE aid for certain school years; continuing 20 mill statewide levy for schools and exempting certain portion of property used for residential purposes from such levy.

By Nikki McDonald, Chair, Olathe Public Education Network

February 6, 2019

Senator Baumgardner, Senator Denning, Senator Hensley, and members of the Senate Select Committee on Education Finance:

On behalf of the non-partisan grassroots community educational advocacy group, Olathe Public Education Network (OPEN), I am writing to request that you give your full support to SB44 and pass this legislation out of committee as soon as possible. This bill will provide the necessary inflation adjustment to school funding which is required by the Gannon decision from the Kansas Supreme Court, and which our schools need in order to effectively address the educational needs of our students. The Olathe Public School District is the fastest growing school district in the area, and has been listed among “America's Top 25 Places to Live and Go to School.” Our school district is one of the driving reasons that major corporations have located in our community. Our schools have created a competitive and desirable economic climate, attractive to families and businesses, both small and large.

Olathe families value our public schools and regard them as a sound, growing investment in the future of our community. Olathe Public Schools have a graduation rate of over 90%, and the District offers more than 60 Advanced Placement, College, and College Equivalent courses. This is the kind of preparation that creates an educated workforce, individuals who create jobs in their communities and drive a strong local economy thanks to our public school system.

Here in Olathe we respect the need for prioritizing our investment in our public schools, and we understand that full funding with an inflation adjustment is necessary. After years of decline, education funding was finally returned to adequate levels last year, and we must not reverse this trend. Increased funding with an inflation adjustment is necessary because our children depend on these dollars in order for schools to maintain high standards. Additional resources are needed to enable students to overcome factors outside of school that impede learning (poverty, disability, mental health challenges for example). In addition, building and maintenance costs will inevitably rise in the future, so the inflation piece of the legislation is vital.

A funding inflation adjustment is necessary because the rate of inflation has been at 16.3% for the last 10 years, according to the Consumer Price Index, and was just under two percent last

year. This 2% trend upward will continue, according to economists, and if we don't account for this trend, our schools will again be underfunded, struggling to do more with fewer resources.

We know that the Legislature faces a complex problem as you plan for funding all of the needs before you, and we appreciate your work here. Revenues have been inadequate for too long, but this is our opportunity to ensure funding for the best investment in our state's future, our public education system, and the healthy economy created by an educated citizenry. For that reason we request that you pass SB44 out of committee, accomplishing your part in the task of ensuring full, inflation-proof school funding for communities that have had a great many demands on their dollars and resources.

At this time we would also like to take the opportunity to extend an invitation to you to visit our exemplary public schools and see for yourselves our vital and energetic classrooms.