

Dear Special Education Task Force Members,

My name is Kristen Blackton. My family and I live in Shawnee in the USD 232 School District. I am a former teacher, and I have a young daughter who will begin attending public school in a few years.

In my previous position as a teacher, a position that I held for ten years, I saw first-hand how important it is to fully fund Special Education. I had students with varying needs and abilities throughout my time in the classroom, some requiring a full-time paraprofessional and an individualized curriculum, others needing modified assignments and occasional individualized help. I saw these students accomplish incredible things as they learned the facets of reading and writing, but the educational bounds they made would not have been possible without the time and resources of the trained and committed adults in our Special Education program-- the very program that has been under-funded in our state for years. I believe, as I hope you do as well, in the dignity and rights of **all** students, and our students with disabilities have a right to learn in the ways that meet their needs. This requires funding.

In addition to the Special Education students in my classroom, I witnessed how important and essential it is for general education students to share educational experiences with their peers of differing abilities. I saw how the support and presence of a trained paraprofessional often correlated with educational gains for **all students**, even those with a general education curriculum, not to mention that all students' lives are informed and enriched by sharing spaces with those different from them.

As I'm sure you know, tens of thousands of students in Kansas have disabilities and are served by our public schools. It is the right of these children to have access to a quality education that meets their specific needs. Fully funding Special Education allows them to have the educational experience they deserve, and I hope that our legislators do the right thing and vote to give our schools the Special Education funds that they need.

Thank you for your time,

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