

Submitted by:

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Members of the Special Education Task Force:

Thank you for the work you are about to undertake to evaluate concerns of the lack of funding for special education in Kansas.

I am providing written testimony as a 36-year veteran educator in the Olathe Public Schools. I serve as a general education educator and partner with a multitude of specialized educators to ensure that every student has the great public-school education they deserve. All students in our schools are general education students first. Throughout their educational experience, students may be identified and qualify for specialized services – the trend of students receiving these services is increasing both in Olathe and across the state of Kansas. In my years of experience in the classroom, I have had the opportunity to partner with educators highly qualified and specialized to meet very specific learning needs of students, from mobility specialists, therapists, behavior consultants as well as the many paraprofessionals that work alongside all of us in the classroom. By collaborating together, staff foster a climate of inclusivity of all students, no matter their exceptionalities.

Because the Kansas legislature has failed to fully fund special education, coupled with an increased need for services for students, districts must transfer great amounts of funds out of their general fund to special education, impacting not only our students identified with special needs, but all our students because the salaries for all staff are tied to that general fund. According to a recent article from the National Education Association, educators across the country are making less, \$3,644 less, than they did 10 years ago, when adjusted for inflation. A recent survey by Olathe National Education Association revealed that over %60 of certified staff in the district coach/sponsor activities or work a second job just for financial improvement. Retaining current classified and certified staff is at a critical point – we can't recruit ourselves out of the educator shortage. Our current educators are the future administrators and even superintendents for districts in the state of Kansas. Fully funding special education would allow districts and staff bargaining units to work together to make a positive financial impact for all staff that support students, every day.