

**Testimony to the
Task Force on Special Education and Related Services Funding**

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Task Force members, thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on special education funding. My name is Ashley Motley, and I live in Manhattan, KS.

I am a 5th teacher in USD 383, and I also have two children enrolled in the district. My daughter, Evelyn, is currently in 4th grade at Oliver Brown Elementary. I am grateful for the SPED services she receives in our district. She completed her evaluation for special education services in the spring of 2021 during 1st grade. While COVID-19 has presented many challenges for students, the pandemic did not cause the learning challenges my daughter confronts. Beginning in 2020, our family started the process of working with a pediatric geneticist at Children's Mercy in Kansas City after my daughter experienced health delays and demonstrated frustration while learning phonetic sounds in Kindergarten. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we pushed through a months-long waitlist, multiple insurance appeals, and, finally, a change in insurance to have genetic testing performed on her bloodwork and ours, as her parents. We learned that she lives with a rare de novo genetic condition called 1q21.1 microdeletion syndrome. Because of Evelyn's diagnosis and school evaluation, she has received speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, social work support, and resource room support. After her initial diagnosis, we also met with a neuropsychologist who diagnosed Evelyn with ADHD and dyslexia – these often go hand in hand. While dyslexia does not qualify her for services as a stand-alone diagnosis, it has had a significant impact on the amount of time she spends with reading interventionist at her school building. With all of her support, my daughter now reads at the 48% percentile nationally for her grade which demonstrates she now has a deeper understanding of phonics. However, she needs to

continue to work hard to improve her fluency score which currently places her at the 6% percentile nationally. However, she is not deterred by her reading challenges and constantly consumes all the dinosaur-related material she can get her hands on. She would like to become a paleontologist and did one of her most recent research projects on Kansan, George F. Sternberg.

Beyond being a parent navigating this reality for my daughter, I support several students who depend on special education services to receive a free, appropriate public education. My students also receive needed therapies, have space for additional work and testing time in our resource room with our special education teachers, and access to tools for learning accommodations made possible by their IEPs.

All my students are entitled to a free, appropriate public education. In order to accomplish this legal requirement, the staff in my building put in many extra hours and jigsaw a tight schedule together to ensure we have para and interventionist support where it is needed. Providing this education means we support all the required accommodations outlined in an IEP, but we also cannot let the quality of education lag behind for our students not receiving services while we are trying to make accommodations for our SPED students. If special education were fully funded by our state and the U.S. Congress, I would like to see an increase of special education and general education paras in the classroom as the most immediate priority. Paras significantly help a general education teacher by allowing the functioning of small group cooperative learning. Cooperative learning, or working in small groups on projects, increases the deep learning of students and creates more on-task behavior. Furthermore, it promotes healthier social relationships and increases achievement on projects. Additionally, our school board's priority of decreasing class sizes would be made possible if we had more funds to hire more teachers. This would allow us to have more one-on-one time with our students as they work to master updated standards critical for our workforce's future. Now, because of the need to create more one-on-one time with my students, I spend my own lunchtimes sitting with them so they can master new math learning (frustration from lack of understanding new concepts, when

unaddressed, can manifest in many challenging behaviors that distract from whole group learning.) USD 383 has moved \$32 million from the general fund to special education funding in the past 10 years. These are dollars that could have impacted many more students if the state had fulfilled their legal obligation to fund 92% of excess costs for special education.

Thank you for holding this meeting and listening to the concerns of constituents. I am available to offer additional testimony and answer any further questions you may have about my experience.