

January 5, 2024

Written Testimony: Special Education and Related Services Funding Task Force Committee
Submitted by: Dr. Brian Huff, Superintendent, USD 231 Gardner Edgerton

Honorable Chair Williams and Committee Members,

The Gardner Edgerton School District USD 231 appreciates the support offered by the SPED Funding Task Force as it considers the funding formula for public education in Kansas and how that impacts the funding of SPED students. We have a passion for the education of all kids and feel strongly that all students should have access to an outstanding education. All of our kids deserve the opportunity to succeed.

We currently serve around 1300 students with special needs as identified through an IEP (Individualized Education Plan). We have 129 specially trained staff members who educate these students. Last school year, the cost of educating our special needs students was \$16.6 million. The district received \$10.2 million in funding, about 61% of the needed amount. The \$6.4 million shortfall was taken from our general budget, leaving less funding for our 4600 general education students and the overall operation of our district.

Special Education students are general education students first. Students with disabilities have a right and are more successful when included in the general education classroom with their friends. This requires significant investments of resources, including staffing, training, and ongoing support.

When legally mandated special education services are underfunded, resources at the local level must be reallocated, thus reducing the district's ability to fund other programs and supports adequately. In addition, public education accountability mandates enacted by the Kansas Legislature over the past few years – without targeted funding – have burdened staff and financial resources.

Kansas is obligated under K.S.A. 72-3422 to provide 92% of the state-level excess cost for special education services. Currently, the legislature funds special education at 69% of the state-level excess costs. With the largest budget surplus ever in Kansas of \$2.8 billion by July 2024 and \$1.7 billion in the State's General Stabilization Fund, now is the right time to support total special education funding. IDEA's requirement for Maintenance of State Financial Support (MFS) should not be a concern given the surplus of funding and by phasing increased funding over four years to attain the mandated state requirement of 92% state excess costs.

I appreciate the committee taking this funding issue into consideration. This shortfall in funding has posed a significant challenge to us, and we hope the committee can find a solution that will move our funding closer to the 92% level.

Sincerely,



Dr. Brian Huff

Superintendent of Schools

USD 231