



16740 W 175th Street
Olathe, KS 66062

To: Senate School Finance Committee
From: Cassandra Barton; Insight School & Kansas Virtual Academy Date:
May 18, 2017
Re: Support of HB 2410

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

I am Cassandra Barton, the Head of School for the Insight School of Kansas and Kansas Virtual Academy. These are two virtual schools within Spring Hill School District and are managed by K12, Inc, a virtual education provider. Thank you for the opportunity to offer remarks in support of HB 2410.

K12 Inc. is a company that provides online school services and curriculum to school districts across the nation. Our products and services are designed to provide alternative opportunities for public school students from kindergarten to 12th grade. At Insight and K12, this includes:

- Providing a full range of services and support for our students.
- Utilizing the rigorous, interactive, research-based and standards-aligned K12 Curriculum.
- Hiring and training Kansas certified teachers and staff to instruct and support our students in a virtual environment.
- Providing the technology to allow our students and staff to interact in live sessions.

We stand in support of HB 2410 as it relates to virtual education. This bill appropriates virtual school state aid at the same level as current law, which is a flat cost of \$5,000 per full-time student.

In 2015, a Legislative Post-Audit report stated virtual schools were underfunded, which led to the flat rate funding prescribed in the Block Grant of \$5,000 for School Year 2015-2016 and \$5,600 for School Year 2016-2017. The funding level was dropped to \$5,000 by a reduction that came during the 2016 Special Session (a \$600 per pupil cut).

The House K-12 Budget Committee thoroughly reviewed virtual education components and funding and recommended no reduction be made to the funding level. The House's Subcommittee on Virtual Education met and offered the same conclusion.

The House's review illustrated the misconception that virtual students receive more funding than traditional students. No traditional student receives only the base state aid, because they receive at least one weighting plus other costs. HB 2410 puts virtual state aid in its own funding silo and does not give them any weightings, despite the fact that 63% of our students are at-risk and 18% are special education students.

Our virtual schools provide an atmosphere for students to thrive. Our teachers, including special education, are employees of the virtual school vendor, not the school district, and those costs are included in the \$5,000 funding level.

The 2015 Legislative Post Audit report illustrated virtual students perform well on standardized tests. However, our graduation rates are lower than traditional school averages because nearly 50% of students that enter virtual schools are credit deficient. This produces an immediate uphill task to graduate students on time.

The current version of HB 2410 would add \$460M in new funding for school finance over the next two years. Underperforming schools are receiving additional support, not less.

Virtual education serves an important role in Kansas education. It is a school choice issue. Many of our students feel virtual school is a better approach for their learning style. Virtual education allows parents to be more involved and works better with some family schedules. It is also an alternative for students facing many issues that greatly impede their ability to learn in a traditional school, including anxiety, depression, physical illness, pregnancy/parenting, family financial instability, or extreme bullying. We have seen so many cases where our schools have allowed students to thrive during a time they wouldn't have otherwise.

Please use us as a resource for any questions you have about virtual education. We respectfully urge you not to support any cuts to virtual education.

Respectfully,

Cassandra Barton