Written Testimony for

The Special Committee on Education

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Chair Williams and Members of the Committee:

I am Chuck Knapp, President/CEO of Jobs for America's Graduates-Kansas (JAG-K). Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony to the Committee regarding improving student achievement and outcomes. My testimony will describe the JAG-K program, provide evidence of how we are helping prepare students for success, and make the case for expanding JAG-K programming to help increase state graduation rates and develop a competent workforce.

JAG-K Objective
JAG-K wants all Kansas students to have successful futures. We specifically help students with various barriers to success, graduate from high school and get on a productive career path.

History and Program Data
JAG-K is one of 40 state affiliate organizations of Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG), which was founded in 1980. JAG-K, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, is in its ninth year in Kansas. This year, JAG-K has 79 programs in 63 schools, in 43 school districts, serving approximately 4,000 students.

The Evidence-Based Model
There are multiple evidence-based JAG Program applications implemented throughout the United States. JAG-K has implemented the Multi-Year High School, Alternative Education High School, and Middle School programs. JAG also has models for students who left the public school system and need additional training to get on a career path, and a college success program for students who need additional support while in college. This testimony is related to the JAG multiyear high school program. Sixty-seven of the 79 JAG-K programs are multiyear programs.

JAG-K is an in-school, elective class, where students are taught leadership and career development skills by their JAG-K Career Specialist, who is an employee of JAG-K. The Career Specialist works with a school Advisory Council, usually comprised of school counselors, administrators, and sometimes community members, to determine which students will be placed in the JAG-K program. Students must meet certain criteria to be eligible for participation, including potential for success, and at least six identified barriers.

JAG Barrier Examples:
- Low Academic Performance
- Homeless

- Lacks Maturity to Pursue Education or Career Goals
- Is economically disadvantaged as defined by eligibility for Free or Reduced Lunch, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or other public economic assistance.
- Inadequate or No Work Experience
- Incarcerated parent
- The student is a parent

There should be no more than 60 students in a JAG-K program with classes of no more than 15 students per class. The required minimum number of students per program is 35. Some schools have multiple programs.

Over the course of a multiyear JAG-K program, students will be introduced to 87 competencies related to employability, career development, leadership development, life survival and personal skills. Each senior must master 37 core competencies to successfully complete the program. These are the skills most employers tell us workers need but often do have when entering the workforce.

The competencies are often introduced through project-based learning activities. We also introduce and master competencies and career exploration opportunities through regional and statewide events, campus and workplace visits, guest speakers and other innovative strategies.

Students are required to invest a minimum of 10 hours serving their communities and a minimum of eight hours during the JAG-K class focused on academic remediation to ensure they are successful in classes outside the JAG-K program.

Each JAG-K program has a student organization called the JAG-K Career Association. Students are required to be part of the Career Association and given the opportunity to run for officer positions at the local, regional, state, and national levels. State Career Association officers participate in special activities at JAG-K Day at the Capitol in Topeka, and they attend the JAG National Student Leadership Academy in Washington, D.C.

The JAG-K program is a 12-month program, requiring JAG-K Career Specialists to maintain contact with students throughout the summer months, assisting them with job and job shadowing opportunities and ensuring they are continuing on a positive and successful path while not in school. In a unique feature to the JAG model, Specialists also have a 12-month follow-up period with JAG-K seniors. In that follow-up period, the

Specialist tracks job placement, helps get students acclimated to post-secondary education and new careers, and is available for an extra layer of support.

Performance Measures

JAG has been successful for more than 40 years in the United States because it can demonstrate results with objective data. A variety of performance measures are tracked for every student over the course of their JAG-K experience, including the 12-month follow-up period. This data covers all areas of the JAG model, including barriers overcome, competencies mastered, graduation rate, job placement rate, and successful outcomes (measured by whether the student is in post-secondary education/training, military service, or in the workforce). Career Specialists enter data regularly for each of their students.

JAG-K is required to maintain the data in the JAG national data system to ensure standardized and consistent data management. Data is so important to the success of the JAG model, JAG-K and many other JAG affiliates have a data management position to ensure quality data control.

The most prestigious award given by JAG to affiliate organizations is the "Five of Five" Award. This award is earned by meeting or exceeding the national performance measures in five categories. JAG-K has been eligible for the award seven years and has earned it every year. The challenges of remote learning and other COVID-related limitations impacted thousands of Kansas students in the Class of 2020. Despite wide-spread learning loss and disengagement, the JAG-K Class of 2020 had a 97 percent graduation rate, and 89 percent of our graduates were in post-secondary training/education or full-time employment by May 31, 2021.

Drexel University: JAG Students More Successful Than Peers

JAG-K students are not only graduating at a high rate, but they are also prepared for post-secondary success. Career exploration and skills development are important aspects of the JAG model. JAG-K was recently announced as the sponsor of the first Youth Registered Apprenticeship program in Kansas, partnering with the Kansas State Department of Education, the Kansas Department of Commerce, and Topeka Public Schools.

Drexel University's Center for Labor Markets and Policy assessed the post high school employment outcomes of JAG students nationally. Lead Researcher, Dr. Paul Harrington said, "The differences between JAG graduates and the referent population were some of the greatest that the youth labor market researchers have seen."

Some of the research findings:

- Two-thirds of all JAG Graduates (both in college and out of school, combined) were employed one year after high school graduation
- JAG Graduates were 230 percent more likely to be employed full-time compared to the average 18- to 20-year-old population.
- Black JAG Graduates were 290 percent more likely to be employed
- White JAG Graduates 210 percent more likely to be employed
- JAG Graduates not enrolled in college were 140 percent more likely to be employed
- JAG Graduates in college were 120 percent more likely to be employed
- JAG Graduates realized significant gains in weekly earnings, gains in higher hourly wages and better non-wage compensation including health insurance and retirement benefits

Funding

Most JAG affiliate organizations receive a state appropriation as their primary source of funding. JAG-K is primarily funded with a small portion of the federal TANF allotment to Kansas, which is administered by the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF). JAG-K has proven to be a remarkable return on investment, for several reasons:

- If a student does not graduate from high school, they have a nearly 80 percent chance of going into poverty
- Of those who go in poverty, most end up on public assistance or in the corrections system.
- Kansas needs workers who are prepared to be trained

The FY 2022 JAG-K TANF grant is just under $5.4 million. School districts pay a program fee of $11,000 per program. We also have some private investors, including AT&T, John Deere and Walmart. While hoping to maintain the TANF grant as a part of the funding model, we have been working with Governor Kelly, DCF and legislative leaders to explore other funding sources.

On average, it costs about $74,000 per JAG-K program, which includes serving the enrolled students and those in 12-month follow-up.

The Impact

Data and independent research prove the success of JAG-K. While JAG-K can serve up to 60 students in three to four classes, that is a small percentage of the student population in a large high school. For example, we have five high school programs in Wichita, but we should have 16 to 20 programs in Wichita, plus middle school programs

that feed into the high schools. We are confident we could help raise graduation rates, prevent entry into the juvenile system and help adjudicated youth get on a successful career path if given more opportunities to serve these students.

Our confidence is based on decades of experience in other states and eight years in Kansas. We have data to prove our model works. We also have thousands of former students who can attest to the positive difference JAG-K has made in their lives and the lives of their family members.

With sufficient funding, JAG-K could expand programming and help school districts not only increase graduation rates, but also to truly prepare students for successful futures. The State Department of Education has designated eight school districts for extra support in achieving higher outcomes. We believe we can help these districts reach and at least sustain a graduation rate of 88 percent if JAG-K is given the opportunity and funding to partner with these districts.

<u>Project 88</u>
The goal of Project 88 is to help several of the largest urban school districts, as designated by the Kansas State Department of Education, attain at least an 88 percent graduation rate. Leadership in many of these districts, including Kansas City and Wichita, have expressed an interest in this initiative.

JAG-K is a proven evidence-based program that has successfully helped students graduate at high rates in large urban schools. Each JAG-K program can serve up to 60 students, including 15 seniors. The goal of project 88 is to implement enough JAG-K programs in each district to serve the number of seniors necessary to increase each school's current graduation rate to the state average graduation rate of 88 percent.

For example:
JAG-K had seven high school programs in Kansas City in 2020, and each of those programs had a 100 percent graduation rate. J.C. Harmon High School in Kansas City had a 64 percent graduation rate in 2020. There are currently no JAG-K programs at Harmon. If the HHS Class of 2023 had a 64 percent graduation rate, that would result in 234 students of a class of 365 graduating. To reach 88 percent graduation rate, an additional 87 students would need to graduate. That means there would need to be six JAG-K programs at HHS, serving a total of 360 students, including 90 seniors.

Wyandotte High School had an 85 percent graduation rate. JAG-K has four programs at WHS. Based on the same formula, WHS would only need one additional JAG-K program to reach 88 percent.

Wichita USD 259 and Kansas City, Kansas USD 500 both have JAG-K programs. They simply are not serving enough students to have the necessary impact on graduation rates. Of all the JAG-K programs in both districts, the lowest graduation rate for JAG-K students is 92 percent at Wichita West High School. The school graduation rate is 75 percent.

The solution is obvious.

Statewide, JAG-K has a 97 percent graduation rate over the past three years. The national organization has been delivering similar results for more than 40 years. The average demographics of JAG-K are:
- 55% are students of color
- 75% are eligible for free and reduced lunch
- 46% are in the bottom 25% of academic class rank

Implementing JAG-K is not a risk, it is a great return on investment.

Return on Investment
The Kansas high school graduation rate will increase if there is a significant increase in graduation rates in large urban districts. In addition to raising the overall state graduation rate, these communities and the state will benefit from the economic impact of having additional high school graduates prepared for post-secondary success.

- Lower Social Services Costs
- Lower Correctional System Costs
- Judicial Districts with the largest number of adjudicated youths receive more prevention programming through the evidence-based JAG-K program
- Lower health care costs
- Increased tax revenue
- Increased employment

Thank you again for the opportunity to address the Committee. I would be glad to respond personally to any Committee member questions regarding our proposal to increase graduation rates or about JAG-K.