

**Written Testimony to House K-12 Education Budget Committee
In Support of SB 142**

Honorable Chair, Representative Kristey Williams
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Room 286-N, State Capitol Building

Written testimony in support of SB 142 By Select Committee on Federal Tax Code Implementation 2-11 AN ACT concerning education; relating to the instruction and financing thereof; making and concerning appropriations for the fiscal years ending June 30, 2020, and June 30, 2021, for the department of education; amending K.S.A. 72-5132 and repealing the existing section.

Hearing: Tuesday, March 19, 2019
By Nikki McDonald, Chair, Olathe Public Education Network
March 18, 2019

Honorable Chairman Williams and Committee Members,
Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on SB 142. On behalf of the non-partisan grassroots community educational advocacy group, Olathe Public Education Network (OPEN), I am writing to request that you pass Bill 142 out of committee.

This bill represents full funding for Kansas Public Schools as required by the Kansas State Constitution and the Gannon Decision of the State Supreme Court, in addition to providing the inflation adjustment necessary for school districts to catch up after several years of inadequate funding that has strained local education budgets, led to larger classrooms and in many cases decreased programming.

As the fastest growing school district in our area, the top-rated Olathe Public School District is one of the driving reasons that major corporations have located in our community. Our schools have created a competitive and desirable economic climate, attractive to families and businesses. Olathe families, which include more than 31,000 students, value our public schools and regard them as a sound, growing investment in the future of our community. Olathe Public Schools have a graduation rate of over 90%, and it creates an educated workforce, individuals who create jobs in their communities and drive a strong local economy thanks to our public school system.

Here in Olathe we respect the need for putting our public schools first in the budget, and we understand that full funding with an inflation adjustment is necessary. After years of decline, education funding was finally returned to adequate levels last year, and we must not reverse this trend. Full funding with an inflation adjustment is necessary because our students depend on these dollars in order for schools to maintain high standards. Additional resources are needed to enable students to overcome factors outside of school that impede learning (poverty, disability, mental health challenges for example). In addition, building and maintenance costs will inevitably rise in the future, so the inflation piece of the legislation is vital.

A funding inflation adjustment is necessary because the rate of inflation has been at 16.3% for the last 10 years, according to the Consumer Price Index, and was just under two percent last year. This 2% trend upward will continue, according to economists, and if we don't account for this trend, our schools will again be underfunded, struggling to do more with fewer resources. We know that the Legislature faces a complex problem as you plan for funding all of the needs before you, and we appreciate your work here. Revenues have been inadequate for too long, but this is our opportunity to ensure funding for the best investment in our state's future, our public education system, and the healthy economy created by an educated citizenry. For that reason we request that you support SB 144, accomplishing your part in the task of ensuring full, inflation-proof school funding for communities that have had a great many demands on their dollars and resources.

The sooner we can put this funding issue behind us, the better, as schools are currently making hiring decisions for the 2019/20 school year. This financial uncertainty causes unnecessary difficulties for our local districts when it comes to planning for the most prudent ways for local school boards to deploy resources. We understand that you face a complex problem in finding ways to meet your court ordered (and constitutionally required) duty to adequately and equitably fund our schools, but we trust you will work together to do what is necessary to end this continuous cycle of litigation.

At this time we would also like to once again invite you to visit our classrooms here in Olathe. Come see for yourselves our vital and energetic classrooms. You will enjoy the visit! Thank you.
