



OVERLAND PARK

K A N S A S

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 361

**Senate Education Committee
Monday, February 6, 2012**

Chairman Schodorf and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Jennifer Bruning, and I am Vice President of Government Affairs with the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony today on behalf of our Board of Directors and our nearly 1,000 member companies in support of the local option budget cap removal proposed in Senate Bill 361.

Education is one of the top priorities of our membership, and it is reflected as such in our 2012 legislative agenda. Educational excellence leads to a high quality workforce, and it has been cited by new and expanding companies as a key reason why companies select Johnson County and Overland Park as their place of business, thus leading to the creation of jobs in our region and economic prosperity in Kansas.

For many years the Overland Park Chamber has supported fundamentally reforming the school finance formula by utilizing local authority to better relate to the actual cost of providing services, incenting operational efficiencies and expanding local flexibility over how education funds are raised and spent. We also adopted the Guiding Principles for School Finance Reform proposed by the Committee for Excellence which advocates for fairness, financial sustainability, transparency, greater local control that promotes excellence and not mediocrity, and an appropriate use of equalization in any reform measure being put forth.

For the reasons stated above, we commend Governor Brownback for his bold approach to school finance reform, and we wholeheartedly endorse the change proposed in the funding formula that permits local school districts to allow the voters to control the amount of their local option efforts. This increase in local authority is one of the fairest proposals we have seen, allowing districts to raise local funding but equalizing all other districts throughout Kansas with state general fund dollars.

We also appreciate the change made to the proposal to now allow districts to continue to operate half-day kindergarten and charge a fee for the other half day of programming. Many of our Johnson County school districts already charge this fee, and we did not want to see them lose this key piece of funding while still providing needed early childhood education.

We urge the Committee to support the increase in local authority proposed in SB 361. Thank you for your consideration.