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Testimony in Support of Kansas House Bill 2319
Dr. Cynthia Lane, Superintendent
Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools
Tuesday, February 19, 2013

I am testifying in support of HB 2319, which would create a coalition of innovative schools. I believe this bill would encourage more school districts to follow the path first blazed by McPherson USD 418, which sought and received permission to raise standards, with the goal of graduating all students prepared for college and careers. Following McPherson's lead, the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools also requested and received a waiver from the US Department of Education (USDOE), in order to administer "college and career readiness" measures as the assessment for determining Adequately Yearly Progress for students in grades eight and eleven, by replacing the Kansas Reading, Mathematics, and Science Assessments with the more rigorous and relevant college readiness assessments of EXPLORE and ACT.

We took this action in order to continue to achieve results that matter to the futures of our students. The ACT college readiness measures will open doors for our students to pursue their passions, and will ensure they are ready to compete on a global level for college and careers. We hold as a singular goal that "each student will exit high school prepared for college and careers in a global society, and at every level, performance is on-track and on-time for success." Granting the waiver has placed Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools in alignment with USDOE's expectation that students, when graduating from high school, are fully prepared for college and careers and have the credentials to demonstrate this level of competence.

Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools is a nationally-recognized urban school district that, over the past sixteen years, has made steady and significant improvements in academic achievement. Our improvements began with the shocking realization that, in 1996, just over 11% of our students in reading and 3% in math were meeting or exceeding the standards established by the state of Kansas. The 2011 school year concluded with nearly 70% of our students meeting and exceeding the standards in reading and math. Even so, these impressive gains in performance on the Kansas Assessments in Reading and Math, while positive, have far too often left our students short of the goal of college and career readiness.

Seeking approval to raise our academic standards certainly entailed significant risk. Meaningfully higher standards always result in an initial drop in the number of proficient students, and all of the attendant consequences that follow lower test scores. However, we are confident that, when given the opportunity, our students will live up to the higher expectations we have set for them, and that the goal of college and career readiness is the right one for our community, and the state of Kansas. This bill would encourage other districts to take that same leap of faith, and help ensure that our students will continue to be able to compete successfully against students from across the country, and across the world.