



**House K-12 Education Budget Committee
Written Testimony on HB 2270**

Presented by Dr. Pat All | Superintendent

February 15, 2017

Chairman Campbell and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 2270, a bill creating an education finance act. Olathe Public Schools is a growing district with nearly 30,000 students. We are committed to providing high quality education programs and services for each student in the most efficient manner possible.

Olathe Public Schools has a long-standing tradition of offering college and career pathways that help students realize success in post-secondary education and the workforce. We believe that investing in students has positive impacts for our community and the state's economy.

Olathe is a microcosm of the school districts across Kansas. We are a community growing in diversity (68% Caucasian, 15.7% Hispanic, 7.2% African American, and 4.2% Asian). We continue to experience overall enrollment growth; that is accompanied by increases in English Language Learners and students in poverty. Over eighty (80) different languages are spoken within the homes of our students. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of our families receive free or reduced priced lunches, with the percentages across our schools ranging from 2% to 84%. We also have pockets of affluence throughout our district. We are a melting pot of Kansans, with the needs of our students representing the needs of all students in Kansas.

HB 2270 includes several components that align with Olathe Public School's Legislative Positions, including:

- **Restoring and increasing per pupil funding**, as well as assuring that it keeps pace with inflation into the future.
- **Preserving At-Risk and Bilingual Weightings.** Olathe Public Schools is a diverse community requiring additional resources to address many challenges, including poverty, language and transience. We utilize at-risk funding to support our most vulnerable students from early childhood to graduation, including expanding access to all-day kindergarten at our Title 1 elementary schools. ***We are concerned about how at-risk funding is calculated and have provided additional comments below.***
- **Funding all-day kindergarten and early childhood programs.** Today's students come to us with a variety of challenges that are best addressed early in their academic career. Additional funding for voluntary, full-day kindergarten and 4-year old at-risk programs will allow us to provide early interventions that will return dividends later in their educational career and life.
- **Restoring bond and interest state aid based on median assessed valuation per pupil.** Bond and interest state aid has historically been based on the same calculation as the court approved capital outlay state aid calculation. These two calculations should once again be aligned.

- **Funding Special Education at 92% of excess cost.** Fully funding special education will allow Olathe Public Schools to recapture general fund dollars that are currently being used to provide special education services. Recapturing these funds would allow Olathe to enhance and develop programs and services to support students elsewhere in the district. Nearly 35% (or \$19 million) of our special education budget is funded using general fund dollars.
- **Preserving special mill levies currently in place for cost of living and extraordinary growth.** Olathe's enrollment has increased every year since consolidation in 1965. As a growing district, it is critical that we retain our ability to utilize this local support to assist with the opening of new schools and hiring and retaining quality staff in a high cost of living area.

There are also several areas we encourage the committee to consider as part of any new school finance formula:

- **At-Risk Weighting based upon the U.S. Census Bureau's poverty rate.** Olathe supports funding for at-risk students, however, we are concerned that this proposal may reduce funding for critical programs and services in our district. Olathe's preference has been utilizing free and reduced lunch counts, as it has been more responsive to the changing demographics of our community over time. It appears that this change would result in a reduction in at-risk funding for Olathe. We understand there is an interest in using the Census Bureau's poverty rate to determine funding, however, we would strongly encourage additional review of what the appropriate multiplier should be *before making any changes*.
- **Capital Outlay Levy.** Olathe Public Schools continues to face increasing capital outlay demands such as scheduled maintenance and investing in new infrastructure (e.g., technology) and our community has been supportive of these ongoing efforts. Currently, these demands are exceeding the revenue generated by the statutory maximum 8 mill levy. We support increasing the maximum levy, with equalization, by a reasonable amount. This increase would provide the additional authority necessary to address our aging infrastructures and the technological needs of our classrooms.
- **Transportation.** Our district supports the safe transport of students to and from school; however, we request that enough aid be provided to cover the cost of these reduced limits, as well as current law. While lowering the mileage would allow more students to ride the bus without paying a fee, the total cost of transporting students may increase due to increased bus routes. Our concern is whether the proposed changes will provide adequate funding.
- **Local Control/Local Effort.** Olathe Public Schools supports school boards having appropriate levels of authority to lead and manage public education within their district. To do so, they must have the authority and flexibility to secure resources. One way to provide this flexibility would be increasing the current 33% cap on the Local Option Budget by some reasonable amount.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to offer feedback on HB 2270 and please feel free to contact me at jhutchison@olatheschools.org or 913-780-8034 if you have any additional questions.