
March 9, 2015

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
RON RYCKMAN, CHAIR

H.B. 2403 Concerning school districts: relating to school finance; making and concerning appropriations; creating the classroom learning assuring student success act.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on House Bill 2403. I am the Executive Director for the South Central Kansas Education Service Center. I have dedicated my professional career to helping students of any age obtain their education through 18 years in the Wichita Public Schools as a teacher, building administrator, executive director of Title I Services and the past 4 years with the Service Center in Clearwater educating Kansas adults who wish to obtain their high school diploma.

During the fall of 2014, we were selected to be part of the Legislative Post performance audit, *K-12 Education: Reviewing Virtual School Costs and Student Performance* that created the tragic impact of the elimination of virtual funding for students above 18 years of age in H.B. 2403. I oppose H.B. 2403 because eliminating funds for adult learners working toward their high school diploma should not be swept away based on a sample of 38 students out of almost 1000 Kansas adult virtual students statewide.

I feel the audit compared the adults we work with on a level playing field with the “traditional” virtual K-12 student that is anything but level. Our adults come to us with unique challenges and obstacles that identify them as at-risk. These challenges and obstacles must be overcome in order for them to be successful. One of the largest obstacles is that of dropping out of high school the first time itself. **An adult without a high school diploma is unqualified for more than 90% of employment opportunities creating greater job instability within a world of low wage jobs.** Little to no money creates obstacles such as less than ideal living situations forcing them to take care of their families’ physical and emotional needs first before concentrating on anything else. Our staff works diligently on a daily basis and even weekends to keep connected with all of our students, to motivate them to work as much as their schedule and lifestyle allows them. Unlike traditional K-12 programs, we do not close our programs at the end of May but continue to work with our adults through July 31 with just a two-week inactive period in August before beginning coursework again. This is an intervention we have put in place to keep our students engaged and connected.

Our adults lean on us heavily for job and career planning and guidance counseling due to being an adult without a high school diploma. 71% of our adults use job and career planning with us and 100% take advantage of guidance counseling. Because of the unique situations adults bring with them to our programs it is of utmost importance that we build relationships with them (even virtually) to help plan and guide them through this critical time in their lives. This is such a significant aspect of our work with our adults simply because of where they are in their lives.

We enroll adult students in two courses at a time to begin with so we do not overwhelm them with too many classes. When they complete a course - they are immediately placed in another course no matter where they are in the semester. We have adopted this model due to past experience with adult students that have been out of school for a few years and are very intimidated about the thought of pursuing their education. **This model has shown success and we are pleased to share that during the 2013-2014 school**

year, our combined **370.4 adult virtual FTE students completed 1296 credits (or 2592 courses) with 102 of these students completing graduation requirements and walked across the stage of their graduation ceremony.** It is our hope this data will convey the success we have had with many students that went beyond the sample of only 38 adults out of almost 1000 statewide that was explained by the authors of the LPA that **“This sample is illustrative but is not statistically projectable to all adult students in the state.”**

It is also difficult to compare the adult virtual program with the “typical” K-12 virtual program mainly because of the unique situations each adult brings with them. The adults we serve did not graduate on time because of a multitude of reasons when they were in a traditional K-12 setting and many times if not most bring those same obstacles with them the second time around. This is a very unique population of students in which we are passionate about helping to better not only their lives, but the lives of their families and communities. **Obtaining their high school diploma allows our adults the opportunity to have options, options such as going on to post-secondary education, joining the military or gaining stable employment that makes them less reliant on social services.**

The adult virtual program is an amazing and wonderful intervention that has helped thousands of Kansans achieve their high school diploma while opening doors of opportunity. Please do not allow H.B. 2403 to remove this crucial funding needed to open these doors of opportunity.

Respectfully,

Dr. Brad Pepper
Executive Director
South Central Kansas Education Service Center