

My name is Jacki Himpel and I am the Parents as Teachers Coordinator with Kansas City Kansas Public Schools. I previously was the PAT coordinator with the Basehor-Linwood School District.

I am come to you with grave concern over the proposed move of Parents as Teachers funding to TANF dollars with House Bill No. 2577. Over 70% of the families in Kansas would have to pay for the services which were previously funded, not by the State General Fund, but by money from the tobacco settlement that was set aside for early childhood programs in the Children's Initiative Fund. Most families that utilize this program don't have much or any disposable income. These families shouldn't be denied this program because they can't afford it. Schools would see many more children enter school with unidentified delays because more children would not be seen through PAT. We provide developmental, social-emotional, hearing and vision screenings as well as check to make sure children are up-to-date on their immunizations. We also have health and dental screenings. PAT refers more infants and children to Infant-Toddler Services, also called Part C, the early-childhood special education program, than any other program in the state.

Many of the most significant delays I have seen with children over my years working for Parents as Teachers involved families who would have been in the 200% above poverty level for TANF. Just in the last couple of years other than the typical speech or motor delays I picked up on an infant needing glasses that the pediatrician missed and at first denied; I picked up on a 2-year-old with autism that their pediatrician missed and supported and encouraged her mom to make an appointment with a developmental pediatrician for an autism evaluation; and I saw another 2-year-old with autism that her own parents working in the medically field missed. These families would not have been able to pay for the program.

Let me tell you about a family in our program in Kansas City. This is what she wrote.

I have been involved with Parents as Teachers for just over a year now. My daughter, Jade, is a year and a half old. I found out about Parents as Teachers during a check-up visit for my daughter at University of Kansas Hospital. At the time, I was yearning for an easier way to find answers for the questions I had about raising this beautiful child of mine.

Let me start at the beginning. I am an only child. My father did a wonderful job raising me all by himself. We were middle class. However, he worked very hard to be able to send me to private school, buy me braces, my first car, and sign me up for all the swim classes a young kid could ever dream of. He encouraged me to attend college, of which I did. I attained my Bachelors of Fine Art at Indiana University in 2012. Shortly after, I moved to Kansas City to pursue my career. Just a few short years in, I was expecting a little one. I cannot explain how nervous I was about that!

While I had a wonderful father who showed me what parenthood was all about, I still had no siblings. I only babysat on a few occasions. I basically had no experience caring for a child what-so-ever. And while I was so excited, and filled with love, I remained uncertain about my abilities to give 100% care to my child, and this is what I wanted most of all. I had a lot of questions.

When I heard about Parents as Teachers, I was unsure. But, I signed up anyways. Words cannot express what a great decision I had made. When Leonae, my Parents as Teachers visitor, visits our home, Jade lights up. She just loves when people are able to come and visit her. Not to mention, me being able to interact with another adult is always a good thing. Leonae

always comes with a new activity. She never gets sidetracked with the visit. She is very focused and calm with Jade. I really appreciate her. She is incredibly informative and has been able to answer every single question I throw at her. She is also very up-to-date on current news regarding the caregiving of children. Being able to ask her questions such as "When should I take Jade to the dentist for the first time?" and "When and how should I begin potty training?" makes my confidence in my ability to take care of Jade so much more. I feel as if I could not have been able to take care of Jade better without Parents as Teachers.

Being well-educated and coming from a middle class (or any class) doesn't guarantee good parenting. No degree or amount of money can teach one to become a parent. I am thankful that I had the Parents as Teachers "net" to fall into when I fell into parenthood. It has truly rounded me into the Parent I was hoping to be. Because of PAT I read to my child several books before bed, I take her to playgroups regularly, and I have been able to wean her from the bottle, feed her solids, and have recently began potty-training her.

While I am so very appreciative of PAT, if it were to cost me money to be a part of the program, I wouldn't be able to continue. I am a very lucky person to be able to stay home with Jade. Most people are not able to financially afford the opportunity to stay home with their little ones. Because my husband and I have made this decision for me to stay home with her, we are on a very tight budget. Being able to go to these play groups are saving us! If not for them, Jade would not see very many children at all. Not to mention, using Google to answer questions on raising my child is a very unsettling style of parenting. However, I would not have much more means to do it otherwise.

Being a parent is one of the most important roles a person can play, if not the single most important. Most people end up being quite a bit like their parents actually. If I can provide my child with a positive education, positive relationships, a positive environment - then, that is what I am obligated to do by all means. PAT provides the education and resources to raise children in a positive, educated, well-rounded environment. I would never want to see this program dissipate because of money it would cost to participate.

Sincerely, Stacey VanDenDriessche

When talking to her on the phone she added, "I don't see PAT as a luxury. I see it as a necessity. It is important for everybody."

Another excerpt from a letter from Michelle Holland, M.S., a former public school teacher who is homeschooling her children and is enrolled in our PAT program:

I am an educator. I am a parent of 4 children (7.5, 2 and 1). I earned my degree in elementary education and my Master's in Special Education. We are a homeschooling family. My two older children went through the PAT program and my youngest 2 are currently enrolled in it. Even with my professional background in education, my family has greatly benefited from this program.

During the time we went through the program with my oldest two I was a new mother. It was extremely helpful to have their support as I began my journey as a full time mom. I had lots of experience working with kids, and yet motherhood brings on so many feelings of uncertainty and the support of this program greatly increased my confidence and also assisted me to build a strong foundation at this critical time in my children's development.

Being a family of six, living on one income, makes the budget tight. As much as this program has benefited us, it is not something we could afford to pay for. There are many huge benefits of homeschooling, but one of the things I feel like we miss out on is the support in the area of education, even though our tax dollars are paying for these types of services to families participating in a public education.

I would never want to take ANY money away from public education. I was a teacher in the public schools and these children NEED our support! I would love to see more ways we can bridge access to these supports to our families who have chosen to educate their children at home. I feel that Parents as Teachers is a great avenue for homeschool families to gain access to these supports in the early years. I not only plead with you to keep this vital program to so many families from all backgrounds and income levels, but to consider thinking about how we can continue to build programs that duplicate its ability to meet the needs of such a diverse array of families in our community!

We in PAT make a difference for ALL families. Please help us keep our program free to all Kansas families.

Thank you for your support of young children and families in Kansas.

Jacki Himpel