

Written Testimony on Senate Bill 273

Presented to:
Senate Ways and Means Committee

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Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Nicole Hodges and I am the director of Basehor-Linwood Virtual School. I am testifying today to oppose the elimination of virtual school funding for adult students and also the reduction of funding for part-time students.

I appreciate all of your dedication and work for the people in Kansas, and I realize that your job is not easy and there are many facets to every problem.

I do have two important concerns with the bill that I would like for you to consider.

Adult Virtual Education

First, we need an avenue for serving adults through our virtual schools. Basehor-Linwood Virtual School has served both adults and school-aged children for 17 years. On a daily basis, I see the importance of a high school education, and more importantly, the impact on our state when a person does not have one. I engage first-hand with adults and see how their lives change when they earn their diploma. In my experience, there is nothing that can alter the state of a person's life more than obtaining an education. Decisions about adult funding are being made based on the post-audit results of a very small sample size of ultimately 31 adults. As noted in the post audit, thirty-eight adult files were reviewed and (7) of those adult students were ultimately excluded from the sample because they resided in a mental health facility, bringing the sample size to thirty-one (31) adults.

Without argument, we have extraordinary challenges with the adult population that make consistent progress difficult, but the end result of helping any citizen in Kansas earn a diploma minimizes the lifetime strain on other social services, and creates a direct economic boost for the entire state. I would like to read a short quote from The "Kansas Commission on Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Report" that was released in January 2011, as I believe it best highlights the economic value of each of our citizens having a high school diploma.

"Research tells us that high school dropouts are more likely than their graduating peers to: be in prison, get divorced, live in poverty, be unemployed, have poor health, and utilize public assistance. They are less likely to engage in civic activity, including voting and volunteering in their communities. It is easy to see the burden these people place on themselves when they drop out of school, but few understand that the drag goes far beyond the impact to the individual. High school dropouts influence a community's economic, social, and civic health. The Alliance for Excellent Education reports that each high school dropout costs the nation approximately \$260,000 in lost earnings, productivity and wages over their lifetime. Additionally each student who graduates from high school rather will save the state an average of \$12,939 in Medicaid and uninsured health care expenditures over their lifetime. During the school years (2004-2009), 17,699 students dropped out in Kansas; equaling an economic loss of \$4.8 billion." Current figures for 2011-2013 show that 9,408 students dropped out in Kansas creating an economic loss of about \$2.5 billion. (Kansas Commission on Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Final Report, pages 4-5, January 2011)

It is because of this great economic impact that we should continue to provide opportunities for every Kansas citizen, regardless of age, to experience success with his/her education. Money spent on education now, can save us from spending money on others services over the person's lifetime. A virtual learning path is often the last chance, and the only feasible option that exists due to life responsibilities and schedules, academic skills and even learning needs. GED programs have often been exhausted before a person enters a virtual school, and as we know, even with a GED, many people continue to experience closed doors and limited economic opportunities.

Safeguards for Adult Funding

Let us work together to continue funding adult learners responsibly and fairly. We have the opportunity to restructure how virtual funding is allocated for adult learners in Kansas in order to create the accountability that is needed. One option would be to fund adults at a rate that is capped and based on credit units completed. Another option would be to provide a capped amount and strict completion time lines for adults based on the credits they need.

I have provided data on graduation rates for adults who enrolled in virtual schools as well as other diploma completion programs in our state. Below you will see that data for my school also matches well with what the state has calculated.

2012-2013 and 2013-2014 Adult Enrollment and Graduation in Kansas – Data from KSDE

Number of Adults who Enrolled in 2013	Number of Adults who Graduated in 2013	Number of Adults who Enrolled in 2014	Number of Adults who Graduated in 2014
10366	2600	11516	2715

In any given year, approximately 25% of all adult students are graduating. This might seem like a much smaller number than in the traditional high school, but in reality it is very comparable. Adults re-enter the school system at different levels, much like a high school has freshman, sophomore, junior and senior students. In the high school, only approximately 25% (senior class) of students graduate each year. That is similar to what we see with adults, with approximately 25% of the population graduating each year.

Basehor-Linwood Virtual School Data

2010-2011 - Enrolled 37 Adults - Graduation Rate 24%

2011-2012 - Enrolled 44 Adults - Graduation Rate 27%

2012-2013 - Enrolled 24 Adults - Graduation Rate 33%

2013-2014 - Enrolled 61 Adults - Graduation Rate 23%

Part-time Virtual Students

A second concern is the reduction of virtual funding for part-time students. The current system funds part-time students based on FTE of enrollment in the school. The proposed language seems to indicate that a part-time student in year one would be funded at \$4045, and in year two at \$1700. Failure to adequately fund part-time students will force virtual programs to restrict the enrollments of part-time students. This is not good for Kansas kids. The funding formula for part-time students will negatively affect schools who believe in supporting youth in getting a well-rounded education that includes both virtual and bricks and mortar education. I believe this formula was derived from the legislative post audit study of Andover. The Andover way of providing just curriculum to private school students does not compare to those of us who provide curriculum, teachers, counselors, oversight, state and local assessments, etc. no matter the number of courses taken. Basehor-Linwood will not be able to provide a student with 3-5 classes at a prorated amount of \$1700. It is my understanding that I would receive \$1360 for a student enrolled in five (5) classes. I cannot make this work, and I will be forced to not enroll part-time students. Reducing these funds to the amounts proposed based on one unconventional example from the audit would eliminate this as an option in many of our virtual schools. These part-time enrollment opportunities have been great for our Kansas students, and they must be funded adequately in order to be maintained. [[There are a vast number of services that virtual schools are expected to provide to students regardless of part-time or full-time enrollment status. These requirements need to be enforced for all virtual schools no matter the enrollment status of the student, and I would propose that if these requirements are not in place or not being provided in the intended manner, then virtual school funding should be withheld for that particular school.]]

Again, I want to thank you for your time and dedication to our state and to our young people, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

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