



February 1, 2016

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee,

My name is Wendy Webb and I am Coordinator of the Blue Valley Parents as Teachers program. I am here today speaking on behalf of PAT programs across the state and the children and families that are participating. In the interest of your time I will keep my remarks very brief.

I am sure that you are aware of the scientific findings from a variety of fields that have demonstrated that support of early development yields rich benefits not only in immediate ways for the child and their parents, but also over time in terms of the child's ability to contribute to the community. Interventions in the early years of childhood offer an extraordinary opportunity to avoid or moderate learning problems, and to bring lasting benefits to individuals and society. Parents as Teachers is a prevention program.

Any consideration of reduction of funding or 'means testing' for a family's participation in Parents as Teachers thus charging for the services threatens a twenty-six year Kansas success story told by over 230,000 Kansas children. Kansas has long recognized that all families can benefit from support. Parents as Teachers, as a universal access program, serves families in all configurations, from all socio-economic levels, and from both rural and urban communities. Universal access reduces the stigma that other programs addressing only high-risk or low socio-economic families may carry.

I would draw your attention to Parents as Teachers State Office document on page 3 published September 2015. You will note down the right are the statistics regarding the families we serve statewide. Many of the families served in the state meet identified risk factors. Only twenty seven percent are eligible for free and reduced lunch and 17% of the families had multiple risk factors. The other families meeting risk criteria might not be served if 'means testing' were implemented. If families were forced to make difficult choices about their family budget their child's early learning might not be the first priority. Yet we know through our documented outcomes how critical this can be. And what I know from my twenty-six years in the business is that many families that have 'risk factors' don't self-identify themselves at enrollment. It is only over the course of time through relationships are we able to successfully address some of the difficult risk factors (for example substance abuse or violence in the home). And network families to appropriate resources.

And I would ask what would be the purpose for this change? If it is to save money I would argue that it wouldn't be a savings to the state, and the CIF budget, but would result in higher long term cost borne by our PreK-12 educational system. To demonstrate this I would draw your attention to the Kansas School Readiness data at the top of page 3. All these things make a difference for a child's success. And these facts are only part of the story, additional data on outcomes could be provided to you at your request.

Means testing would potentially decimate many programs. In the Blue Valley district less than 2% of the families currently served would meet the economic criteria. Yet eighty percent of our families met at least one risk criteria. Services currently successfully provided by the PAT program like mandated child find activities would need to be recreated. I would remind all of you that local school districts make up part of each individual PAT program budget. We would like to retain the local control for prioritizing the needs of the families that live within our district boundaries.

On the issue of 'charging a fee for service' historically it has been the practice of Parents as Teachers programs to offer personal visits without charge. This practice reinforces the universal access nature of the model.

Parents in Blue Valley feel strongly that education or economic position don't necessarily prepare you for parenthood. To quote a parent from a letter recently sent her legislators, "I graduated, with distinction, from KU in Business Administration. My husband's Bachelor's degree is in Telecommunications Engineering. These degrees served us well in our careers. They do very, very little to prepare us to teach our children early literacy skills, language, sensory development, self care, etc. This is where the Parents as Teachers program came in. Our college degrees do not mean our children are immune to health or developmental issues that can be identified by a trained parent educator. Every child may be typically developing - or face challenges - regardless of parents' education, age, race, housing or financial status. That is one of the reasons this program is vitally important. Early intervention is so critical for children who need it. An annual, ten minute pediatrician well check is not going to uncover what monthly, hour long interactive PAT visits in the child's home will."

All PAT programs visit higher need families more often, and research has shown that greater intensity of service delivery results in better outcomes for families and children. If fees, even sliding scale fees, were charged, it is highly unlikely that the families that would potentially benefit the most from a higher number of visits would actually receive them. Continuity of services is also important, and it seems likely that the fragile financial footing on which many high needs families find themselves would make that goal much more challenging to achieve. Additionally there would be a fiscal note relating to an administrative cost with a 'fee for service' program. The complex nature of the program makes 'charging' for services difficult at best. And the administrative burden would reduce availability of service to the 93 families currently on Blue Valley's waiting list.

I am here before you, as I said, representing a local Parents as Teachers program, and a representative of children and families. But I'm also here as a taxpayer and former legislator's wife. I'm familiar with the difficult and arduous process of creating a fiscally responsible state budget. I recognize the tough decisions before you and I'm willing to negotiate. I would ask you to continue your commitment and if you must, recommend a change to our budget to the Children's Cabinet, just like the cuts you must make to other programs before you. But leave us with a universal access program. We can tighten our belts and cut costs. Please don't limit a family's access to this program because of their financial status.

Thank you for your time today.

I would be happy to answer questions.

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In 1990, Kansas made a wise investment in families with children prenatal to age 3.

Parents as Teachers (PAT) provides a strong pre-literacy foundation for Kansas children.

Based on *Kansas School Readiness Data*, children whose families participated in Kansas PAT:

- Are more likely to have parents who read to them daily resulting in higher reading scores at Kindergarten, 3rd and 4th grade.
- Score higher in symbolic development, math concepts, written language and oral communication.
- Are more likely to be identified at an earlier age if there are health or developmental concerns resulting in referral to school and community services for early intervention.
- Have a lower Body Mass Index (BMI) at Kindergarten entry and are more likely to be fully immunized at age 2.

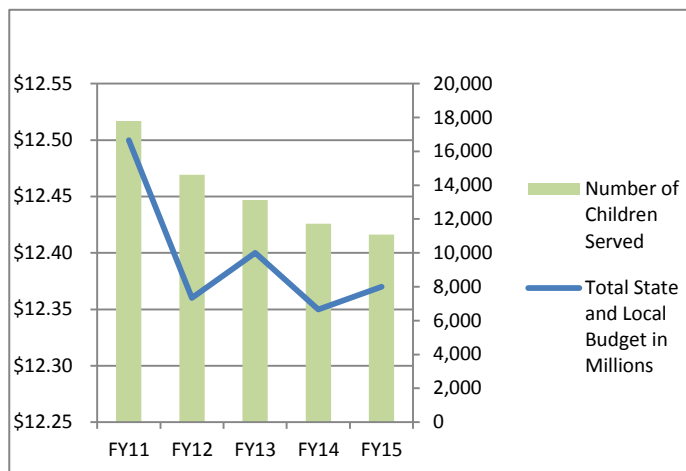
Parents as Teachers (PAT) is designed to provide children the best possible start in life.

Using research based curriculum, parents are provided with the skills and knowledge they need to help them make informed decisions regarding their child's development and education. The model includes personal visits, group connections, health, vision, hearing and developmental screenings, and supports family connections with other community services.

Research shows that parenting education can be an important component in supporting and developing healthy relationships between children and their parents, setting the stage for strong families and children ready for success.

State and local school district funds have declined and program costs have risen resulting in fewer families served. **Kansas Parents as Teachers demonstrates long term positive outcomes with an average cost of only \$1,117 per child.**

Local programs maintain waiting lists of 1,224 families wanting to access Kansas Parents as Teachers.



Kansas PAT, a nationally recognized results based program, is dedicated to providing high quality services that meet national and state standards.



Kansas PAT is a valued partner with other parenting education and early childhood programs working together to promote easy access and high quality services to children and families in their communities.

Parents as Teachers is available to less than 12% of the eligible children and families in Kansas.

In 2014-15, more than 27% of the Kansas PAT families were low income and 17% of the families had multiple risk factors including:

769 parents with less than a high school diploma or GED.

628 children with disabilities/chronic health condition

350 teen parents

321 families who are active duty military

253 families with substance abuse or domestic violence issues

228 families with mental health services

175 foster/adoptive families

165 transient or homeless families

143 very low birth weight babies

76 families involved with the corrections system