

## House Education Committee

### Testimony on HB 2319 - Neutral

Cheryl L. Semmel, Executive Director

February 19, 2013

On behalf of United School Administrators of Kansas (USA|Kansas) and our Board of Directors, I would like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to appear before you as a neutral party on HB 2319, a bill creating the coalition of innovative districts act.

There are many schools throughout Kansas that have implemented or are developing unique programs of innovation and excellence. In many cases, these districts have partnered with other organizations, local government and private industry to make the academic work students engage in even more relevant.

Some of those programs include:

- *The Advanced Automation Robotics Program* at Topeka USD 501
- *The Center for Advanced Professional Studies* at Blue Valley USD 229
- *The C3 - Citizenship, College and Career Readiness Initiative* at McPherson USD 418
- *The Home Construction Partnership Program* at Seaman USD 345
- *Personalized Learning Programs* at Erie USD 101
- *The Entrepreneurship and Economic Development Program* at Stafford USD 349
- *T3, Transforming Tonganoxie Together* at Tonganoxie USD 464
- *The Walton Rural Life Center* at Newton USD 373

This list is not all-inclusive, but intends to show that schools of different sizes, student populations and geographic locations are focused on delivering quality programs for students. The programs vary significantly based on local community needs, support and resources. Contact information and a summary of each program are attached.

USA|Kansas has supported districts looking to implement new accountability systems and reform their college and career ready programs. As an organization, we actively supported McPherson USD 418, Kansas City USD 500 and Clifton-Clyde USD 224's applications for waivers under No Child Left Behind.

Last year, USA|Kansas supported the Governor's concept of "seed money" or grants for innovative programs. There are many innovative programs being developed in Kansas

school districts, aimed at making school more relevant to the students we serve, but we could be doing more.

While we generally support the concept of encouraging districts to embark upon dynamic changes, we'd like to offer the following questions for your consideration.

[Page 3, Line 33] Upon the approval of the first two public innovative districts, the board of education of a school district desiring to operate as a public innovative district shall submit **a request for approval to operate as a public innovative district to the coalition board and have such request approved by the coalition board prior to submitting any application to the state board** under section 3, and amendments thereto.

*Should this move forward, we would recommend that there be a way to streamline the application process. Peer review could be incorporate into the selection process instead of using it as a screening function.*

[Page 2, Line 35] Except as otherwise provided in sections 1 through 9, and amendments thereto, or as required by the board of education of the public innovative district, **a public innovative district shall be exempt from all laws and rules and regulations that are applicable to school districts.**

*Kansas City Kansas Public Schools and McPherson Public Schools sought Federal waivers under No Child Left Behind. While this bill helps remove barriers at the State level, there is no guarantee that the Federal requirements may be waived.*

[Page 4, Line 15] The authority to operate as a public innovative district shall be effective for a period of five school years.

*Will there be a process or mechanism for addressing schools/districts not performing during the five-year period?*

Again, thank you for the opportunity to address the committee and we look forward to working with you **for Kanas students.**

## Innovative Programs

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The list below is not all-inclusive, but intends to show that schools of different sizes, student populations and geographic locations are focused on delivering quality programs for students. The programs will vary significantly based on local community needs, support and resources. I have provided a brief summary of each program.

In committee the other day, I mentioned that Concordia USD 333 and Cloud County Community College were also exploring a collaborative initiative for high school students. If you are interested in learning more about those early discussions, you may contact Dr. Beverly Mortimer, Concordia Superintendent at [bmortimer@usd333.com](mailto:bmortimer@usd333.com).

If you would like to learn more about any of these programs, I encourage you to contact the individuals listed below. I know they would be happy to speak with you about how the programs got started, as well as the allocation of resources for implementation, how they intend to maintain these programs and what impact these programs are having on student success.

### **Advanced Automation Robotics Program at Topeka USD 501**

*Contact: Dr. Julie Ford ([jford@topeka.k12.ks.us](mailto:jford@topeka.k12.ks.us)), Superintendent or Deborah Perbeck*

GO Topeka's Entrepreneurial and Minority Business Development (EMBD) program, Topeka Public Schools Unified School District No. 501 and the global firm Yaskawa Motoman Robotics have partnered to offer Topeka/Shawnee County the nation's first secondary education course in industrial robotics. Upon completion of this course, students earn a basic industry-recognized certification to operate and program industrial robots.

The courses, currently taught at Highland Park High School, is available district-wide to students of junior or senior standing who have successfully completed geometry and basic science courses.

Additional robotics training soon will be offered in a post-secondary format by Washburn Institute of Technology. The more-advanced post-secondary training will be available, not only to the students who have passed the basic course, but to all Topeka/Shawnee County citizens pursuing automation robotic skills.

Equipping the robotics classroom for Highland Park High School involved a total capital investment of \$250,000 invested by GO Topeka's EMBD Program and USD 501 Topeka Public Schools.

### **Center for Advance Professional Studies (CAPS) at Blue Valley USD 229**

*Contact: Donna Deeds ([ddeeds@bluevalleyK12.org](mailto:ddeeds@bluevalleyK12.org)), CAPS Executive Director or Dr. Tom Trigg ([ttrigg@bluevalleyk12.org](mailto:ttrigg@bluevalleyk12.org)), Superintendent*

Blue Valley's Center for Advanced Professional Studies (CAPS) inspires students to succeed in the critical areas of Bioscience, Business, Engineering and Human Services. CAPS is an example of how industry and our educational system can work together to produce personalized learning experiences that prepare the next generation of professionals for 21st century opportunities. The CAPS program was recently recognized on a national level with the prestigious Edison Gold Award.

Junior and senior level students from all Blue Valley high schools will join together in a unique learning opportunity to deeply explore their interests in a profession-based learning approach. Learning is student driven; teachers facilitate the learning process through problem-based projects comprised of authentic and relevant work assignments.

Students learn the professional skills necessary to succeed in today's fast-paced world, all before entering college or other post-secondary educational opportunities. CAPS is about students solving real problems, with real tools (used by real professionals), being mentored by real employers, leading to real contribution.

### **C3 - Citizenship, College and Career Readiness Initiative at McPherson USD 418**

*Contact: Dr. Randy Watson ([randy.watson@mcpherson.com](mailto:randy.watson@mcpherson.com)), Superintendent*

In March 2011, McPherson USD 418 became the first school district in the country to receive a waiver from No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The request was submitted by the school district after two years of discussion with the community and retreats, released their plan entitled, C3 – Citizenship, College and Career Readiness. This plan was a non-negotiable position for the school board and one that through collaborative goal setting, the entire McPherson administrative staff supported. In June 2010, that plan was submitted to the Kansas State Board of Education and subsequently to the United States Department of Education.

While the waiver is only a small part of the school district's work, it will allow the district to change the assessments given to their students in grades sixth through twelve. Instead of taking Kansas State Assessments under No Child Left Behind, middle and high school students will be taking ACT developed assessments. These assessments measure whether students are ready for college or a high paying career. These benchmarks represent a much higher standard than is being asking of other schools in the country.

The McPherson, C3 – Citizenship, College and Career Readiness plan has established strong partnerships with Quantum Learning and ACT to develop and measure their three areas of emphasis – citizenship, college and career readiness.

## **Home Construction Partnership Program at Seaman USD 345**

*Contact: Mike Mathes ([mmathes@usd345.com](mailto:mmathes@usd345.com)), Superintendent*

In 2009, Seaman USD 345 Schools announced a lease arrangement of a 6.7-acre vacant tract of land to Washburn Tech (formerly Kaw Area Technical School). The \$1 per year lease over 20 years is for land that will be used for construction of affordable single-family homes by Washburn Tech construction program students. The lease arrangement will allow students from several Washburn Tech career training programs including Building Technology, Commercial and Heavy Construction, Commercial Construction, Electricity, Heating and Air, and Cabinet/Mill an additional real life, hands-on opportunity to practice their skills. Any land remaining undeveloped after 20 years would return to the ownership of USD 345.

Students have been involved in the construction project from the beginning. The students have direct experience with grading and preparing each home site for building, constructing driveways and basements, building the home frame, interior walls and roof, installing the plumbing and electrical systems, constructing the cabinets and other millwork, as well as other components of home building.

The homes to be constructed will be reasonably priced, single story with three bedrooms, garage, and a basement. Energy efficient features, green building materials and technology will be incorporated into the design and construction of each home. The 6.7-acre tract will support the construction of 14 to 20 homes and is located across from the former Seaman East Indianola Grade School on Northwest Fillmore Street in north Topeka.

Students acquire real life experience in developing a sub-division from the very beginning. It will also be a great addition to the neighborhood. The district will see financial benefits as each house is sold and added to the property tax rolls as well as the possibility of providing additional students to our schools.

## **Project Based Personalized Learning Programs at Erie USD 101**

*Dr. John Wyrick ([jwyrick@usd101.com](mailto:jwyrick@usd101.com)), Superintendent and Principal*

Erie High Charter School's Personalized Learning Program is a personalized learning option for students that aligns with the students' academic outcomes, learning styles, and Kansas Common Core Standards. Providing students an expansive learning environment that blends their ability to learn with active experiences will enhance 21st century skills, increase motivation, and promote higher order thinking skills. The 21st century learner will need to be creative, innovative, and collaborative; the individual will also need to possess critical thinking skills. With an opportunity to have a personalized education, one in which they have a voice, is goal-oriented and with an eclectic array of modalities will empower students to be fully engaged and responsible for their achievement.

PLP offers the flexibility to meet the needs of diverse learners through both group and individual projects, on-demand seminars, workshops and internships. Students

start at different places when they begin; however, each student brings something to the table such as a new skill or perspective. Students who are used to waiting for directions may find this type of learning challenging. On the flip side, kids who prefer working independently may not enjoy working as a team, but collaboration is a critical skill and the 'real' world will be full of situations that require teamwork.

Partners and sponsors include local businesses, community organizations and individual residents.

### **Entrepreneurship and Economic Development Program (SEED) at Stafford USD 349**

*Contact: Dr. Mary Jo Taylor ([mjtaylor@stafford349.com](mailto:mjtaylor@stafford349.com)), Superintendent*

The Stafford Entrepreneurship and Economic Development (SEED) Program is an innovative approach for meeting the educational and school-to-work preparation needs of high school students. Students will learn entrepreneurship and marketing principles while participating in individual and group projects. The student will operate an entrepreneurship project and utilize marketing strategies to promote his/her business project. Students are allowed to keep 70% of their net profits.

Upon completion, the student will understand the concepts of entrepreneurship, local business opportunities, feasibility and business planning, types of business ownership and the legal environment of business. The student will identify and develop an individual entrepreneurship project and will finalize a business plan. The student will participate in a group economic development project. The student will understand and demonstrate employment, communication, and technology skills.

Stafford's SEED Center has been fully approved as a Career and Technical Education Marketing Management Program. The Marketing Management Pathway has the following course sequence: Business Essentials, Entrepreneurship, Marketing, Accounting, Business Management, and Marketing Management.

One of the barriers to beginning this adventure was financial. Even though the State BOE granted permission for our SEED Center, there was no money available that year. We decided to proceed, anyway. A specific component of the SEED plan was that it be located as a storefront, downtown, like any other business. A local patron donated this building to our cause. Small grants were applied for and donations accepted. The second year, the district applied for, and received Reserve Funding from the State of \$150,000. The only other grant money we have received was a dissemination grant from the state for \$13,976.

### **T3, Transforming Tonganoxie Together at Tonganoxie USD 464**

*Contact: Dr. Jill Dickerson ([jdickerson@tong464.org](mailto:jdickerson@tong464.org)), Middle School Principal and T3 Chair*

Transforming Tonganoxie Together (T3) is a newly formed community coalition focused on the prevention of youth substance abuse/suicide and the growth of positive capacity in youth. The coalition places emphasis on building a system of

prevention—*before* a situation becomes a crisis. T3 creates civic solutions that increase positive behaviors through community education, engagement, and empowerment. Core T3 members include all 12 sectors of the community: students, parents, faith leaders, media, law enforcement, city and school administrators, business owners, youth serving organizations, civic and volunteer groups, health care professionals, state and local agencies, and other organizations involved in developing youth capacity and reducing substance abuse.

T3 members have completed the Strategic Prevention Framework process under the guidance of Regional Prevention Center staff. During 2012 several grants have been awarded to T3. This monetary support has made it possible for the group to promote and facilitate a number of health and safety initiatives for the Tonganoxie community.

### **Walton Rural Life Center at Newton USD 373**

*Contact: Ms. Natisa Vogt ([nvogt@newton.k12.ks.us](mailto:nvogt@newton.k12.ks.us)), Principal or Dr. Deborah Hamm ([dhamm@newton.k12.ks.us](mailto:dhamm@newton.k12.ks.us)), Superintendent*

Walton Rural Life School is a K-4 Elementary Charter School in Walton. The school has an agriculture-technology focus that the staff integrates into standard-based curriculum. Walton Rural Life Center is one of 17 charter schools in Kansas and one of only two elementary schools that is ag-based, the other being a small kindergarten through eighth grade school in Oswego, Kansas.

The charter school gets autonomy from certain school district rules so that it can pursue unique courses of study while still having to meet state education standards. An advisory board monitors the charter school's performance. Since becoming a charter school, its test scores have risen. For three years straight, 100 percent of students have tested at proficient or above in state assessment tests

The school has 168 enrolled. About half the students come from outside the school's enrollment boundaries and some live outside the school district, which is based five miles away, in Newton, Kansas.

The school has been nationally recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, who produced an eight-minute video on the school.

