

Testimony for Public Hearing
Senate Appropriations Committee, S.B. 273
March 10, 2015

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My name is Joani Purdy and I have been actively involved in education for 22 years, the past 15 of those years as a Program Director for Project Encore, a high school diploma completion program under the direction of SCKESC in Clearwater, Kansas. I am also an opponent to S.B. 273, specifically the elimination of virtual funding for anyone who is 18 years of age or older. My experience with adult learners through Project Encore has provided me additional insight into the benefits of virtual learning options for students 18 years of age and older. I would like to bring some of those benefits to your attention.

Some of the most common obstacles faced by our adult learners are lack of reliable transportation, inability to afford child-care, sporadic work hours, and health issues. Our blended learning approach allows students the flexibility to access their courses virtually, thus eliminating these barriers. Students that are required to travel for their job can access their courses from their hotel room at night. Students who work during the day, and have family obligations in the evening, can work at night when their kids are in bed. Students that have health issues can work from the comfort and convenience of their own home or hospital room. Virtual education options provide students the flexibility to work when it fits their schedule.

Kansas is faced with a shortage of skilled workers. For this reason, it is critical that we continue to fund programs that will enable adults to complete high school and obtain the credentials necessary to fill this shortage. A majority of post-secondary institutions in Kansas offer online learning options. In order to ensure a successful transition from high school to post-secondary school, it is imperative we expose students to online learning experiences.

According to the Kansas DropIns website (<http://community.ksde.org>), "During the 2012-2013 school year, 3,257 Kansas students dropped out of school. Each high school dropout costs the nation approximately \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes and productivity over the course of his or her lifetime. For the 3,257 dropouts that equals approximately \$846 million. Those dropouts are also more likely than their graduating peers to be in prison, get divorced, live in poverty, be unemployed, have poor health and utilize public assistance." According to the Kansas State data on adult learners, 2600 students, over the age of 18, earned their high school diploma in 2013. As you can see, high school diploma completion programs that offer flexible learning options are helping to offset these staggering financial and societal costs to Kansas.

For the adult learner seeking to obtain a high school education, flexibility is necessary in order for them to be successful. Without the benefit of virtual education and the flexibility it provides, many potential graduates will not succeed. When limited to time and attendance constraints, adult students will not pursue their diploma, but instead see these limits as another obstacle they cannot overcome to improve their living situation. Their employment opportunities will be limited and they will continue to rely on unemployment benefits, welfare and even criminal activity as a means of survival.

I encourage you to consider these points before making your decision on SB 273.

Respectfully,

Joani Purdy