



To: House Committee on K-12 Education Budget

From: Cassandra Barton, Insight School of Kansas Head of School

Date: February 14, 2022

Re: Support of HB 2602

Madam Chairwoman and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of HB 2602. I am thankful to you for taking time to discuss options to help virtual schools and the districts that authorize them continue to be accredited and support not only students in their physical boundaries, but students across the state. Insight School of Kansas is one of 62 virtual schools or programs in the state which serve high school grade levels, 41 of which serve students outside of their district boundaries. Currently at Insight, we have high school students from 152 districts of residence other than Spring Hill School District.

We believe this bill can help portray a more accurate depiction of our virtual school graduation rate performance under the existing statutory framework. The approach of HB 2602 does not alter the statewide graduation rate calculation system; thus the existing system will remain in place if this bill becomes law. Additionally, this bill will not impact the graduation rates or accreditation system for traditional brick and mortar high schools.

HB 2602 creates a second graduation rate for virtual schools for the purposes of accreditation. Several years ago, when the state moved to a district-wide accreditation process, our authorizing district was suddenly at risk of losing accreditation for the entire district because of the graduation rate at a single school; a school whose majority of students are not physically residing in district boundaries. In my time at Insight, our graduation rate had always been a focus, but we prided ourselves in being there for Kansas students who found themselves with no other schooling options. We served students who had not earned a single high school credit. We served students who had dropped out of their brick and mortar school. We served students who wanted to try something other than traditional homeschool. We served students who were facing health challenges and could not attend their local brick and mortar. This service was now going to come at a cost; a cost which is not fair to the students and families who do reside in the Spring Hill School District and who, consistently, have a graduation rate in the upper 90% range.

With the implementation of the current accreditation system, we had to take some drastic steps to quickly impact our graduation rate. One step was to implement credit criteria for enrollment in our high school program. I'll never forget sitting at my computer late one night, emotional, as I typed up the finalized credit criteria for incoming 10th – 12th graders. I was sad because I'm an educator who wants to serve kids and I knew this removed Insight as a possibility for the students who needed it the most. I was frustrated and angry because every graduate should be celebrated, no matter how many years it



takes them to achieve it and schools should not be punished for working to serve at-risk students. While our enrollment criteria still allowed us to serve credit deficient high school students, I worried about what would happen to the students we would no longer enroll.

We've made huge improvements in our graduation rate at Insight in the last several years; our cohort 2021 graduation rate was 63.3%, a 37.6% increase from our cohort 2017 graduation rate. In spring of 2019 as part of our YODA process, we set a goal to have a district graduation rate of at least 67% by cohort 2021. We didn't just meet that goal, but far surpassed it. Our district graduation rate for 2021 was 78.3%. However, despite exceeding our goal and demonstrating growth and improvement over several years, our district accreditation is again threatened due to Insight's graduation rate still being "bad."

We support HB 2602 because it allows virtual schools, for accreditation purposes only, to be measured only for the students who enroll with them with a realistic chance of graduating within four years and does not punish them for enrolling students who are credit deficient and do not have a realistic chance at finishing high school with their four-year cohort. Had a second graduation rate calculation such as the one proposed in this bill been run for Insight's 2021 cohort, our graduation rate for accreditation purposes would have been around 79%.

Upon review of our existing graduation rates, a major challenge that 68% of our non-graduates came to Insight credit deficient, meaning they are not on pace to graduate on time. When they do not graduate on time, our virtual school receives the full hit on the graduation rate. Even if we are able to help some of the students catch up and graduate the next semester, our graduation rates are not changed. This is the way Kansas currently calculates statewide and we understand that will not change.

We believe this bill provides us, and other virtual schools like us, a more realistic portrayal of how we are performing with our students. It is more transparent.

Again, to reiterate, this bill does not retroactively change the graduation rate of a previous school. And in the mentioned example, credit deficient enrollees would still be on our regular graduation rate so the student will still be counted. There would just be the second, more accurate graduation rate, used for school district accreditation, under the existing framework.

HB 2602 would help us maintain our accreditation and, thus, our ability to continue to be an option for students and families who, for whatever reason, need something besides their local brick and mortar school. We ask for your support.