

Steve and Amy Wilkinson  
Parents  
Blue Valley School District  
(913) 579-6119 – Amy cell  
(913) 526-7106 – Steve cell

To the K-12 Budget Chair and Members:

We are parents of two teens in the Blue Valley School District who are currently in the Hybrid school model (alternating 2 days in person/2 days at home). This serves as our written testimony on the Hybrid school model.

When the lockdowns started in March 2020, we understood and were compliant. There were many unknowns, an abundance of fear and the main goal was for the world to eradicate the virus. Even when the school year started in August, we continued to be understanding and did as we were instructed. It is almost a full year later and the time has passed to sit on the sidelines. Simply put, the Hybrid school model is not working for our children, PERIOD.

Our daughter is an 8<sup>th</sup> grader and before COVID, was vibrant, outgoing and driven. Over the last year, her mental health has sharply declined and was suicidal at one point. She is currently battling depression, on medication and in counseling. On the days she is at home, she logs on for attendance and then has nothing to do for hours. The teachers pile on assignments with little explanation. When she has questions, she has to email the teacher and wait for a response. By the time a response is sent, it takes a while for her to refocus on why she asked the question in the first place. All of this, combined with increased screen time causes anxiety, headaches, and irritability for most of the day...EVERYDAY. It has become increasingly harder to get her out of bed to check in on her home days. There is no face-to-face interaction on those days with anyone either.

Our kids need to see others in person, see their faces, reactions,

Our son is a high school junior and has high functioning autism. He is in mainstream classes, but is part of the Navigator Program at his high school. He, like many students with high functioning autism, need the social interaction more than they do the academic. They must have consistency. The hybrid model is too stop/start and offers no consistency. The homework is piled on because they are not in person full-time which causes frequent anxiety, frustration and outbursts of hopelessness. School provides him a canvas to use the social techniques and lessons he has learned. The hybrid model has stripped him of that option. He feels like he is always “just catching up and hanging on.” Trying to just survive another day. In September, he came to us and asked what the purpose of all this was. He said **“he did not see any reason to be on Earth anymore.”** With him, he will be fine until he’s not. We won’t know until he’s gone. His social network was never built early in life due to his social awkwardness. Lockdowns, remote learning and the hybrid model has forced him further into isolation. He does not communicate view social media because

there is no one to communicate with. He does not feel anyone outside of his family, with the exception of his Navigator teacher, cares about him.

These kids are being tossed aside, to accomplish what? To keep them “safe” from a virus whose statistics don’t support keeping them home anymore? They need to be in school, NOW.

Our kids are falling behind and we have serious doubts if they will be able to get back on course and ready for the future.

In conclusion, keeping these kids away from classmates, friends and teachers is NOT keeping them safe. It is borderline cruel and incompetent of the school system to continue the charade of keeping them safe from virus, when in fact, the damage that is being inflicted on these kids may be irreparable.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee,

Full disclosure right up front... Rep. Steve Huebert is my Father-In-Law, and I have been speaking to him regularly about our situation here in Gardner (USD 231).

In fact, I spoke last night at our monthly BOE meeting, and was interrupted by the board president, challenged, and yelled at by other board members (none of which are allowed per our USD 231 Policy).

Thankfully, Senator Molly Baumgardner spoke immediately after I did (which I didn't realize was going to happen). She was bashed by our Superintendent and other board members as well.

They then brought in a representative from USA Kansas to spew rhetoric as to why your House and Senate Bills should be voted down... I think the school boards are finally feeling the heat of parents who are pulling kids because they are not allowed back in the classroom.

Here is the link to the meeting... the conversations mentioned above start at the 1:18:30 mark (A little over an hour into the meeting).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=50fksgjLVs&fbclid=IwAR0ogTeUgXwHOGesrhVpgoWkieKOLTtWafZmKu5XKO4MXCcCOd8p4hPaLM8>

My Freshman Daughter and Sophomore Son have not seen the inside of a classroom since last March. They have been Forced Remote this entire school year. While they are both straight A students, that is not the issue. This is killing them emotionally, physically, spiritually, and intellectually. When we told them the district finally agreed to go Hybrid, starting February 8th, they were literally jumping up and down in the living room.

Obviously, full time is what we desire, we'll take the stepping stone for now. I fully support HB2119 to allow funding to follow the students. If the schools will not give us the option to get our kids in the classroom full time, we should definitely have the option to take them somewhere that will.

I know this was long, and I thank you for your time. Feel free to reach out if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

- Andrew Thomas

I am writing to you regarding remote learning and my son's experience as a student who requires an IEP. My son is a Junior in the Olathe School District. Five years ago he was involved in an accident and sustained a traumatic brain injury. He misses 3/4 of his 6th grade year, and began attending school 1/4 of the time for 7th grade. He gradually worked his way up to being able to attend full time by last year as a sophomore.

My son has worked incredibly hard to try and catch up to his peers, and while he has made amazing progress, due to the damage he sustained, he requires an IEP that allows for his work to be modified and requires many accommodations, including para help and frequent one on one reteaching.

Remote learning has been frustrating to say the least. It is not appropriate for him to receive instruction via a laptop. He couldn't receive the accommodations deemed necessary in his IEP. I repeatedly expressed my concern to district level administrators and the school board and was finally given an option for him to go to school a few hours a week to get the help he needed. Unfortunately, by the time this happened, he was only able to go for 1.5 weeks before winter break began.

When I think of the time he has lost it makes me sick. He will never be able to get that time back, and he is a Junior. At this point I am not sure how this will affect his ability to attend college. To say that I'm upset is an understatement. While other districts openly offered in person learning to IEP students, Olathe didn't unless you asked and asked and asked.

My son didn't receive any school / services at all from March 2020-September 2020. School was only optional if you wanted to raise your grades. Then, they started in the fall as remote. The first few weeks he didn't have any para support at all in his classes. Once he did have that, he could at least go to a pull out room over zoom, but it still wasn't enough. Many who suffer brain injuries have issues with their eyesight and a tendency for certain lighting to cause migraines. By the end of the day, after spending 6 hours + in front of a screen, he typically had such a bad migraine that he had to go lay down in a dark room for the rest of the day.

I own my own business and was unable to be home with him to help him all of the time, which only made him more frustrated. Several days he called me so upset that I would have him log off and call it a day.

My son began slipping deeper and deeper into a depressed state. Shortly after school started again, he began having insomnia and feelings of hopelessness. Three weeks ago I had to admit him to Crittenton Psychiatric Hospital because he was afraid of what he might do to himself. He didn't want to live anymore, and he didn't want to go to school. The last 3 weeks have been horrible, and I do blame the school district for creating a system that didn't do what they were legally bound to do when it came to those kids who need their help the most.

The idea that the schools are receiving extra funds for my son because he is on an IEP, and they didn't provide those services, is so upsetting to me. Those funds should have been given to families so we could have hired tutors or put it towards enrolling our kids in private schools that were open and teaching in person daily.

I do not blame the teachers. This is an administrative issue at the district level. They provided services only to those who knew to ask for it, and only after you begged to have your child included. It was completely wrong, and is exactly what is wrong with public education in Kansas. The districts are being

run like corporations, with those at the top making insane amounts of money, and the teachers who do the work- making barely enough to live in the communities that they teach.

Texas gave parents money to get services for their children. Why didn't Kansas?

Sincerely,  
Annie Martin  
9133876346  
-- Annie

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee,

Hi. We are the parents of two high school students, one a freshman and the other a Senior at Gardner Edgerton High School in Gardner, KS. I am writing to tell you of our personal experience with remote learning and why it is so important to go back to Full- Time IN-PERSON school learning.

Our children have been out of the actual classroom since March 2020. Since that time, our children have been forced to do remote learning from home. Our youngest, a freshman, has yet to step foot into his school since he began High School. He has not been able to form new friendships, has not been able to join clubs or activities, and has not been allowed to be in the marching band at full capacity. Our oldest son, a Senior, has been robbed of what should have been the most memorable last year of high school. He has missed out on both junior and senior proms (school canceled them), a homecoming (school canceled), a band trip (school canceled), marching band season, and countless number of opportunities and last moments spent with his classmates and friends at school. He will never get those moments back.

Both of our boys, wake up each morning and log into their remote classrooms from their bedrooms. From 8:00 am until 3:00pm, they sit at their desk, each in their own bedroom, with their door shut (for quiet), and are forced to stare at their computer during those hours. They are isolated, have no personal interaction with their teachers or peers, and are expected to get their work done without resources readily available, that IN SCHOOL would have allowed them. Our children have no personal contact with their classmates. Our children have spoke to us about their peers who are also struggling with school and mental health due to forced remote learning. This is absolutely heartbreaking. These are issues that no 14 and 18 year old should have to discuss at that age!

We have reached out numerous times via email to our School District Superintendent, Pam Stranathan, and each BOE member: Shawn Carlisle, Rob Shippy, Tresa Boden, Brandon Parks, Kristen Schultz, Robin Stout, and Lana Sutton to voice to them that we want IN PERSON SCHOOL since August 2020. Most emails were never responded to. The only email we received, stated we should get our students involved in Zoom meetings over lunch so they can "socially" interact with their peers. The school district was actually suggesting our children spend MORE time online, on the computer, in front of a screen. How is that healthy? How is that good for their mental health or physical health?

As parents, we fear what the long term effects of having our children in forced remote learning will do to their development, mental health, and social skills, let alone their education? They have missed out on so much. Our senior student has missed out on increasing his ACT scores, scholarship opportunities, and increased GPA opportunities. How will this effect his college future? Our children ask us why they cannot be IN SCHOOL or at least hybrid when all other school districts in our area, have been back for months. Why is Gardner so far behind? Why are our voices not being heard? Pam Stranathan, our superintendent, has threatened to shut down BOE meetings during peaceful protests. Pam has used the police to tell students and parents to move off of the school property during BOE meetings. Our BOE has refused to call emergency meetings, even when other BOE members are requesting this and Gardner parents are requesting this. As a parent, we feel helpless and do not believe our school district understands

our community's needs. We also fear that the BOE and Pam Stranathan will shut down the hybrid learning model before it even starts.

We ask you to please hear our request to get USD 231 schools open, to full time in person learning! Please help our voices be heard. We don't know what else to do. Our children need to be in school! In person. Thank you for your time.

K-12 Education Budget Committee

Chair Kristey Williams

546-South

Written testimony on information concerning remote, hybrid and in-person learning

Erica Benson

9900 Glenwood St.

Overland Park, KS 66212

ericawbenson@gmail.com

Date of Hearing: Feb. 3

To Chair Williams and K-12 Education Budget Committee Members:

My name is Erica Benson and I am a public school teacher and a mother of two children. I am proud to teach A.P. U.S. history and U.S. history at Blue Valley North High School in Overland Park, Kansas. This school year I am teaching virtual courses and in-person hybrid courses. I have shown absolute dedication to my craft, developed new teaching skills, and worked overtime every day to create high-quality and relevant courses for my students, despite the emergency pandemic situation. My students have made adjustments, but they too continue to demonstrate that they are flexible, can quickly adapt to change, and collaborate in new ways. All skills employers will demand in the future.

My second-grade daughter continues to attend in-person school as she has for most of the year after a remote start to school. Despite the pandemic, my child continues to advance and thrive in school, and maintain proficiency on her MAP testing. I am very proud of her teacher and the building leadership for continuing to make her school a safe and happy place to learn.

Private companies knew that their operations and goals had to change as a result of the pandemic, why are schools not given the same permission? Why would the state prepare to spend less money on public education when schools are going to be back to normal capacity in the fall and have demonstrated how vital they are to the health of the economy? Parents may be experiencing temporary frustration with remote schools in parts of the state and the country; however, the priority should be to vaccinate teachers and staff so schools can reopen normally in the fall. Parents of young children and young teens are scrambling to get their students back into school full-time, this year was a temporary interruption. The pandemic will end in 2021, in fact I am getting vaccinated tomorrow. Please do everything in your power to get the economy up and running again by fully funding public schools.

If the budget committee would really like to help the students who didn't have the support they needed at home to succeed this year, the legislature should consider what it would cost to allow students who failed to have a "bonus" year to repeat the past school year, as needed. An achievement gap of one year is not impossible to correct, the expectation just needs to be adjusted. We cannot pretend that it was a normal year for any workplace, including our schools.

I would welcome a future opportunity to discuss these issues. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Erica Benson



Dear K-12 Budget committee,

I'm very grateful that SMSD has let science prevail and keep students, teachers, and their families at home remain safe during this public health crisis by keeping schools in either remote or hybrid learning models. Going back to school in person fulltime is dangerous to the progress our communities have made with COVID numbers going down. We are just a few months away from having the majority of people vaccinated, and with the current spread of the 3 more infectious variants, now is not the time to relax proper mitigation strategies by increasing class sizes in order to have all the kids in the buildings at once. Its just plain dumb. The studies that are saying there is little transmission in schools are based on shameful of rural schools with an average of 11 students per class and upgraded ventilation systems. Neither of those is doable at this point in our school system. Even with hybrid, there are way more students in a classroom than 11. No changes or upgrades have been made to the ventilation. The general public can also not buy the proper PPE like n95 masks that help prevent the virus from spreading, which is especially important right now with the variants bearing down upon the Midwest right now. We are in a lull because Christmas break had students at home. So even if families chose to travel and gather unsafely over the holidays, we did not send students back into the classroom until several weeks later, so we didn't see the big rise in community spread because the pool of sick kids and asymptomatic spreaders weren't congregated in close contact at school. Where they infected others who took it home to their family.

My student had excelled at remote learning because as parents we used facts and data to explain why remote is necessary instead of complaining about how it was unfair. We taught our child to overcome a difficulty instead of complain loudly until they got their way. It's a terrible lesson to teach, that if you yell loud enough or threaten to sue the school, you don't have to follow common sense public health guidelines. It also involved being interactive with our child about school, something a lot of parents who are in the Let Them Play groups don't want to be bothered with. They want someone else 'to deal with their kids instead'. We have taught our child to excell when things are harder or are different than usual, and taught him to think of the health of others vs personal selfish interest. KS has had way lower numbers of infections and deaths because we closed schools first. We adapted, we succeeded. We still can continue to do so by choosing to remain safe with remote and hybrid for a little longer until the Federal govt can provide rapid testing before kids goto school each day, have n95 masks, and be provided funds to improve air quality/ventilation , all of which our govt has promised to make a priority of in order to get schools back to full in person as soon as it is safe to do so. Don't cave into the bullies when we are in the home stretch.

Beth McDaniel, SMSD parent

[Sarcasticallyscientific@gmail.com](mailto:Sarcasticallyscientific@gmail.com)

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee,

I am writing to actually request to speak at the meeting tomorrow via zoom. I cannot attend in person, but would still like the opportunity to speak if possible. I want to share my experience with my eighth grader and my 10th grader, who have both been remote this entire year because we are part of the Gardner Edgerton USD 231 school district. I have spoken at several board meetings, lead a town hall meeting, sent numerous emails, along with MANY other parents, yet it falls on deaf ears and no change is made to get our kids back in school. In fact, it has had the opposite effect and has caused the board members to become defensive, disrespectful, immature, unprofessional and honestly, embarrassing. I've never felt so helpless and out of control when it comes to what I feel is best for my children. I am so incredibly disappointed in our district and for the first time in 18 years of living here, I've wanted to move and never look back. This isn't just about me and I have 4 kids who have all been born and raised here (I also have a second and fourth grader), so it's not just that easy to up and leave.

They call it REMOTE LEARNING, but that's not at all what it is. It's not school. For example, my son is part of the ATC program at the high school, which means several of his classes are hands on (carpentry, automotive, auto collision, etc). I work from home (thank goodness) and I've heard a couple of his teachers make the comment last semester that if we don't get back in school soon, they have no idea what they are going to do for their class. My son wants to be a diesel mechanic and needs these classes. He's missed out on pretty much his entire sophomore year because our district REFUSES to allow kids back in school. I'm so tempted to find another program for him and have him go that route and then head to trade school. This is a joke. I feel so helpless.

Another issue I have is that we are playing sports, but cannot attend school. Actually, only our HIGH SCHOOL can plan sports, but our middle school can't. I fought to get our middle schoolers at least in sports and they wouldn't listen at all. Basically, I was told that middle schoolers are not on top of their priority list. I was FURIOUS, but again, my hands are tied and I could do nothing about it.

I've done everything I can possibly think of, like I mentioned above and I feel completely ignored and I know the majority of the parents and students in our district feel that same way. If kids want to choose remote learning because they are high risk, they can always home school. That has always been a great option and still continues to be. That has never changed.

They also want to keep us out of school due to lack of substitute teachers. Well what are they doing to solve that problem? When they are asked, they are blaming the parents saying more parents need to step up! In no way, shape or form can they put that on the parents. They need to figure that out. Maybe they go to a staffing agency. Maybe they have quarantined teachers teach virtually while a parent helper comes in to watch over class. Maybe they reach out to the community college or student teachers or students in the education program. They CANNOT keep our kids out of school because of lack of subs and then blame the parents, but that's exactly what they are doing.

I'm confident that there are being rules broken and regulations not being followed, but I cannot prove it because I do not know all the rules and there is a severe lack of transparency, yet we voted these people in and we pay our taxes, but we are getting shut out, yelled at, blamed, disrespected and flat ignored.

As you can tell I have so much built up frustration because this has gone on WAY too long. I'm seeing districts abolishing the gating criteria, sending kids back full time, school boards and superintendents advocating for kids, yet here we sit in Gardner just building more walls, losing more trust, creating

hopeless feelings and the most sad of all, forgetting that this is ALL about the kids and they deserve SO much better. THEY DESERVE THE OPTION TO ATTEND IN PERSON SCHOOL IF THAT IS THEIR PREFERENCE.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing back from you soon!

Bree O'Gara  
816-520-8102  
[breeogara4@gmail.com](mailto:breeogara4@gmail.com)

**Isolation is real. Depression is real. Anxiety is real. Suicide is real.**

Governor Kelly abruptly closed our schools on March 12, 2020. As a result, Shawnee Mission School District was an epic fail in educating our students last spring. Trying to rebound from their admitted FAILURE, the district offered parents options for learning this past fall, and 70% of parents voted for in-person learning. The school year started three weeks late, and then they closed the schools to begin the year. Our daughter has had 10 days of in-person learning (all Hybrid) since March 12, 2020. Ten. Another Epic Fail on the District! Private schools have been open since the beginning of the year. (Follow the money.) When a student gets COVID, they stay home. If a teacher gets COVID, they stay home. Fearful of COVID? Stay home. Simple concept. Never in the history of humanity have we kept HEALTHY people home. It's called FREEDOM.

This is our daughter's senior year. It's heartbreaking on all fronts. Every day another disappointment. Eleven months and counting. Do you know what depression looks like? Do you know what anxiety looks like? Does anyone care?

God Bless everyone who is fighting to **OPEN OUR SCHOOLS**. The TRUTH will set us FREE.

Brenda Snizek  
Parent  
Shawnee Mission East High School  
[brendasniezek@gmail.com](mailto:brendasniezek@gmail.com)  
(816) 582-7187

To the K-12 Budget Chair and Members of the the Kansas House K-12 Education Budget Committee for the Remote and Hybrid Learning Informational Hearing,

I am here to say Remote is not working, Hybrid is not working, education is failing.

**Basic facts: remote/hybrid learning is not working. The district offered parents options for learning this past fall, and 70% of parents voted for in-person learning. My daughter has had 10 days of in-person learning (all Hybrid) since March 12, 2020. Ten days in eleven months. Private schools have been open since the beginning of the year. When a student gets COVID, they stay home. If a teacher gets COVID, they stay home. Fearful of COVID? Stay remote. Parents have this OPTION. And for the ones who feel safe and know what its best for their child, they had the OPTION for in person learning. Although the reality is that this is not happening. One 90 minute in person class a week does not work. Students are falling behind academically, some segments of the population disproportionately more than others. Their education is being severely compromised. For secondary students who have difficult classes, it is close to impossible to learn what they need to online, in one in-person class per week.**

**These are educational years our children will never get back. It's heartbreaking on all fronts, every day another disappointment. Eleven months and counting. Failing education, depression, anxiety...please show that you recognize this and care.**

**Remote is not working. Hybrid is not working. Schools are not transmitting COVID if proper mitigating protocols are in place.**

Please, we beg of you, help get our children back in school, full time. We are desperate and our children are even more desperate.

Thank you for your time,

Britton Norden, Parent  
Shawnee Mission School District, USD 512.  
816-679-5513

Written Testimony before the  
House K12 Education Budget Committee  
**Informational Hearing on Hybrid and Remote Learning**

by

Testimony provided on behalf of the Ellis County K-12 COVID Response Group: Ellis County Health Department - HaysMed - USD 489 Hays - USD 388 Ellis - USD 432 Victoria - Holy Family Elementary - Thomas More Prep-Marian - St. Mary's Elementary

**2/3/2021**

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

There have been many lessons learned as schools carve a path through this pandemic. The first lesson we learned is that there was no universal “right” answer. With no experience to draw from and no time to prepare, schools and communities have had to make very impactful decisions based on the facts and perceptions within each local community.

Beginning in April the schools of Ellis County banded together with the Ellis County Health Department and Hays Med to keep students and staff safe and in school. These schools include the three public school districts as well as three private schools within the county. This group continues to meet weekly and focus on local indicators and trends and the result has been in person learning for all school buildings nearly every day this school year. There has been short term classroom and even a couple short term building closures, but we have been able to avoid long term or district wide moves to hybrid or remote learning.

Each school and community is different and each school district must make local decisions based upon the individual facts. It would be unfair and unwise to attempt to oversimplify or judge school districts across the state without first understanding their community and their schools. The second lesson we learned as a group was to first ask “how do we keep students and staff safe”. While in person learning was not possible for all districts across the state, our school community is fortunate and grateful to have been able to work closely with our county health experts to keep the students of Ellis County in person learning. We were able to create some social distance in our schools, and county health experts went to work in our schools to educate students, staff and parents on mitigation strategies. We were able to use county SPARK money and ESSER/CARES money to purchase cleaning supplies and sanitization equipment and we added nursing staff to conduct contact tracing within our schools on behalf of the county health officer. If any of these things were not in place the results would be much different.

Dr. Heather Harris – HaysMed, Jason Kennedy – Ellis County Health Officer, Ron Wilson – USD 489 Superintendent, Corey Burton – USD 388 Ellis Superintendent, Kent Michael – USD 432 Victoria Superintendent, Geoff Andrews – Salina Diocese Superintendent



**HAYS USD 489**  
**#EveryStudentEveryDay489**



Hello,

We have students in 9th and 11th grades in the Shawnee mission school district. Remote and hybrid learning is not effective education. With hybrid, the kids are getting less actual time with teachers than with remote as two days a week they sign in to get assignments and then do them on their own.

If kids can safely play contact sports or sports with close contact (basketball and volleyball) then they can be in a classroom wearing a mask and be in person safely. Covid is not being spread in schools.

It is very important that our kids return to full in person learning! Private schools have done it successfully.

Thank you,  
Eric Friskel, M.D. (parent)  
Cell 913-220-5803  
Email: [friskel@me.com](mailto:friskel@me.com)

K-12 Education Budget Committee

Chair Kristey Williams

546-South

Written testimony on information concerning remote, hybrid and in-person learning

Erica Benson

9900 Glenwood St.

Overland Park, KS 66212

[ericawbenson@gmail.com](mailto:ericawbenson@gmail.com)

Date of Hearing: Feb. 3

To Chair Williams and K-12 Education Budget Committee Members:

My name is Erica Benson and I am a public school teacher and a mother of two children. I am proud to teach A.P. U.S. history and U.S. history at Blue Valley North High School in Overland Park, Kansas. This school year I am teaching virtual courses and in-person hybrid courses. I have shown absolute dedication to my craft, developed new teaching skills, and worked overtime every day to create high-quality and relevant courses for my students, despite the emergency pandemic situation. My students have made adjustments, but they too continue to demonstrate that they are flexible, can quickly adapt to change, and collaborate in new ways. All skills employers will demand in the future.

My second-grade daughter continues to attend in-person school as she has for most of the year after a remote start to school. Despite the pandemic, my child continues to advance and thrive in school, and maintain proficiency on her MAP testing. I am very proud of her teacher and the building leadership for continuing to make her school a safe and happy place to learn.

Private companies knew that their operations and goals had to change as a result of the pandemic, why are schools not given the same permission? Why would the state prepare to spend less money on public education when schools are going to be back to normal capacity in the fall and have demonstrated how vital they are to the health of the economy? Parents may be experiencing temporary frustration with remote schools in parts of the state and the country; however, the priority should be to vaccinate teachers and staff so schools can reopen normally in the fall. Parents of young children and young teens are scrambling to get their students back into school full-time, this year was a temporary interruption. The pandemic will end in 2021, in fact I am getting vaccinated tomorrow. Please do everything in your power to get the economy up and running again by fully funding public schools.

If the budget committee would really like to help the students who didn't have the support they needed at home to succeed this year, the legislature should consider what it would cost to allow students who failed to have a "bonus" year to repeat the past school year, as needed. An achievement gap of one year is not impossible to correct, the expectation just needs to be adjusted. We cannot pretend that it was a normal year for any workplace, including our schools.



I would welcome a future opportunity to discuss these issues. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Erica Benson

To Chair Williams and K-12 Education Budget Committee Members- My name is Gabrielle Fulford and I am a junior at Blue Valley North High School in Overland Park Kansas. When I was made aware of the hearing being held tomorrow to discuss the distribution of funds to private schools, I knew I had to do something. As a student who has had the experience of both going to a private school and public school, I must tell you that my public school experiences have been 100X better. I attended a private school from the age of 3-11, and ultimately I acquired little to no information. Although I can't say surely that the focus of the school was on profits and other unimportant things, I can say that it was not on our studies or our knowledge of information. Having that experience and being able to reflect on it after having been in the public school system for many years now has allowed me to fully understand the vast differences public and private schools have.

Regarding the assumption that Hybrid/ Online learning is an example of how the public school system is failing their students, I would like to say this: as a person who has been diagnosed with anxiety, depression, and OCD, and who has been living with ADD their entire life, I can whole heartedly say that the remote learning I have had the chance to undergo as been one of the best experiences of my life. Prior to the pandemic, going to school for me was a struggle, not only because my ADD paired with my anxiety made it impossible for me to get things done, but also because the school environment just wasn't right for me. However, due to the incredible staffs hard work to create a system/ program where students like me can flourish in their own environments, I have been able to discover what might help me in the future and what kind of environment is suitable for me. Without this experience made possible by the public school system, I would be completely lost, anxious, fearful, and hesitant about going to school, and college in specific.

Everyone has struggled in their own way throughout the past year, and it is incredible how quickly and efficiently the staff and administration in my public school district were able to create an accommodated mode of learning: a mode of learning that was only possible due to the funds they receive from the state annually to fund projects like these. If you were to take away the funds from the public schools, so many students would be left with nothing. I am fortunate enough to have parents who can support me in the things I do/ in my everyday life, however, I know so many people who's families can't afford to buy them food everyday, so they have to use the schools allotted food resources systems in order to be able to eat lunch everyday. The stopping of fund distributions to public schools will forever alter the lives of so many people, and in negative ways. Please, when you make this decision, don't do it lightly; think about the kids who rely on public school resources to live their daily lives and succeed in the world. Thank you for your time and for considering my statement.

Gabrielle Fulford

To The K-12 Budget Chair and Members,

My name is Greg Chapman and I am a parent and former BOE member for USD231. I am writing you to give our testimony on remote learning and the impact it has had on our family. Due to being a truck driver, I am requesting written only, but I am more than willing to talk on the phone, there is just a lot of background noise due to the job.

When this nightmare began last spring break, I had two children in high school at Gardner-Edgerton HS in USD231. It was awful watching my two mostly A's few B's children go from excited for school to dragging them out of bed to do school and this year one of them is failing classes. Originally our district didn't require any education at all, they didn't have virtual like it is now and they didn't require the kids to attend. It was devastating to watch my oldest daughter, a senior, realize all the things she wouldn't be able to do that children look forward to for years, when they become Seniors. Holding our breath as we wait anxiously for the district to tell us if they were going to let the kids come back, allow them to have prom, and even graduation. But we understood that this virus was new and precautions needed to be taken and new policies/procedures created. My wife was even one of the teachers selected to help Dr. Watson create those policies and procedures for going back to school.

Fast forward to this year, our district has been exceptionally obstinate in even attempting to remove us from remote learning, even with 100's of citizens attending board meetings BEGGING the BOE to allow them the choice to return or not. I listened to heartbreaking story after story about all the things remote learning is doing to the children in the district, some students even speaking to how they had attempted suicide and how at that time, they had lost 2 peers to suicide that year alone. But the BOE wouldn't budge. My own daughter, a Junior, is very involved in school, and has plans to attend University of Arkansas, but she has battled severe anxiety and depression all year. She's taken mental health days because she was just so tired of sitting in front of a screen unable to learn in that manner and watching as the teachers just kept going.....right past her and other students like her. It has intensified her anxiety and depression even with increased medication. We have received several emails from the teachers stating that over half their kids are failing the class, and that they are offering ways to try and improve the grade, and canceling finals in an effort to not harm the grade any further.

Most children do not learn like this. The average class for my daughter is 15-20min and then they dismiss the kids to work on the assignment. I get in class they get time to go over things together and have quiet study time, but these teachers log off and make it difficult for the students to reach out for help because of that. It appears that she has a total of maybe one and half hours of direct contact hours from the teachers on most days. Even taking seminar and lunch out, that is unacceptable and is NOT an education.

We were also informed last night at the BOE meeting that the district or KSDE had made an error and it was reported to the Senate and the House that USD231 was fully in person and might have

been receiving funds like they were in person, when the students haven't stepped foot in the building since before spring break 2020. This was alarming and concerning.

My last bit of testimony is that Lilly is on a group that welcomes Freshman to the HS and helps them get acquainted with the school. Every other week she meets with around 5 to 10 Freshman and talks with them about classes, life, goals, etc. Several of these students have expressed how depressed they are and how much anxiety they have with school currently. They are struggling to grasp new ideas and even understand how HS works. They have also expressed severe loneliness, and because of the heart of my daughter she takes time at lunch almost every day to remotely have video lunch with one or more of her Freshman peers to help them. I do not say this to brag, although I am very proud of the young woman she is, but to show just how much this remote learning has affected students from all grade levels. I have spoken with 3 teachers who see how far the kids are slipping and they fear that this will take years to undo, but some students, like my daughter, only have a year left! My wife and I are public education advocates, but seeing this BOE in our community not listen to the constituents and run their students and staff into the ground has been eye opening. We feel and believe that parents deserve the right to choose the education that works best for their student(s) and that the finances associated with their child should be able to be transferred to whatever district or school program that works best for them. These districts know they have the monopoly and they are unwilling to bend. But should the parents be able to speak with their money, then once again, there would be local control where it belongs.....with the parent.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony today,

Sincerely,

Greg W Chapman

913-980-0773

[greg628522@gmail.com](mailto:greg628522@gmail.com)

829 N Evergreen St

Gardner, Ks 66030

February 3, 2021February 2, 2021

Mrs. Holly U Palacio  
14601 S Chalet Dr  
Olathe Kansas 66062

Rep. Kristey Williams, Chair  
K-12 Education Budget Committee  
Kansas House of Representatives, 2020-2021

Subject: Written testimony-Remote Learning 2/3/2021

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify regarding the effects of remote and or hybrid learning formats on our children. My husband, Luis Palacio, and I have been married for over 22 years and have lived in Olathe for the past 17 years. It was a move largely motivated by the caliber of the community and the quality education we thought we would be able to provide for our children.

We have three children we enrolled for in person learning in the Olathe Public School District (OSD) for the 2020-21 school year. After enrollment, the Olathe Board of Education withdrew the in person choice and remote learning was enforced for the entire district. This was a detrimental decision for our students. Our oldest is a senior, and this format forced total isolation from her peers and relegated her entire social/ emotional world to the voices and pictures on a screen. The instantaneous effect on her normally cheerful and upbeat disposition cannot be overstated. Academically, she is normally highly motivated and easily inspired to complete homework on time, ask questions and participate in class and do well in tests and quizzes. This motivation and drive almost completely disappeared. It took concerted effort for her to overcome and was a constant source of stress and anxiety for her. She persevered but she also had classes where a log in/ check in /log out was the sum total of her interaction. This was hardly the academic or social senior year she was expecting. The fallout from this has been a change in mood and mental health severe enough to warrant professional support. Hybrid was better, for the first few weeks. Then, the realization that this was a far, far cry from the education needed to prepare her for life after high school came crashing in. Academic standards have fallen so far, she is now anxious about college success among students from across the country who have been in full time academic settings this entire time and her almost non existent academic progress in the Spring of 2020 leading directly into less than half the expected academic progress this school year virtually assure her a rough entry into college. Her frustration has been shared in writing and in person directly to the school board, with no discernable notice from them in their decision making.

Our middle child is a sophomore and has a learning disability, the most common learning disability, that we have already paid out of pocket to remediate. He has dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia. To say that remote 'learning' was a huge academic challenge would be to understate it. His motivation to succeed in the classroom is largely influenced by his interpersonal relationships with the teacher and his peers. Both of those relationships were hindered if not completely forfeited by the remote format. Then, to compound the lack of interaction, he suffered a concussion thus removing him from the academic portion of the online experience. He fell so far behind in two core classes that he withdrew from those two classes and we have begun homeschool classes to complete his educational requirements. As I became his eyes online and had to navigate the multiple 'classrooms', zoom calls, file retrieval, storage, naming, and digital work turn in applications, it became very clear to me that if you did not have home support, this format was confusing, often prone to log in difficulties or lost uploaded assignments and documentation, and duplicative work for little feedback. Teachers were under pressure to prove the format was 'robust' (as the Spring semester was decidedly not) and thus began the race to get grades in a gradebook without any interest or ability to assess whether a skill was mastered or meaningful comprehensive progress was made. I am a very technically comfortable middle-aged person with a degree and work experience under my belt and the online format was completely incompatible with learning. For a typical high school sophomore, it would have been daunting and to a student with any learning challenges, little better than a complete waste of time academically. Were it not for their extracurricular team involvement, both of our high school students would have transferred to private schools.

Our youngest is an eighth grader with many medical and cognitive issues. He has a rare genetic disorder called Tuberous Sclerosis Complex (TSC), autism, epilepsy, ADHD, and TSC Associated Neurological Disorder that leaves him cognitively years behind his grade/ age level peers. He is a full time IEP student in a Center Based Resource classroom (stand alone academic setting with insertion into some general ed and elective classes with typical peers.) His experience with remote 'learning' during the initial state lockdown of schools in March 2020, was an academic and social /emotional disaster. To say that this format for 'learning' was completely contraindicated would be accurate according to the extensive testing and evaluations he has completed and the very IEP itself. Where he is recommended and approved for a full days' worth of minutes, lets use the 460 minutes per week assigned in his IEP for his classroom teacher to provide, he was offered, in writing, 60 minutes of in person learning to start the school year. The rest of his 'education' was to be via Zoom class. To include two electives where a para, that was in the school building, was also 'with him' in 'class.' I will leave you to your accurate assessment of how effective or meaningful that education was for him.

This drove us to the unprecedented effort after a full 13 years in dealing with the OSD of having to request legal representation at an emergency IEP meeting. He was granted a half day attendance five days a week in person, though he could not travel to the elective classrooms for his electives, those were still remotely taught to him with in person para support. Those arrangements were in place in a document called a Temporary Learning Plan which clearly means OSD is well aware they are not providing the full IEP requirements and therefore not necessarily an appropriate education. These arrangements were in place during remote at the beginning of the year, then hybrid afforded him the offer of full day in person every day (despite his typical peers being given the nightmare every other day schedule) and still without overlap of

groups of students so his building is still not fully accessible to him all days. (For example, he can attend PE with his peers in the afternoon as he is assigned to that class and on an AB schedule but he cannot attend it on the opposite day with the other group.) All this despite no massive outbreak or cases of significance being reported by the district as originating from school transmission in his middle school.

The return to remote prior to Thanksgiving was truly an injustice. With no indication in internal OSD numbers that case were being spread or our attempting even half an education for our children was causing or exacerbating any spread of the Covid virus, the OSD decided to make our kids education the price of perceived safety. That rationale continues with no sign of it relenting. All of these concerns have been regularly communicated to staff, teachers, coaches, building administrators, counselors, district staff, the Superintendent, and the Board of Education. All has been consistently communicated in writing and in person wherever and whenever those opportunities existed. Now, with grades, attendance, and any measure of academic progress plummeting, our district is choosing to double down on an unmeasurable, and therefore unattainable goal of 'safety' by leaving our children with half an education.

Were I in your shoes, I'd want the answers to the following questions from each and every district who has chosen not to allow their students to access the full free appropriate public education that affords meaningful academic progress this year:

1. Since enrollment numbers are down (some estimate as high as 25,000 no longer enrolled in public schools statewide) and you were paid the full amount for your budgets, where is the accounting for the excess sent to each district? (If anecdotal totals are true, and OSD is down 4000 students, where did the excess \$40,000,000.00 go if not to efforts to get kids back in the door full time? (this assumes \$10,000 per student from the State)
2. What is the exact parameter required for students to be in class full time (keeping in mind many districts and most private schools throughout the state have been since August)?

As it is, I have the following questions for you:

1. Where is the accountability from each district for the money you have sent them for a full time, free, appropriate, public, education? Why are districts allowed to spend over half of our state budget without knowing where every dime goes? Is any other entity that is paid by the State allowed to have such unaccounted spending discretion?
2. When our KSDE report card indicates that reading proficiency fell to 34% in 2019 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP); fourth-grade proficiency fell from to 32%, why are Districts allowed to turn in these results AND half the educational minutes for full payment?
3. Why can't I take my child(ren)'s allotment of education funding and apply to a school that will actually prioritize their education?

I humbly and respectfully beg you to hold our District, and any other, that will not put our kids first, accountable.

Accountable for either their gross negligence or their complete incompetence in making no meaningful progress for our children.

Accountable for every tax dollar they collect and either fail to spend in the classroom (to include teacher salaries) or on appropriate curriculum but can somehow be found to increase administrative positions and salaries.

The lie has gone on long enough. Our community is no safer with our children in hybrid (or remote) than if they were in school full time. Other communities are proving that more with each passing day. Even private schools within our own city.

Our children are not prepared for a future when their education is little more than busy work and self-teaching. We need accountability, we need to put students first. Our students deserve the right to choose their own education.

Respectfully yours,

Holly U. Palacio





### **Written Testimony**

#### **Informational hearing on remote and hybrid learning**

#### **House K12 Education Budget Committee**

**February 3, 2021**

**Lori Blake**

**President, Kansas Association of School Boards**

**Board Member, USD 306 Southeast of Saline**

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the topic of remote and hybrid learning in Kansas public schools. I hope to provide some statewide perspective through my roles as a Board Member in the USD 306 Southeast of Saline school district and President of the Kansas Association of School Boards.

The Kansas Association of School Boards represents the 286 Kansas public school districts. Our members serve nearly 500,000 students in the communities that are the bedrock of our state, and each can tell you about a distinct in-person, remote or hybrid learning environment based on their unique experience of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In my role as KASB president, I have watched my fellow Board members in Dodge City and Goodland, Emporia and Spring Hill, Parsons and Marysville, Renwick and Wichita and many other Kansas communities contend with the difficult reality of starting the 2020-21 school year during a worldwide pandemic. They want their students to be back in the classroom and thriving. Some have been fortunate enough to accomplish that, while others have been forced to make unpopular decisions to pull back from onsite learning in the interests of public health. Other districts began the school year in remote or hybrid learning but were able to move to on-site learning as local conditions improved.

Our school board members are dedicated to the wellbeing of their communities. Their own children flourish through the opportunities offered not only in the classroom but also in extracurricular activities like sports, music, debate, and robotics, but they've been forced by local circumstances to make agonizing decisions to restrict those activities in order to protect their students and staff. Whether they began this school year in-person or in hybrid or remote learning, none of my colleagues made those

decisions lightly. Those who are still not fully in-person know their communities are frustrated. They're frustrated, too.

At Southeast of Saline, we have been blessed by our small population and great caution by our staff, students, and patrons. Our students have been attending in person since August without interruption. There have been great personal sacrifices when students and staff have been exposed to a positive case. Our top runners were unable to compete in regional cross country even though none of them were actually positive. Thankfully, their teammates rose to the occasion and qualified and won state where those in quarantine were allowed to return after their 14 days of isolation.

Parents and staff have taken the screening of symptoms seriously. We have been able to keep highly trained educators in our classrooms because we used our SPARK money to follow the KS Department of Education's Reopening Plan and installed plexiglass barriers where social distancing could not be achieved, rerouted student traffic so it was one-way and hired full-time substitute teachers to fill gaps when staff were sick or quarantined. Teachers have taught their students to assist in cleaning surfaces between classes while they are checking on those students who are in class through video chat remotely.

SE of Saline is a K-12 school which educates 684 students under one roof. Other schools have spatial constraints and weren't lucky enough to have a county open their disaster funding to their districts. In Salina, the simple fact that 900 middle school and 1100 high school students are under one roof impedes their ability to be in class full-time. They started in a 2 day per week in-person hybrid model and adapted to half days 5 days a week to rotate students and decrease the exposure risk due to the number of students they are tasked with educating.

However, not every school district has had the luxury of these responses because of economies of scale. For example, some of our smaller rural districts used SPARK money to install new air purification systems to provide optimum ventilation as recommended by public health experts. However, many of our large suburban and urban districts with multiple school buildings are finding it much more cost-prohibitive to install this state-of-the-art equipment and they share their constituents' frustration about remaining in hybrid or remote learning. Whether rural or urban, school boards want to do their very best to protect their students and staff.

And even with these differences, one thing has been universally challenging...hiring qualified staff. Substitute teachers were hard to find before the pandemic and the risk through the pandemic makes it even more difficult to keep enough certified adults in each classroom. Even principals are acting as substitutes. In order to keep these professionals safe from the virus, class sizes would need to be cut in half, but districts can't afford to double their payroll. So in response, school board members, administrators and teachers have worked creatively to do whatever it takes to reduce the risk.

Whether they live in Augusta or Coldwater, Kansas City or Valley Center, Stillwell, Lenexa, Olathe, Wichita, or my hometown of Assaria, school board members know in-person school is the very best option for most of our students. They will freely admit they're not satisfied with the limitations of remote or hybrid learning; they know nothing can replace the benefits of being in the classroom, on the football field or volleyball court or on the stage. They are all looking forward to better days in Kansas.

Thank you.

Dear Representative Williams and Mr. Ruvalcaba,

My name is Jackie Lang, and I am a 16-year resident of Gardner, KS. I have five children, four of whom attend school within the Gardner-Edgerton school district (USD 231). I have two eighth graders, a fourth grader, and a kindergartener. My fourth grader and my kindergartener have been full time in person schooling since September and doing quite well. I'd like to tell you about my two eighth graders.

Isaiah and Ashton are outgoing, intelligent, motivated, kind-hearted, and talented teenagers. They both have IEPs for the Gifted Program. They are multi-sport athletes. They play in the school band, and have been recognized in various honor bands. They took the ACT as seventh graders through Duke TIP and received recognition for their exceptional scores. My son, Ashton, just won the school Spelling Bee and represented his middle school at the county level. Their list of achievements could go on.

Unfortunately for USD 231, Isaiah and Ashton will NOT be attending Gardner Edgerton High School next year. Instead, they will be attending a private school for their high school education. This may not have been the easy choice for our family, but it is the right choice. You see, during the past eleven months of "forced remote schooling," my boys have lost their motivation and lost their passion. As involved parents, we have done everything in our power to advocate for their learning. This includes, but is not limited to, contacting our superintendent, director of remote learning, and every school board member to ask questions and express our desire to be in person. We have also contacted each school district and private school within a 45 miles radius to inquire about a potential transfer.

Despite all the challenges of "forced remote learning," my boys still maintain straight A's and perform well on standardized tests. However, this is NOT because they are being challenged or because the district has done its job in educating my boys properly. Instead, it is because my boys are naturally academically gifted, and because they have a tremendous family support system. I have no doubt that my boys will succeed, but their success will not be because of USD 231 -- rather, in spite of USD 231.

My boys are lucky. I am blessed to have a flexible schedule that allows me to be home with them throughout the day. I can prompt them to stay on task, troubleshoot technology issues, make sure they eat a healthy lunch, and ensure they get physical exercise throughout the day. Most parents aren't so lucky, and their kids suffer at home trying to manage with little support. My family is fortunate to be able to send our boys to a private school beginning next year. We realize this isn't an option for most families due to financial and logistical constraints. Many of those families feel trapped in a broken education system.

I write this email to beg of you to do everything in your power to require in-person full time education for grades K-12. If schools are not able to achieve this standard of education, then they should not receive state funding. I am fully in favor of my tax dollars following my students wherever we choose to send them for school! If USD 231 cannot do the job successfully, then

we, as parents, should be able to choose the best option for our children. The funding should follow our children.

**I am advocating for in-person full time school for my own children, as well as all those students who don't have the parental support necessary during this time. Students are failing academically and struggling emotionally. Numerous studies have shown that schools are NOT the source of Covid transmission. However, schools ARE the source of academic growth and emotional stability. Covid is real, but so is mental illness. Please help us get our kids back in school full time!**

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jackie Lang

Mom to Isaiah (13), Ashton (13), Hadley (9), Eden (6), and Beckham (3)

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee,

I am the parent of a junior at Blue Valley Southwest. I have been wondering how to help or communicate about our experience and was given your email addresses. I have attended a BV board meeting and have attempted to learn all that I can about the process and how decisions are being made.

I asked for my son to share with me his thoughts; so this is his perspective. He has been in-person/online hybrid.

"It is hard to learn online.

Some teachers have different plans for remote students than for the students in the classroom on a given day. So the online activities feel like "filler" and it is obvious students are only getting about half of the content.

Focusing is difficult.

There is no engagement with other students.

Prolonged periods of sitting at the desk contribute to back pain. With online learning, assignments are given to be completed in a time period which often runs right into the next class so moving around or walking even short distances to loosen up is tricky.

Being on the computer presents challenges for integrity. It is easier to cheat. Learning self-control is good, but the lack of engagement is a huge problem.

It is so much easier to learn in person and to be able to have face to face conversations about the subjects and to get help.

Several times the zoom link has had trouble or the voice aspect was not working so the online students either could not get into the class or could not participate in the discussion because when we unmuted there was still no sound."

Every day our calendar is different which causes lack of rhythm. This semester has seemed a bit less confusing than fall, but still every day being different is a scheduling challenge. Students need to be back in school with regularity and schedule.

The downsides of increased depression, anxiety, isolation, complacency, apathy, frustration, etc are not worth this sacrifice and shutdown. On the CDC website this morning the United States showed 141,559 new cases (which we do not know if they are actually sick or not) but **ONE death per 100K in the last 7 days!**

The MARC covid hub has been consistently showing the daily death average in the metropolitan area as 6.9 deaths per day. That is one death about every 4 hours. Whereas someone dies of cardiovascular disease every 37 seconds or dies of a stroke every 3.5 minutes.

I understand every life is precious and we must do our best to be aware of possible dangers, but life includes risk. No school district, state or county can secure safety for their people. Nor should we want you to. Risk is part of life. We must model for our kids a courage to live. We are getting stronger.

Thank you for taking time to read and consider,  
Janet Peterson

K-12 Education Budget Committee

Chair Kristey Williams

546-South

Written testimony on information concerning remote, hybrid and in-person learning

Date of Hearing: Feb. 3

To Chair Williams and K-12 Education Budget Committee Members:

My son is a sophomore at Shawnee Mission West in Overland Park and is a hybrid student. We know this method of learning is only temporary and hope that the 2021-2022 school year returns to normal, however I'm very happy with the way the school and district has been able to continue educating through this difficult time. I knew from the beginning that I wanted my son to be in school, in person, in some capacity this year and hybrid isn't ideal, but it's the best that we can work with right now so that's what we do. My son has taken an active approach to his classes, does his work to the best of his ability, works with what methods the teachers in each of his classes are able to provide, and has succeeded more than I expected in this capacity. The hybrid method provides him with the structure he needs both at home and in school on those days, as well as the extremely important social interactions that teens need these days.

My son has a gifted IEP and it's so important for kids like him, as well as all students, to have access to the best that their schools can provide. Making sure that our public schools are well funded and supported by our state is not something that should ever be a concern to the families that live here and attend or will attend these schools.

Thank you,  
Jessica Leslie

Parent

Shawnee Mission West High School (Overland Park)

[jjoleslie@gmail.com](mailto:jjoleslie@gmail.com)

913-568-3550

Hello,

I lost my daughters mother about three years ago to Suicide. Since then I have spent over \$10,000 in therapy, had to change jobs due to lifestyle changes and would stress when leaving my daughter alone during the summer. Alexis my daughter, was getting getting to a point of spiritual Freedom. She was a high risk for her own personal battles we are still tackling in therapy. That stress has been taken to the next level with her being by herself over a year at home.

Then Covid hit. She lost her physical contact with her friends, like she had that was helping her. Her Appearance is becoming obese. Her grades went from A's and B's to barely passing. She has been tucked in her bedroom for the most part over the last year. I'm a truck driver and have trained myself to be in solidarity. I have to be honest; this isolation our littles have been through is Inhumane, and not fair.

Meanwhile other schools have went on with their lives. Not to mention other states that refuse to accept the mandates.

Regards,  
Johann Schart

Hi, Roger.

My son, Will, is a sixth grader at Mill Creek Elementary in Lenexa.

When Shawnee Mission School District offered families a choice between fully remote and hybrid/in-person learning modes, my wife and I included Will in our decision-making process. Will immediately said he preferred the hybrid or in-person option. He wanted to be in a physical classroom with a teacher and classmates above all else.

More recently, on a snowy morning, Will was happy to hear SMSD had not called a snow day. He said he would rather be in school with his teacher and his classmates than at home for a remote learning day.

Both instances highlight the impact Mill Creek Elementary, its teachers, and its students have on my son. It's not hard to imagine the impact and importance would be even greater for kids who have special needs or who are faced with additional difficulties in other areas of their lives.

Through the uncertainty of the pandemic, public schools have been one of a very few reliable constants for many kids. Despite the less than ideal circumstances public schools have faced, they have risen to the challenge and their importance has only increased.

Jon Riekenberg  
Mill Creek Elementary parent and PTA President  
Lenexa, KS  
913-387-9269



To the K-12 Budget Chair and Members,

While the pandemic has placed undue stress on everyone, as a parent, I can sympathize with the struggle teachers are facing. Having to assist in corralling my children and keeping them on task and engaged while working full time; seeing the late nights put in by the teacher to keep everything moving forward has been eye-opening.

My oldest child started his first year of high school and struggled immensely with the remote only situation we began with. Things improved once hybrid began. Having face to face interactions with his teachers helped create a rapport that increased his engagement.

My youngest is in the 3rd grade and has been remote only. The biggest struggle with him has been technology. Either during instruction where things will be running smoothly, then there will be a hiccup and it will disrupt the flow or when working on an assignment on the iPad and it glitches, erasing all of his work. That's very disheartening to an 8 year old.

While both kids are making progress academically they are suffering from a socialization standpoint. Not being able to be surrounded by peers is taking a huge emotional toll on them, as I'm sure it is with most children. Our public schools need more funding, not less, to help address the emotional needs of all the students coming back to public life after having been isolated for over a year. I would imagine there will be an increased need for counselors and social workers to help in the readjustment. That burden should not be placed on our already overworked teachers.

Once the school year started, one thing I heard from multiple parents, is that they too have been awakened to how hard teachers work and that the teachers need more support and recognition for their efforts, not less.

Sincerely,  
Josh Dugdale - parent  
SMSD  
816-308-0715

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee,

My son is an 11 year old sixth grade student. He attended school in USD 231 from kindergarten through October of his sixth grade year. He has always really loved school and has had many wonderful experiences in Gardner schools, until this year. We were told we could choose if we wanted our child to attend in person, which we did opt for. We knew our son with ADhD would thrive best in person with his teacher's physical influence.

Our district school board and superintendent determined it would be unsafe for him to attend. My husband and I are both elementary school teachers and were expected to show up to school each day to teach our own students in person so we had to find some way for him to have daily supervision over his education. Thankfully we had a dear friend who was willing to let him go to her house and remote learn with her daughter. I was very concerned as to how that would go because while he has always liked school his adhd often results in frustration and anger for him.

By the third week he had multiple missing assignments, was clicking in and out of classes, and hated school. His teachers did their best and did keep him in class but he was not taking in any new information, his frustration was mounting quickly.

Eventually I took advantage of FFCRA leave and planned to stay home with him until we could scramble to find an alternate educational plan for him. My husband went and spoke passionately at two board meetings that resulted in no change for our children in the district. When there was no change in schooling for our middle schooler I immediately began to research private schools. It was either enroll him in private school where he could go in person or I would have to quit my job and home school him. The stress was causing our son to have multiple emotional meltdowns daily.

Thankfully we found a school with a 6th grade spot still open and we were able to get him enrolled and starting in late October. He will stay in the private school for the years to come. His transfer has been highly beneficial to him and we are experiencing much more peace and joy in our home.

The financial cost is great for our family but the trade-off with the education and knowing that our son is getting to attend school peacefully each day has been worth it. Considering our middle and high school students in USD 231 have not stepped foot inside a classroom yet this year and won't until they get to go two days a week on February 8th, we are grateful we could find another option for our son.

Thank you for considering our families experience with education this year.

Julie Brumet

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee,

First, I want to thank you for taking the time to read my input. I have always been a huge proponent for public education. I was raised by a mother who was a public school teacher. I was loved and encouraged by a grandmother who had taught in a one room schoolhouse. I have three siblings who entered the field of education and am currently married to an elementary school teacher. We have always believed in the benefits of education and chose to live in Gardner, Kansas partly because we had heard about the phenomenal schools that the town had.

I would like to say we have not been disappointed by that choice and until this year could have. However, my two oldest children stepped out of their middle school buildings on March 12, 2020 excited for spring break and have yet to step foot into a school building again. With current communication from the district it appears they will be going hybrid and exactly 334 days since they left school, my boys will begin to enter schools just two days a week.

To say this experience with remote learning has been the beneficial education we want for our children would be a lie. I am an A & P mechanic, and am unable to be home to support my boys. As I mentioned my wife is an elementary school teacher. Elementary has been in-person full time since September. My wife is unable to be home with our boys. Financially it is not feasible for one of us to leave our job. We were thankful that in December my wife was able to take FFCRA extended leave to support the boys, however, once made optional the district chose not to offer it to employees so in January she returned to work and my 11 and 13 year old returned to managing their educational days alone.

This adult responsibility placed upon young children's shoulders has not gone well. In October, my 11 year old sat multiple times waiting to be let into a zoom session by his speech therapist. Thankfully he let us know and when we reached out to the teacher, her email bounced back to us as undeliverable. After emails to the principal and the special education coordinator we learned the teacher was no longer with the district. No one informed us. What they did allow to happen was an 11 year old, home alone, got to experience anxiety and stress that they were somehow making an error, while in reality they were forgotten by the district whose job it is to provide that quality service to them. My wife and I kept wondering what would have happened if we didn't have a kid that talked to us. How long had other kids been experiencing these same emotions?

My wife chose to take the leave in December because we had begun to see some mental health signs our boys were exhibiting. Our oldest even mentioned that he had "no drive to do anything." Months of adult responsibility had taken their toll. Our happy healthy boys who used to love to learn and had never exhibited any mental health issues, now have dealt with depression, anxiety, and apathy toward education. While home in December my wife observed that our 13 year old is literally on the computer all day. That is over 6 hours of screen time just for instruction, not including homework. The American Pediatrics Association recommends limiting screen time, in remote learning this is not possible. Screen fatigue is a real thing. She also observed that our 11 year old had huge blocks of time completely open. Since he is high academically, he is not receiving any instruction, not even enrichment, during small group reading, small group math, or tier blocks. Our boys are home together but essentially alone. Their schedules do not overlap and they even eat lunch in solitude. Just having my wife there for a month we saw a huge improvement in our boys with the social interactions they were able to have. Our oldest no longer had to be the adult and help the youngest with technology issues and other stressors, and the youngest had someone to interact with during all of his free time.

These kids who have to be home all alone have been forgotten. As a parent we feel completely helpless to truly support our children during this time. They are not adults. They do not have the executive functioning skills of adults, yet our district expects them to do so without any thought to the mental health implications. What happened to the #ZeroReasonsWhy campaign? We have watched friends pull their kids and move them to private schools. We have seen teachers who work in Gardner but live in another district pull their kids to their own district. We have seen more affluent friends rent houses and live in another town so their child can be appropriately educated. We do not have those options financially. We are stuck in a district that refuses to appropriately educate our middle school children.

I never would have believed I would advocate for funding changes. However, as a parent with zero options to meet the needs of my children, I need your help. Either pressure needs to be placed on districts to provide an appropriate in person education for children or parents need to be given options that allow us to pull our children from a district not doing their job. Our children are the future. Our district has treated that future with contempt this year through its decisions. I implore you to find solutions that meet the needs of these forgotten children.

Sincerely,

Justin Reimer  
[jkrbr@gmail.com](mailto:jkrbr@gmail.com)

Good afternoon,

I am a parent of a 9th grader at Shawnee Mission West and would like to share our experience. My daughter has been fully remote for this entire year and I feel it is extremely important that this has been an option for her. She is in a variety of honors classes and our school counselor worked with the other high schools in our district to piece together a schedule for her. She is currently being taught by teachers in three different schools. While this is not the most ideal way for her to experience 9th grade, we are grateful for the opportunities provided by our school system. It is imperative that our schools get enough funding to be able to staff appropriately and have flexibility for these situations. To that point, our districts need to have more funding going to teachers, specifically better pay for full time and substitute teachers, and more time allowed for planning and grading. I believe this pandemic has proven how our teachers and schools are invaluable.

Respectfully,

Kate Ampleman  
Lenexa, KS

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Members,

It was a blow to have my 5-year-old start Kindergarten as a remote student, but when given the choice, we elected to remain remote (until our remote learning facility closed down), mostly out of concern for the teachers putting their health at stake to teach. I was amazed this past fall that my kids' district was able to keep up remote, hybrid, and in-person schooling, and provide free lunches to all students each week. This was surely a yeoman's job, and was handled stunningly well.

Despite extreme measures for virus prevention on the campus, enough teachers were positive or isolating to require all students at our school to learn remotely for the week leading up to winter break. There remains concern about having enough substitute teachers to stay in-person throughout the remainder of the 20-21 school year.

The resources available to our public school are precious. Diverting government funds away from public schools to private school students via Bill HB2119 vouchers is a misuse of what are intended to be public monies. Don't penalize public schools for the hard work they are doing to keep our families and our beloved teachers safe.

Thanks,

Kate Vilain, parent of children at John Diemer Elementary in Johnson County

816-589-2155

[krobertus@gmail.com](mailto:krobertus@gmail.com)

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Members,

I am the parent of three Shawnee Mission School District students. My son is a 9th grader at Shawnee Mission Northwest, and I have two 6th graders at Benninghoven Elementary. My son, a 9th grader, has attended the first half of his first year of high school either remotely, or in hybrid mode, attending Mondays and Tuesdays in person, and working remotely Weds, Thurs, and Friday. He has earned A's in the past semester in all seven of his classes. He has made friends, and connected with extracurricular activities.

My two 6th graders attended school remotely last semester, and have returned to the school building in-person full time starting last week. They have both maintained As in their classes, and one of them has improved their grades over last year, and developed a new fondness for learning. This opportunity to work remotely has helped my child develop independence, time management, and a newfound confidence, and I see that continuing with a return to the school building.

While this has been a challenging time, we know it is temporary. My 3 children have thrived during these months of staying home. In our family, we have used this time to learn about doing the right thing and contributing to the welfare of our community. In addition to all they have learned through school, they have learned that as members of our community, we have had the opportunity to demonstrate our respect for, and care and kindness for others in our community whose health is more fragile. They have learned about sacrifice for the greater good, and have done that while maintaining all As with the support of highly engaged and supportive teachers who have made sure they have the tools they need to succeed in this challenging, albeit temporary time of COVID-19.

I realize this time of remote and hybrid learning has been challenging for some families. It has been very positive for our children. We are fortunate to be in the Shawnee Mission School District, where they have taken the steps needed to ensure ALL students are supported and able to learn, especially those who must work from home during this time.

This time is unprecedented. Nobody had a playbook for how to address the challenges of delivering high-quality education during a global pandemic. Our community and our school district has stepped up to the challenge, and as a result, I believe my children are better for it. It has not been positive for all families, however, so having options for in-person and remote have been helpful. Moving forward, my 9th grader will continue in a hybrid mode. He is able to connect with teachers and peers, and still limit the risk of exposure, which, while he may be unaffected, could result in negative health outcomes for close family members. My 6th graders have returned to the building, but if there is a need to move back to remote or hybrid, I am confident their school and their teachers will help them maintain their learning.

I believe instead of creating a pathway to divert funds from our public schools, thus penalizing those who choose to engage with and support public schools, our legislature should focus its resources on shoring up funding to public schools, and special education in particular, for those

children who need those supports. I believe our legislature should work to ensure that our public schools, which open their doors to ALL children have the tools and the support they need to ensure ALL children can continue learning during this challenging, yet temporary time. As rates of COVID in our community decrease and with the onset of vaccines, I know we can get "back to normal" soon. I urge you to continue supporting our public school, and not use the pandemic - a challenging, but temporary condition - as justification for legislation that would lead to public tax dollars being diverted away from public schools, to private schools.

Sincerely,  
Kathryn Bigelow, Ph.D.  
Parent of 3 Shawnee Mission School District students  
Shawnee, KS 66216  
913-526-8338



K-12 Education Budget Committee  
Chair Kristey Williams  
546-South  
Written testimony

Date of Hearing: Feb. 3

To Chair Williams and K-12 Education Budget Committee Members:

I am both a parent of a high school student as well as a high school teacher. We are in the Shawnee Mission SD. My student has chosen to remain virtual throughout this year of school. I teach at a private school where we teach in-person, have connected and hybrid learners. I have the rare insight to both sides of this argument.

This situation of virtual/hybrid learning during a pandemic is not ideal in any situation. We teachers are being asked to go even beyond what is being asked during a normal year. Students are forced into learning situations that are unpredictable and unprecedented. But, it is exactly that, unprecedented.

We are in a situation that is fixable. Now is not the time to be using something that is not "normal" to make changes to a system because it suits an argument. This is temporary. Institutions have had to make temporary adjustments to meet the unpredictable times.

With that said, the idea of "stealing" money from public schools to deepen the pockets of private schools is unacceptable. All this accomplishes is widening the gap of public education. Public education is for all. Private education is a choice if you have the means or find the means (scholarships, financial aid, etc).

Using a pandemic to further the agenda of using public funds for private institutions is unethical. This proposal of a concept that has been a talking point for 20+ years needs to be tabled until the pandemic gets under control. Voucher programs do NOT work. What works is giving more time, energy, money, and support **to our** public schools, NOT stealing money, time and support **from our** public schools.

I firmly disagree, especially with the situation at hand, to any program that takes money from our public schools. Now, even more, decisions should not be made until we control the pandemic and get back to "normal", whatever that may be.

Thank you,  
Katie Cox, Parent & Teacher  
Shawnee Mission East HS  
Leawood, KS  
[katiecox0702@gmail.com](mailto:katiecox0702@gmail.com)

Hello,

I am the mother of a first grader in Olathe School District's remote learning option. I wanted to share our experience. We chose to enroll our son in the remote option for both first and second semester this school year. Overall, it has been a very good experience. His teacher has been OUTSTANDING. As the semester progressed the teacher clearly learned what did and did not work well as a remote teacher. Things have been running very smoothly since about the second week of the school year. We have had almost no technology issues at all.

While our son misses the daily social interaction, this was the best option for our family. We appreciated the school district offering remote only options. I know people are always more quick to complain so I wanted to share a GOOD experience with you.

Respectfully,  
Katie Norwood

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee,

I just wanted to let you know what a horrible experience the remote learning has been at USD231. We have been disrespected by the school superintendent Pam Stranathan, and many of the school board members especially Shawn Carlisle and Rob Shippey. My son who has been an honor roll student from K-9th and is now struggling just to pass 10th grade classes. HE no longer wants to go to school and his social/mental well-being has deuterated. The kids have no support other than being told to figure it out. Parents have had no say in anything that has been decided at this school district even though we know our kids the best. It has all been a dictatorship of the school superintendent and her board members. We are the people living everyday with these kids and trying to juggle working, being the teacher for our child and trying to stay positive so they don't get any more depressed.

Remote School issues:

Teacher is just telling the child to do this and no instruction is being given.

Teachers are way behind on grading so by the time a child/parent finds out that they have a D/F is nearly impossible to get grade up

Wifi in this area is spotty at best. There are no good options for internet and continually dropping in class makes it almost impossible to follow what is going on

No replies to emails/calls from any school staff.

Please someone listen to the parents/kids in USD231 and get someone who cares about what these kids need.

Kelli

[ckkhgw@hotmail.com](mailto:ckkhgw@hotmail.com)

K-12 Education Budget Committee  
Chair Kristey Williams  
546-South

Written testimony on information concerning remote, hybrid and in-person learning

Date of Hearing: [Feb. 3](#)

To Chair Williams and K-12 Education Budget Committee Members:

My name is Kelly Brende. My husband and I live in Leawood, KS and my children attend school in the Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD).

We chose hybrid learning for my two sons. It hasn't been the best experience but in these unprecedented times the district, teachers and staff have performed remarkably. Sure there are things that could be improved and they have made improvements as the school year has progressed.

Teaching students in a pandemic is a complex situation with many factors to consider. It is my prayer that we will not have to do something like this again, but if we do we all need to be better prepared. I strongly believe our public schools will step up to the challenge.

We have always believed our public schools to be essential to our children, families and communities but the pandemic has shown how instrumental our public schools really are. Our public schools must be strong and have the resources available to support our students and families. So many students (college students too) are struggling with remote learning. We must always provide safe places for our students through public education.

It is imperative that school funding be increased to ensure our students are receiving the best education and support possible. Our families and our economy rely on strong public schools. Please do not redirect our tax dollars to private education. Public schools need more funding not less.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Kindly,  
Kelly Brende  
816-674-8584  
[Kbrende23@gmail.com](mailto:Kbrende23@gmail.com)

Written Testimony  
Informational Hearing on Remote and Hybrid Learning  
House K12 Education Budget Committee

By  
Shannon Kimball  
Lawrence, Kansas

February 3, 2021

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony on remote and hybrid learning in Kansas.

I am a school board member in USD 497 Lawrence Public Schools, as well as a parent of three students in the district. I have served on the board of USD 497 for ten and a half years; in addition, I have served as a board member and officer of the Kansas Association of School Boards. I submit this testimony in my individual capacity; my testimony is, however, informed by the expertise I have gained in these education leadership positions.

Throughout the pandemic, I have kept the best interests of students front and center in my decision making as a school board member. Protecting and promoting the health, safety, and academic success of students has never been more challenging than during this time. To inform my decisions, I have committed countless hours to gathering advice from public health professionals in my county and the state; gathering input and feedback from parents, teachers, students, and my community at large; consulting with my district leadership; and researching and evaluating best practices from across the state and around the country; all with the goal of making decisions on delivery of educational services to students that would allow them to continue their education in a safe and supportive learning environment during the pandemic.

There are no right or easy answers to the immense challenges presented by the pandemic. In a district the size of USD 497, the difficulty of implementing socially distancing as one of the pillars of COVID-19 risk reduction is exacerbated by large enrollments in many of our buildings. Consequently, the district has provided in-person learning in a hybrid model for the majority of the school year, while also providing a remote learning option for families. We have followed the directives and guidance of our local health department, KDHE, KSDE, and the CDC in this respect. While

imperfect compared to how a district can operate in the absence of a pandemic, our teachers have gone above and beyond to support both in-person and remote student learning in the midst of this global health crisis.

Decision making about how school districts should operate during the pandemic has been placed squarely on the shoulders of local school board members and superintendents. Local control has been urged as the best way for districts to respond with flexibility to their communities' needs. My district has exercised that local control and, as a board member, I have been asked to make decisions about how to deliver education and under what conditions during this pandemic. Not surprisingly, some part of the community has disagreed with the decisions made by the board. But we have been operating in exactly the way we have been tasked to operate by the Legislature, KDHE, and KSDE in this regard. I urge the Committee to resist the urge to second-guess these decisions at this juncture, and to reaffirm your commitment to local control of public education. Let me continue to do the work I was elected to do by my community and give me the equitable and adequate financial resources required to achieve the outcomes that are needed. Resist the urge to redirect funds to schools and programs that are not accountable to parents, students, or voters.

Thank you for your consideration.

Rep. Williams and Rep. Ruvalcaba,

The only thing we have to fear is fear itself. And you have taken this old phrase and created the land of the controlled and home of the scared with this pandemic. You have taught an entire generation that the unknown is scary and instead of embracing the unknown you need hide and stay hidden until it safe to come out. How do we grow as a society if we are constantly living in fear? We don't. There is no purpose in life anymore and that is why the number of attempted and successful suicides are on the rise. That is why ERs across the state are full every day with kids who do not see any reason to live - this is what you have created for them. Doom and gloom with zero chance of ever having a normal life again.

We haven't even lost 1% of our population to covid but yet our elected officials have caused more harm to 99% of our population with isolation and lockdowns than covid ever will. Yet no one in an elected capacity has the ability to realize this and do what is right by our kids, our state and our nation. It is truly all about keeping us under lock and key so the state can get the almighty federal dollars.

So how about standing up for our kids and doing what is right for them:

Open the schools.

All kids should be in school 5 days a week.

All activities should be open.

Anyone who wants to attend and watch their kid play, perform or debate - including grandparents can attend and sit shoulder to shoulder in support of their family.

Student section needs to be full again.

School assemblies need to happen.

Remove the masks.

Remove gating criteria.

Remove social distancing.

Remote learning is not learning. My kid said it best when I asked her how it was to go back to school for hybrid learning; you only learn in school. Open the the schools as you have literally run out of excuses.

The data is in - 99.98% will survive. This stat has not changed in one year and will never change. So let your motivation be about the future of kids instead of money.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Klingensmith

Johnson County resident

Blue Valley USD parent

I have two boys, Blake and Joe. Blake is a junior at Shawnee Mission East and Joe is an 8th grader at Indian Hills Middle School. I have always been a supporter of public schools and teachers. I am extremely disappointed in the hybrid learning schedule. Having two days to learn independently is extremely difficult for high school boys. My high schooler didn't even get out of bed until 10:30 this morning! The inconsistent schedule makes it difficult for them to get into the groove. They need more structure and consistency. They need to see their teachers in person. They need to see their friends. It is very hard to learn math and science virtually and/or 1-2x/week in person. The private schools in our area have been doing in person learning since the beginning. They clearly do not have an issue with Covid. It's time for the public schools to catch up.

Thank you,

Lindsay Sowden (parent)  
8537 Briar Lane  
Prairie Village, KS 66207  
913-636-5239  
Shawnee Mission School District



Roger,

I know you are receiving several emails about this, but I wanted to include my voice to let you know that our kids need to be back in school full time.

The private schools in Johnson County have been in school full-time since last August and they are not having any problems with Covid outbreaks. Why would it be any different in the public schools?

Hybrid/Remote learning is hurting our kids academically, socially and emotionally. There are many examples to back this up which I'm sure you know.

Why aren't we putting them back in school full time? Please listen to what the parents are telling you. Our kids NEED to be in school full-time.

Please listen and please make school full-time in person learning again. It is safe for them to be in school.

Thank you for listening.

Lori Funkey

Maki True  
Parent of Children attending Shawnee Mission School District Schools  
Prairie Village  
[sunflower218@gmail.com](mailto:sunflower218@gmail.com)  
913-735-3878

Date of Hearing: February 3, 2021

To: Chair Williams and K-12 Education Budget Committee Members

Here is a quick note to praise many staff, teachers, administrators at my children's public schools who tirelessly worked to keep our children engaged. As a parent there was nothing more I wanted than for my children to be able to go back to their schools full time as soon as possible.

I believe any adult/parent understood the enormous task the public schools had to overcome. Public school administrators had to balance the health of all who keep public schools running and the demands of the parents who wanted a safe place for their children to go during the day as it has been the norm before spring of 2020.

Public schools my children attend are not perfect. However, this is not the time to complain. I believe this is the time for everyone to come together and make public schools better so that EVERYONE in Kansas can get a good education. I think we found that out this past year how important public schools are.

Let's not forget that plenty of us made the wrong choices during this pandemic. We had to learn as we go and adapt as new information became available to us. We educated ourselves and moved on. We learned from our mistakes and experiences this past year.

My high school and middle school children upon learning their schools will move on to a hybrid schedule said they and their friends would absolutely wear masks if that meant they "get" to go to school. After several weeks of hybrid sessions the district we live in was challenged with teachers and staff shortages due to COVID related protocols. It was announced that middle school and high school students will go back to remote while elementary schools will be kept open full time. My children came home and shared with me what was announced at school and said how as much as they don't want to go back to remote that they understood the decision and it was the best considering the circumstances. I was pleasantly SURPRISED that these words came out of their mouths.

The public schools my children have attended and/or currently attend had list of things to improve before the pandemic. That has not changed. However, it is an amazing place that allows so many thoughts and ideas. That is the beauty of Public Schools. It is a place that brings many people together which allows my children to open their eyes and LEARN. I hope Kansas continues to fund public schools appropriately so that it can continue to improve upon what we have learned during this very difficult year.

Thank you.

The K-12 Budget Chair and Members,

My name is Meghan Hemenway and I am the parent of two children at Rising Star Elementary School in Lenexa and in the Shawnee Mission District. I am also the co-president of our PTA in what turned out to be a very unusual school year. I chose to keep my kids in the remote learning model for the entire year for a number of reasons the first being the safety of teachers, staff and family members of the students and staff in our community.

Knowing what we do about this global pandemic and after witnessing the high quality learning my children have received for more than three quarters - the end of the last school year and now this one - I am surprised and worried that HB2119 is being considered. I do not support the bill nor using public dollars for private education.

I have one child in gifted education and the second one is being tested in a remote-learning year. My children have done well enough - test scores etc - to continue to excel academically and the teachers and staff at not just their elementary school but in the district have supported and provided an individualized education plan for my children. I am aware that this is not everyone's experience, but the idea of further removing funding from schools that have faithfully and tirelessly strived to educate all children is insulting and short sighted. No one wants to be working, parenting, or governing in a global pandemic. There are no clear answers, but the idea of abandoning the public good at such a time is to try to find someone to blame for this situation and pushing the problems farther out into the future rather than finding solutions now.

Our elementary school has been Title I until the state reduced funding in 2019. Our population and its needs have not changed so without the funds teachers, staff, and parents have tried to cover the gap. I am glad that my children are in a diverse community school rather than making it to adulthood being surrounded mainly by people who look like them. I did not and would not choose to put them in private school. Their cultural, social, and emotional development is important to me and their school community is part of preparing them to be members of a diverse society.

Raising our children is a collective responsibility and should not be taken lightly or decided by people from one demographic. The well being and education of our children will affect every single Kansan. How well we care for them physically, emotionally and socially as well as how we choose to educate them will affect all of our futures.

Thank you,

Meghan Hemenway

Shawnee Mission School District parent and PTA president

Lenexa

913-633-1552

To the K-12 Budget Chair and Members,

I have two kids in public school in the Shawnee Mission School District (512, I believe). We live in Roeland Park, Kansas. My kids have been learning remotely from home during this entire school year. My eldest is in eighth grade, and my youngest is in second grade. While remote learning is not ideal, my kids are learning, and I'm grateful for this choice, because I am worried about the spread of the Corona virus. My mother lives with us and is over 65 with some other risk factors for complications if she gets Covid. My eldest daughter has an IEP for her academic giftedness. Her teachers have worked to incorporate additional projects to challenge her even while she is learning from home. My youngest has a harder time concentrating and paying attention to a screen, but it's been eye-opening for me and made me realize she may need extra help. Her teacher has been very responsive and we are working together to help my child do her best. She has still been able to participate in art, music, library, and PE from home.

This pandemic is unprecedented, and while long-lasting, will be temporary. I am grateful to our public schools and our teachers who have had to learn different methods of teaching and have become IT experts. I don't believe it is in the best interest of Kansans to divert any money away from our public school systems. They need more money actually. My kids have attended private schools in the past, and they were not able to meet the academic needs of my gifted child. They did not have the level of technology for today's world, and certainly wouldn't have been able to support 100% remote learning, which we need to protect my mother. They also did not have quality music, art, or PE offerings. Our public schools are vital for our community and for all Kansans.

Respectfully,

Melissa Castillo  
Parent  
913-707-0696

My name is Michelle Dombrosky

My husband Darren and I are parents of two Blue Valley Southwest High School students. I also serve as a board member for District # 3 on the Kansas State Board of Education. I have been very vocal about in person learning. Attending rallies, holding town hall meetings in the district where I serve. I voted for local control, because I feel it is much easier to voice your concerns locally than at the State level. We are a strong supporter of in person learning. I have been fighting to get kids back in person. We live in Olathe, KS in Johnson County

We sat down with our boys and asked them questions as it pertains to hybrid/remote learning. They are currently in a hybrid learning mode and have only been in that for a small part of the school year. It has mostly been remote.

Back in August we filled out two different surveys asking us how we would want our children to learn. We chose in person learning. We know that our children learn best in a classroom setting with their teacher and a monitored environment with fewer distractions. Here are their responses when we asked them about hybrid learning mode and remote. We have a freshman who is in a new high school setting this year for the first time and a junior.

"We do not have any motivation to do our work at home. When we are in school we are motivated to complete our school work. This could vary from person to person, but I actually have a better chance of retaining what I learn if I am in a school setting. "

"It is frustrating when all four of us on are wi-fi at the same time and I time out while trying to get a quiz or test code, or when I am supposed to be on zoom and cannot get on because our Wi-Fi kicked me off the internet. Then I feel rushed to take the test or quiz because I have to wait to ask the teacher for the code again and that takes time. I also have to restart the computer. It's time consuming, distracting, embarrassing, frustrating and would not happen if I was in school."

" Most of the work than I am doing from home that I am submitting, doesn't feel like it has any purpose. It is mostly busy work. The teachers feel obligated to assign it, but the work we do doesn't feel like anything of importance. I really don't feel like I have learned anything new while being at home this past year, nor have I retained much. I don't want to challenge any teacher's ability to teach, or say that they don't know the content of the work they do teach. I know this is a new concept of learning for everyone. I just don't feel that hybrid or remote learning works for the majority of students. It doesn't work for me."

"The masks are mostly annoying and a distraction from learning. Students are not asking questions in the classrooms as much as they have in the past. Especially when we are remote and at home on camera. No one wants to discuss anything on a zoom. It is awkward and very uncomfortable. It is a lecture and nothing more."

"While in the classroom, if the teacher feels like they are saying something very important, they will pull their masks away from their face so we can hear, and the same goes for the students."

"Lunch time is the only time you feel like you can take a break. Then we are distanced 6' from one other student. Only two per table. You have ZERO time to socialize or get to know the other students. It is very hard for any new kid in our school or the incoming freshmen to adjust or be social."

"I feel that school is 80% social and 20% academic. In this hybrid mode, we aren't able to do any socializing. It is quiet and very eerie. People are not communicating with each other during school hours. These years are the most important years of being social and learning how to be social. " "This type of learning is keeping us from that piece. "

"We feel that we are a HUGE burden on the schools. We don't feel welcome."

"While at home, I always turn my camera on because it is the closest thing to being in a school setting and it keeps me focused and more accountable, but I would much rather be in a school setting where I can ask questions, learn from my peers and be in a setting that is more conducive to learning."

"This type of learning isn't really learning or education. It is busy work, inputting answers, and there is a greater chance for cheating if you are at home. I want to be sure that my grades are a reflection of what I should be learning."

Thank you for your time and listening to our concerns.

Michelle and Darren Dombrosky

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee,

My son is 11 years old and attended the Gardner Edgerton School district from Kindergarten until 6th grade. He had a wonderful experience going to school there. When our district offered us the chance to have in person learning during the 2020-2021 school year we opted to do that. However our school board and superintendent decided it wasn't safe enough for our son to follow through with our wishes.

What followed was 2 quarters of struggle, tantrums, missing assignments, missing class time, broken relationships, and absolutely no academic or social learning. Our son is diagnosed with ADD. He requires a constant adult presence with him during his educational day. Without this he is unable and unwilling to learn. My wife and I are both elementary teachers so we had to be at our own jobs, educating other people's kids who got to learn in person.

After he struggled for two quarters we decided to pull him out of the school district and we sent him to a private school. Now we are paying taxes so other kids can learn in person and pay even more money so our kid can get the education he's entitled to. Now we're thankful for Heritage Christian Academy in Overland Park for all they're doing for our son. He may even continue there throughout middle school.

We know that they value educating our son in the best way possible. They made education a priority in their school. The Gardner Edgerton School District's priorities seem to be fear and indecision.

**Mr. Nate Brumet**

*First Grade Teacher*

Madison Elementary School

800 W. Madison Street

Gardner, KS 66030

913.856.0433

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee,

I am writing to you today to tell you about our families experience with remote learning. I know that remote learning can bring frustration and stress to many, but I wanted to share a positive story regarding remote learning.

We have 2 children, Jacob in 10th grade and Elise in 5th grade in the Olathe school district. Because their dad is immunocompromised, we had little choice regarding remote learning and our kids have been 100% remote this entire school year. Jacob has high functioning Autism, so naturally we had concerns about him adjusting to remote learning. We are so thankful for having remote school as a choice for our family and have been pleasantly surprised how wonderful of an experience and opportunity it has been for both our kids. Sure it has many challenges, especially when your one child has special needs and typically thrives on routine. Going into remote learning we knew that much of our children's success hinged on the attitude we as their parents brought to the situation. From the very beginning we presented it as a blessing full of opportunities. The personal growth we have seen in our kids these past 10 months has been astounding. We are so proud of them. Jacob finished his first full remote semester at 4.0 gpa and a weighted gpa of 4.5 as he takes all Honors classes. Elise finished her semester with all A's as well.

As I know you hear all the horror stories of remote school and how horrible it is for students, I wanted to give you a different perspective from maybe the quieter voice that is so very thankful for remote learning.

Thank you for your time.  
Regina Tireman



Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee,

I am writing to you to express our families experiences with remote learning through the USD 231 school district.

I had hopes last summer when the school district had sent out a survey to the parents regarding in person or virtual learning, that they in fact cared and would listen to what we had to say. Since that time, we have found nothing could have been further from the truth. The lack of accountability and listening to the people in which they serve, they have done the exact opposite.

Prior to the pandemic I had 3 students in the GE School district. Our experiences last spring were terrible. Our teachers were trying their best, many of them while their children were also at home. However, our students were still struggling and not getting what they needed to be successful. My second grader felt alone, that she didn't matter, that she was too embarrassed to be on camera and overall that she wasn't smart enough to do school anymore. My son, who is also on the autism spectrum, began to revert back to some of the very tendencies that we have worked for years to overcome. My then junior (this year senior) went in to an immediate downward not only academically but socially and emotionally as well. She felt as though she and her friends didn't matter. Everything from the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of her junior year through her senior year has been taken away from her.

I am thankful that some students were still able to participate in sports. But what about the other students? The craft or musical students? The students who were involved in so many other extracurricular activities that get nothing? Our school district has repeatedly shown this community that our students do not matter. Obviously playing sports is MORE important than getting our children the education they and we deserve for them.

In August when the school district decided to NOT send our kids in person (or even hybrid), I had to make a very tough decision for my children. My 3<sup>rd</sup> grader and my 10<sup>th</sup> grader are now homeschooled by me, a full time working parent. To be honest, it is working very well. I don't see them struggling as much emotionally or socially as I do my senior that has been forced virtual learning. I gave her the choice to do the virtual learning or we could homeschool. She wanted to go virtually with the hopes that we would very soon be in person and she would in fact get all the "senior things" from her senior year. Her first semester of her senior year she attended 1 soccer game, only because her boyfriend gave her one of his two tickets from his parents. She has not been to class in person, seen her friends, had any dances, games, or activities. She literally spent her days on Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 3:15 PM on the computer, which most of the time would count her absent because of computer connection issues or other various things. Her junior and senior year was pretty much a waste even though she made the most of it and tried her best. Her grades began to slip and she began to not care. Why should she care when the school board is showing her they don't care? So many kids are committing suicide because of the lack of engagement and interaction that they as children and human beings NEED. My daughter will grow from this experience. She is finally being given a chance to have a few interactions before her high school career is over in a hybrid setting, but we have great concern with this model.

We as parents have to pay taxes and school fees. For what? For our children to fail? Our board talks about they are doing what is in 'their hearts. That is NOT what they were elected to do.

They were elected to make the best decisions for the students and the community in which it represents. Every school district around ours has been at least hybrid if not full in person this entire year. Why can't we?

It certainly hasn't been ideal, but I am thankful that she is going to overcome this with God and her family and friends on her side. I just want her to have the opportunities that every high school student looks forward to: prom, games, hanging out in the hallways, and graduation.

In the future I do not have plans to send my other two children back to the public education system for fear of how much power our school board holds with little to no regard of our students and their wellbeing. There just has to be a better solution.

I appreciate your time today and hope and pray that you can hear our cries and offer a light of hope.

Thank you.  
Samantha Randle

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee,

I have a senior and a freshman at GEHS. Shortly after school started remote my freshman began struggling to pay attention at home. As a result her grades started to decline. I emailed the school board and superintendent at least 10 times first semester regarding my daughters decreasing grades and mental state. After the first semester concluded I did not get any concern shown from the district. I optimistically watched the January board meeting knowing that all the other schools in KS were implementing plans to return to the classroom. When they did not even have a discussion about getting the kids back I knew my child's only opportunity to learn would be to switch schools. Since selling our house and moving to another district wasn't possible right now, I had to pull \$6,500 from my retirement to pay for private school. I again emailed the superintendent and explained how expensive of a decision this is and what the district was willing to do to help with this expense. No response from Pam from any email I ever sent. My senior did not want to transfer and graduate from anywhere else although at least 10 of his classmates did. He has been an A/B student from K-12, multi sport athlete, and homecoming king candidate. His ACT score dropped 3 points between the February and December tests in 2020. My daughter is now happier being in school full time however she is so far behind due to the year of missing education. So not only has the negligence of USD231 affected my children's education and mental health, I am also sacrificing my retirement to give my child the education she should be getting for free at a public school. And when I withdrew her from USD231 they told me I had to pay 2nd semester fees even though it was just the beginning of 2nd semester since they delayed the school start and semester was starting after Jan 1. The bookkeeper said that came directly from the superintendent Pam. Even though I had already expressed how much it was costing us to switch schools, she felt the need to charge us for a semester we weren't even going to be attending USD231 during.

Shawna Dyer

[shawnakdyer@gmail.com](mailto:shawnakdyer@gmail.com)

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee,

My name is Stephanie Williams, I have reached out to the school board and superintendent. Along with spoke on my children's behalf at a board meeting regarding my children in forced remote learning since spring break of 2020. This has been a horrible experience for our family. I have a 6th grade student, 9th, and 11th grade. Two of my students have 504. All 3 of my children have ADHD and this learning platform does not work for their every day education struggles. We have tried so many strategies to make this work. Everyone of these have failed.

I also have a almost 2 year old and care for my niece with multiple special needs. Evelyn my niece was born blind due to a genetic mutation. This same genetic mutation has brought us to a new path entirely, Osteoporosis-pseudoglioma syndrome or OPPG, is our new battle. We have faced multiple broken bones. My sister is a single mother and I share in the caring for this special little girl. That needs very special care. I share this with you to help you understand the level of stress our family is under and working through on a daily level. We always have found ways to make things work. But to take the ability for my children to walk away and get an education in a calm focused atmosphere is the worst thing that could have happened in their lives. For their mental health, physical health and our family dynamic has become battlegrounds! I have pulled two of my children to home school them thinking this would help with the daily battle I was up against. The anger and frustration my kids have has become unbearable. As a mother it is all my fault, and I have never felt so hopeless as a mother in my life.

My children love school, enjoy learning and never wanted to miss. Now they have lost all motivation and drive. I worry that my 11th grade daughter will be able to even graduate on time. She has talked about GAD. Because that's what her friend has done. I just won't let her give up. She struggles to stay awake. Even get into classes, as far as I can see. But as I said before I am also caring for many other children. My son that is in 9th grade has been put in such a hard situation. Very ADHD dyslexic and sensory processing disorder. He is highly intelligent but can not learn in this platform. I pulled him and tried to give something else a shot with an accredited online school that is costing monthly. It is not working out. No matter what I do my son needs teachers educating him. So this kid will most likely have to retake 9th grade and this breaks my heart! I am so frustrated overwhelmed and spread too thin. When I should have a USD 231 to count on for help in the education of these children. Remote learning is not the education that works for some children, there needs to be consideration taken. For families, disabilities which ADHD is a disability! My children are followed by a doctor at Children's Mercy that would never recommend this learning platform for their mental health or education needs! I do not believe USD 231 has taken time to think about unique family settings or challenges we may be facing as a community. I appreciate your time in listening to our struggles.

Thank you,  
Stephanie Williams @  
[Uniquelymade4good@gmail.com](mailto:Uniquelymade4good@gmail.com)



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**STEPHEN LINKOUS**  
CHIEF OF STAFF

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February 2, 2021

Online and Hybrid Learning

Stephen Linkous, Chief of Staff  
Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools

Dear Chairperson Williams and members of the committee.

Online and Hybrid Learning.

In March in of 2020, Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools, like other public-school districts in the state of Kansas, was forced to begin remote learning due to the COVID-19 Pandemic that swept through our nation. We were able to complete the year online and then began planning for the 2020-2021 School Year with both hybrid and online options. Our Board of Education and USD 500 re-entry team began the process of phasing in the return of essential employees to different work sites. This work began as the Unified Government of Wyandotte County created mandates and guidance for a return to learning.

As summer arrived decisions needed to be made whether to return to classes in person with all students attending, return in a hybrid model with cohorts of students attending together, or remain in a remote learning environment. In reviewing county mandates, community infection rates as well as our ability to mitigate at a high level, the decision was made to remain in a remote learning mode. This decision was a difficult one, but with rates in Wyandotte at times reaching close to 40%, it was decided that remote learning was safest for students and staff. This also decision was also made with the idea slowing community spread. This would lead to the large scale roll out of technology and the repurposing of professional development time to assist staff in creating-remote lessons for their students. This decision would be revisited over the next couple of months with the initial idea of beginning a hybrid model in January. Continued collaborative conversations continued and two actions came from this. Bringing back a handful of staff members to work with students who had recently arrived to the country to ensure their acquisition of English wouldn't be slowed. They would return in-person in November. The second action was the return of special education students from the Special Education STEPS and SAILS programs. These particular students receive special education services and the district acted to bring these students back in person to eliminate further learning gaps. They returned in December as IEPs needed to be amended, and there was additional work required to ensure mitigations were in place for all students and staff in meeting their particular academic and social needs.



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**STEPHEN LINKOUS**  
CHIEF OF STAFF

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A collaborative dialogue continued between Board of Education and USD 500 staff to look at a return to school in hybrid mode. Community spread was still well above 20% and it was decided that remote learning would continue through April. The one caveat to this was the return of high needs learners including a second group of special education students, Seniors who may not graduate on time and students from elementary schools with connectivity issues. By the end of February this will include around 1800 district students. Conversations and planning have to extended to bringing back middle school students with connectivity issues in March.

KCKPS is on track to bring groups of students back in person in a hybrid mode in April. This will be a parent's choice as community spread continues to be well above state averages and for those families that choose to return in person, continued work to slow the spread will take place through mitigation practices and access to the vaccine for more members of our staff and community. Please understand that it has been difficult to have students learning in remote mode during this last 10 months, but decisions were made to protect the public health while continuing to assist our learners continue with their progression to master state standards.

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee:

My son's experience with remote/hybrid school for the most part has been negative. The hardest part that he expressed to me is the lack of socialization!! Even with hybrid, he can only see half of his friends/student body when at school. Along with missing the normal interaction with teachers and staff on a daily basis. Even though my son is a good student I see a temptation to share information with other students on tests & assignments etc. For him, this obviously makes remote/hybrid easier than attending in person but definitely not educational or challenging!

The only positive aspect of remote/hybrid that we have found is that my son hasn't had to drive to school in bad weather. Although so far, that really hasn't been much of an issue this year.

Thank you,

Susan Stine  
[ssstine22@gmail.com](mailto:ssstine22@gmail.com)

Written-only testimony  
Remote and Hybrid Learning Informational Hearing  
House K-12 Budget Committee  
Dr. Caroline Danda  
[carolinedanda@gmail.com](mailto:carolinedanda@gmail.com)  
913-940-9536  
February 3, 2020

Chairwoman Williams and Members of the Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony relevant to remote and hybrid learning. My name is Dr. Caroline Danda. I am a licensed child psychologist and the mother of three students in the Blue Valley school district in Johnson County: an 8<sup>th</sup> grader, a sophomore and senior. They have been largely remote, with a few weeks in hybrid.

Distance learning does not work. Even in hybrid mode where students finally have contact and engagement in school during in-person days, instruction is extremely limited during at home days due to teachers' needing to focus on students in the actual classroom. The hybrid format is also disruptive to the consistency and structure needed for learning.

The social, emotional, and academic fall-out due to the isolation and disconnection associated with hybrid and distance learning is enormous. I see it in my house, where two of my three teens essentially failed all their classes. I see their struggles with depression and anxiety. I wonder if one child, who has ADHD and anxiety, will ever go back and be successful at school. He's gotten too used to being at home. I hear the same stories, every, single day, in my office and from my friends. Students are increasingly isolated, depressed, anxious, and, honestly, many have learned to not care about school. Students are disengaged and fatigued by the amount of screen time, the workload, and the absence of a learning environment. At home, students do not have the same environmental cues, movement breaks, socialization, or connections to students or teachers that lead to engaging in learning or maintaining a sense of well-being. They are falling behind academically and suffering socially and emotionally.

These are the facts.

- The CDC shows anxiety and depression among adolescents has tripled since the pandemic began.
- A national 4-H council survey found more than 7 in 10 teenagers are struggling with mental health.
- At a recent Johnson County Commissioner's meeting, they noted that calls to the crisis hotline were up 35%.

Recent data from a voluntary survey from Blue Valley School District found that social emotional well-being is a concern locally:

- 42% of parents were extremely concerned or very concerned about their child's social-emotional well-being, with another 28% being somewhat concerned
- 51% of staff were concerned a great deal or a lot about students' social-emotional well-being, with another 28% concerned a moderate amount
- 24% and 33% of high school students felt not at all connected or not so connected with other students, respectively; while 16% and 33% felt not at all or not so connected with adults at school, respectively.



- 12% and 25% of parents reported that it was difficult to very difficult, respectively, to focus on schoolwork

Although I do not have statistics regarding academics, personal and clinical experience tells me that student absences are high, grades lower, and learning decreased as students struggle to maintain focus and effort in their schoolwork when remote or hybrid. In order to learn, students need the structure, consistency, and relationships of going to school, in person, every day. The current distance and hybrid learning is not sustainable. So many students are behind academically. They need to be in school as soon as possible, full time; regardless, many students will need help and support to regain their confidence in learning, rebuild effective learning habits, and reforge connections.

Thank you for your attention to our children's health and well-being.

K-12 Education Budget Committee  
Chair Kristey Williams  
546-South

Written testimony on information concerning remote, hybrid and in-person learning

Erica Dugdale, Parent of Diemer Elementary and Shawnee Mission South High School students,  
PTA Members at Diemer & Shawnee Mission South HS, & SMAC PTA Board Member

Overland Park, Kansas

ericasdugdale@gmail.com

Date of Hearing: Feb. 3

To Chair Williams and K-12 Education Budget Committee Members:

When we were notified that school would be on an unplanned break last March, I don't think any of us understood what was coming in the following weeks and months. My children were home with my husband and I, learning remotely as we worked remotely. We were balancing our jobs and their schooling as well as we could. It was a struggle at times, but it was also comforting to know that they were safe from this virus. Their teachers worked very hard to create stability for our kids in a very unstable environment.

Before school started this year we selected In Person/Hybrid for both of our children, with the hope that the infection rates would go down and they could regain some semblance of normalcy. As the numbers continued to skyrocket, we were able to change our youngest child's status to Remote because he was having anxiety about going back to school. I appreciated the flexibility that our school district gave us, allowing us to change because attending school would have been very hard for him to do during the pandemic. Our oldest, a freshman, struggled with Remote learning so the move to Hybrid from Remote was something he was really looking forward to.

What I already knew but has been reinforced by this Pandemic, is that our Public School Teachers and Staff are vital to our community's health and development. I am in awe of how they have handled this situation, how they have consistently put their students first. What has been asked of them was a huge effort and they have thrown themselves into it. There should have been clear guidelines set forth for all districts from a Federal and State level instead of leaving each individual district to try to determine the safest plan for their students and staff. Our schools also needed financial support for more teachers and staff to allow for social distancing and the increased workload that managing a remote classroom. But rather than lead, our leaders have left someone else to do the dirty work.

What I have learned from this Pandemic is that our Federal and State governments need constant reminding that Public Education is part of what makes America great and contributes directly to all of our American Dreams. When a group of lobbyists and legislators use a terrible situation like this Pandemic as an opportunity to divert tax dollars from Public Education, they do so at a cost to all Americans. We should be funding our Public Schools at a higher rate, so that all students can get the

education they deserve and the mental health support they will all need when the Pandemic is over. Our Public School teachers have been among the heroes in this crisis and I hope that we honor them by providing the kind of financial support they have deserved all along.

Rep. Ruvalcaba,

My boys are in middle school in Olathe, KS. We have some pretty significant factors that make us likely to struggle should we become infected with SARS CoV 2. So we chose to have our boys do remote learning. We have been very happy with that choice!

First, we wanted stability and safety. Online offered basic stability and plenty of safety.

Second, we knew we were capable of helping our boys, should they need assistance. We knew they were capable of being relatively responsible and motivated, so it was an easy choice there.

Third, we weren't confident that the district or county or state wouldn't manipulate data to show kids could safely be in school. Or, that as a sub, it would be safe for me. And, unfortunately, our suspicions were confirmed when schools began changing criteria and manipulating numbers. We would have yanked our boys out had we chosen in person when that began.

Fourth, our boys have really done well academically online. They have been less stressed also. (We are lucky that our middle school does a block schedule for online. We believe this has really helped with stress.) Our older middle schooler has always been very shy and reluctant to speak up in class. Teachers have said he is really coming along and they feel online has helped him increase his confidence speaking during class.

Fifth, we've had great communication from teachers for the boys.

I realize that we are fortunate to have been able to have our boys home. However, I feel like if WyCo, one of the poorest counties per capita in the state can manage to have kids online, the JoCo the most wealthy per capita could have also.

Best wishes in your tenure. Please fight for the people. ALL of the people, not just those that voted for you.

Thank you! Sincerely,  
Tierney Parker

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee.,

My name is Tim Phillips and I have 2 kids in USD-231.

My 8 year old is attending Sunflower middle school. He has always struggled with school and was not always a fan of going. He is thriving this year and loves going to school. He has always struggled with reading and is getting help in the school. He is currently on a care plan, at the school district and is doing well to with the help of the teachers.

I also have a 11year old who is in 6th grade. She loved going to school, she was diagnosed with ADHD and is also on a care plan. She also got a lot of help in the areas she needing help with, and has been succeeding.

Ever since covid has hit, my daughter has been really down and missing her friends. My son is a different person, loves going to school and enjoys his teacher.

My daughter's virtual learning is really a joke. To me it seems like this is just a check the box. Half the time she is walking around our house. I work from home but I am not able to supervise what she should be doing. Some of the teachers just have the kids watch a video and they are here for help if they need them.

Like I said before she was on a care plan, now with virtual learning she is not getting any of that. I have requested an IEP of 504, and I have yet to see that happen. They state that she is getting good grades, so one is not needed. She works really hard and should not have to fail to get help with ADHD.

She really needs to be in the classroom where there is more structure. I guess some IEP kids are in school.

I have sent several emails out to Pam and have either been sent to someone else or no response at all.

Every time there is a BOE meeting and parents attend they are not listening. I feel that this BOE has failed this district, and has taken the easy route.

Bottom line is my child is not getting the proper education through virtual learning and it needs to be fixed. I would love to know if the program we are using is in compliance.

Dear K-12 Budget Chair and Committee,

My daughter is a 6<sup>th</sup> grader who is currently attending a learning pod with one other 6<sup>th</sup> grader and three kindergarteners. We had originally enrolled her in public school, but quickly pulled her when we learned that she would be forced remote. She told us she could not learn by being on a computer all day. While the learning pod is not ideal, it's the best choice for now. We chose to provide a higher quality education for her, even though it puts our family into a very different financial position. I am so thankful for that decision. We have not experienced the stress and frustration other families have had. Watching the parents, kids and even teachers struggle through this school year has been heartbreaking. Since I am looking at it from a difference perspective and not directly involved, I can see the lack of communication from the superintendent & board has contributed to this frustration. Maybe it isn't even the lack of communication, but lack of compassion and respect for others. The last-minute communications on what the school plans are. Meeting once a month and formatting the meetings in a way that is more of a dictatorship. Picking and choosing of guidelines to follow with what appears to be no consistency. When there is little to no explanation on why decisions are made, people are left to make their own assumptions. I would not want to be in their position right now, I am certain it is difficult and I wish the circumstances were different. But I cannot help but to think of how much differently this would feel to parents if we would have felt the board was FOR our kids. The extra stress this has put on parents & kids is uncalled for and is unacceptable, in my opinion.

My greatest concern at this point is how this board will lead our school community moving forward. As with many parents, I have lost confidence that future decisions will be made with our children's best interest in mind. I do not I trust this superintendent and I have anxiety over what the 2021-22 school year will look like. Honestly, I would prefer to send her to a private school but I don't know if it's a wise financial move for my family (note: the current learning pod will no longer be an option next year).

I spoke at the BOE meeting in December and requested honest communication to this community and a solid timeline. A timeline with goals – to work towards getting kids back in school. I'm not sure that is the board's goal – to get kids back in school. I also do not believe they have been using data that supports what is happening in our community.

Thank you for listening and I will cling to hope---that the words you hear today will prompt action for our school district moving forward.

**Tina Link**

[Tinalink25@gmail.com](mailto:Tinalink25@gmail.com)

Good morning,

I'm writing to you today to inform you of our educational experience 2020-2021 school year. We are in the Olathe School District. The remote learning sessions are completely catastrophic. An abundance of technical issues plague the educational system for districts of this size which vastly impacts all attempts at education. There are hundreds of studies that show children need to be in-person in-school for the best education to transpire.

Hybrid is only one step better than remote which is incredibly bad. Do you really believe high school Juniors and Seniors are being prepared for college by only going to school part-time. If you answer yes to this question you need to look in the mirror and ask yourself why you're involved with education.

As parents, we pay taxes and are now paying for additional services that impact our daily expense budget and professional lives for something you are obligated to provide!! GET US BACK TO IN-PERSON, IN-SCHOOL LEARNING FULL-TIME. Our children are being robbed of their educational and school experiences!

Todd McMullen

Dear K-12 budget chair, and committee,

I just wanted to reach out and tell ypu how our remote learning is going in our house. I have 4 kids ,freshmen, 8th grader,4th grader and a kindergarten. My Two youngest are in school full time. My freshmen and my 8th grader have not been in school for a year now. My 8th grader has been failing all his classes since last March. Most of the time he get kicked out of the zoom class because of connectivity issues. So he misses what happens and class. He is on the crome book for 8 hours for classes spends more time trying to get in to class then in class. Then when he is done with classes he try to get some homework done. Which is another 4- hours. He wants to give up. He feels that he is failing anyway why should he even.He is so very stressed. This way is not helping him to be ready for high school. He needs the peer interaction. Needs the face to face learning to be successful student. We have spoke to out school board,we have sent emails. All sports are allowed to play but my child can't be in school. Our board members are supposed to stand up for our kids and they have done nothing for them. If by next year they are not in full time school we will seek out a different district cause all the other districts around us seem to have it figured out. But not Gardner Edgerton.

Thank you for your time.

Tricia Tadlock