



January 29th 2025

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Public Comment on KSDE Budget
House K-12 Education Budget Committee

Chair Goetz and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer my testimony today. My name is Logan Stenseng, and I am with Thrive Kansas, leading our Zero to Thrive Kansas initiative. For nearly three years, we have been working on the ground across our state, engaging with families and childcare providers – in both urban and rural areas. Our mission is to identify and advocate for policy solutions that effectively address the needs of Kansans involved in the critical work of early childhood education. The Zero to Thrive coalition is committed to advocating for strategic investments in quality childcare and sensible policies that empower families and children across our state, with a particular focus on supporting our rural communities.

The proposed \$10 million for Child Care Capacity Accelerator Grants represents a crucial investment to expand early childhood capacity and address the pressing issue of childcare deserts. This investment isn't just about childcare; it's about setting the stage for a stronger Kansas.

We also support \$2.9 million dollars in funding for the CACFP program to ensure more programs receive funding to access quality foods for their early childhood programs.

Both of these investments should be funded directly from SGF, to ensure the CIF programs that are currently funded do not receive harmful cuts.

Across Kansas, we see local leaders from all walks of life coming together to tackle the childcare challenges in their communities. Child Care Aware of Kansas has played a vital role in convening leaders in 77 of our 105 counties, helping them formulate local strategies to create and sustain high-quality early childhood education. These convenings bring together a diverse group of stakeholders, including childcare providers, business owners, families, school district leaders, hospital representatives, economic development directors, and more. This collaborative approach fosters innovative solutions tailored to the unique childcare needs of each community. Many communities have organized job fairs, appreciation events, and directed resources to local providers. However, the most significant challenge they face is increasing the supply of childcare slots, which often requires capital investments.

As a founding member of the Allen County Child Care Task Force, I've witnessed firsthand the value and priorities of these local collaboratives. Our countywide effort to strengthen early childhood education has led to every school district developing plans to expand quality childcare options, and we have secured strong community partnerships to support these goals. We were fortunate to receive Accelerator grants for Humboldt, which will improve the childcare supply across the county. However, transformational projects in Iola and Moran remain unfunded. Across Kansas, there are \$60 million in unfunded proposals, demonstrating that while this \$10 million is a meaningful investment, it's also a necessary step towards making these projects a reality and serving children and families as soon as possible. The need for these childcare options is immediate, and strategic investments now will create a positive ripple effect throughout the state. Food costs are high as well, and any investment in the CACFP program aids in the financial security of our child care programs.

Investing in early childhood education is not just a benefit to families; it is an investment in Kansas's future. These grants will spur economic development, support working parents, and prepare our youngest citizens for success.

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in school and beyond. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the KSDE budget recommendations. I welcome any questions you might have and can be reached at logan@thriveallencounty.org.

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