

January 27, 2025



Subject: Elimination of reduced-priced co-pay for Kansas kids

Dear Chairman Goetz and Members of the House K-12 Education Budget Committee:

On behalf of LiveWell Douglas County, I am writing to express our full support for eliminating the reduced-priced co-pay for school meals. LiveWell Douglas County is our community coalition focused on policy, system, and environmental changes that address health inequities and support the health and well-being for all residents. As a lead organization for reducing food insecurity as outlined in our local Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), we work closely with local partners to listen and collect perspectives from folks living in Douglas County. You may not realize that over 40% of households in Douglas County are struggling to afford basic necessities. Eliminating the reduced-price co-pay for school meals would help families in Douglas County and across the state:

- Increase access to a healthy breakfast and lunch at school
- Improve student health outcomes; those who participate in school meals also benefit from better test scores, fewer school absences, and fewer behavioral referrals
- Help Kansas families who are struggling with rising costs of groceries
- Ensure Kansas kids have what they need to thrive

We encourage you to invest in Kansas kids and eliminate the reduced-price co-pay for school meals.

Respectfully,

*Ginny Barnard*

Ginny Barnard, MPH  
Executive Director  
LiveWell Douglas County

January 29, 2025

Proponent: Elimination of the reduced-priced co-pay for Kansas kids

Dear Chairman Goetz and Members of the House K-12 Education Budget Committee:

I am writing to request that you eliminate the reduced-price co-pay on school meals as part of the 2025 budget. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Governor Laura Kelly's proposal to include funding in the state budget to provide free meals for children who qualify for reduced-price school meals. My name is Kara Bunce, and I am a public health educator, as well as a proud advocate for the health and well-being of Kansas children. I currently sit on our Food Advisory Council in Reno County, as well as the Reno County School Health and Wellness Alliance. I am writing today to voice my strong support for this important initiative, which will make a lasting impact on thousands of families across our state.

As someone who works closely with schools and communities to promote student health (in addition to being a former classroom teacher), I see firsthand the barriers many children face when it comes to accessing adequate nutrition. For the more than 35,000 Kansas children who currently qualify for reduced-price school meals, even the modest cost of those meals can be a burden on families already struggling to make ends meet. Providing free meals to these students would alleviate a significant source of stress for parents and ensure that every child has the nutrition they need to thrive both academically and physically.

We know that hunger negatively affects a child's ability to focus, learn, and succeed in school. By eliminating the financial barrier for families with reduced-price eligibility, this proposal not only addresses a critical public health issue but also promotes equity in education. No child should have to go through the school day hungry or feel singled out because their family cannot afford a full-price meal. Ensuring all children have access to nutritious meals at school helps create a foundation for lifelong health and success.

This initiative is also a step forward in reducing food insecurity in Kansas, a state where too many families face the difficult choice between paying for food, housing, or other necessities. By expanding access to free school meals, we are directly investing in the health and future of our communities.

Eliminating the reduced-price co-pay for school meals would:

- Help 36,000 Kansas have access to a healthy breakfast and lunch at their school.
- Expand access to school meals. Students who participate in school meals benefit from improved health outcomes, better test scores, fewer school absences, and fewer behavioral referrals.
- Provide targeted financial relief for Kansas families who are struggling with rising costs of groceries.

- With 1 in 5 Kansas kids currently experiencing food insecurity, this would help ensure kids have access to at least two healthy meals each day.
- Invest in the future of Kansas kids, ensuring they have what they need to thrive.

I urge the committee to approve Governor Kelly's proposal and ensure that Kansas joins the growing number of states prioritizing child nutrition and equity in schools. This is an opportunity for us to lead by example and demonstrate that we are committed to supporting every student in our state, regardless of their family's financial circumstances.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical issue and for your dedication to the well-being of Kansas children. I am happy to answer any questions or provide further information to support this proposal.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kara Bunce", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kara Bunce  
Buhler, KS

Testimony of Jane Byrnes, MS LDN, Wichita, Kansas  
In Support of Funding Reduced-Price Copays

Chairman Goetz and members of this important committee:

As a dietitian licensed in the state of Kansas, in my previous career I travelled to many Kansas schools and school cafeterias. In my current position, I teach Diet and Nutrition to university students. By USDA regulation, school meals are required to meet nutrition standard, and indeed all districts' breakfasts and lunches I saw were nutrient-dense!

However, many students in all these schools missed those nutrients because of the stigma of payment. Especially as students grew older, too many students hung away from cafeterias, going hungry. I saw that most often in rural and urban school districts—not so much in wealthier suburban districts. I assume those farm and city students were also food-insecure at home, a double misfortune

I still see the acute need for nourishment in growing bodies, minds and learning abilities in children and teens. To provide for a prosperous Kansas, it will be wise that the Kansas legislature eliminate the "reduced-price" category for school meals. In fact, hope that meets with such success that the Kansas legislature will follow up with insuring all Kansas children and teens school meals at no cost.

Thank you so much for caring for the health and education our future Kansas adults!

Jane Byrnes, MS LDN

Wichita, Kansas

[urbanejane5@gmail.com](mailto:urbanejane5@gmail.com)

January 26, 2025

Testimony to Kansas House Committee on K-12 Education Budget

Chairman Goetz and members of this important committee:

As a dietitian licensed in the state of Kansas, in my previous career I travelled to many Kansas schools and school cafeterias. In my current position, I teach Diet and Nutrition to university students. By USDA regulation, school meals are required to meet nutrition standard, and indeed all districts' breakfasts and lunches I saw were nutrient-dense!

However, many students in all these schools missed those nutrients because of the stigma of payment. Especially as students grew older, too many students hung away from cafeterias, going hungry. I saw that most often in rural and urban school districts—not so much in wealthier suburban districts. I assume those farm and city students were also food-insecure at home, a double misfortune

I still see the acute need for nourishment in growing bodies, minds and learning abilities in children and teens. To provide for a prosperous Kansas, it will be wise that the Kansas legislature eliminate the “reduced-price” category for school meals. In fact, hope that meets with such success that the Kansas legislature will follow up with insuring all Kansas children and teens school meals at no cost.

Thank you so much for caring for the health and education our future Kansas adults!

Jane Byrnes, MS LDN, Wichita

**Testimony by Rebecca Clark with the Johnson County Food Policy Council (FPC) to  
House Committee on K-12 Budget  
January 28, 2025**

Chairman Goetz and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments regarding the Governor's K-12 budget recommendations for SFY 2026. The Johnson County Food Policy Council is an advisory body that reviews and recommends policies to the Johnson County Government leadership and other pertinent entities to strengthen the local food economy and improve access to healthy and nutritious food. The mission of the FPC is to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, the community and our environment through a just, equitable and sustainable food system in Johnson County. Through policy recommendations, education and collaborations, we strive to increase access to healthful food that is locally produced when available.

We support the proposal to eliminate the reduced-priced co-pay for school meals in the Governor's 2026 budget. Nearly 27% of students K-12 in Johnson County are approved for free and reduced paid lunches.

Beyond just Johnson County, eliminating the reduced-price co-pay for school meals would:

- Help 36,000 Kansas children have access to a healthy breakfast and lunch at their school.
- Expand access to school meals. Students who participate in school meals benefit from improved health outcomes, better test scores, fewer school absences, and fewer behavioral referrals.
- Provide targeted financial relief for Kansas families who are struggling with rising costs of groceries.
- With one in five Kansas kids currently experiencing food insecurity, this would help ensure kids have access to at least two healthy meals each day.
- Invest in the future of Kansas kids, ensuring they have what they need to thrive.

We encourage you to invest in Kansas kids and eliminate the reduced-price co-pay for school meals.

Respectfully,  
Rebecca Clark, Chair  
Johnson County Food Policy Council





Date: January 27, 2025

To: The House Committee on K-12 Education Budget

From: The Kansas Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Dear Chairwoman Williams and K-12 Education Budget Committee Members,

As the President of the Kansas Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (KSAND), I am writing in support of Governor Kelly's elimination of the copay for school lunches for those receiving reduced-priced meals in her 2025 budget.

As nutrition professionals, we know how important nutrition is for proper learning and for some, school lunch may be the only meal they receive each day. Dietitians work firsthand with many of these students either in the capacity of a school food and nutrition professional or in an outpatient setting and know how much proper nutrition impacts students. This could be a huge financial relief for some of the lowest income families in the state and will make a huge impact on how our students learn.

One in five Kansans face food insecurity [1] and this bill will allow 36,000 students to eat for free at school each day [1]. We urge you to invest in Kansan's futures by helping reduce this financial burden for these families which, in turn, will improve their nutritional status and learning capability. If you need any other information from our organization, we would be glad to be a resource for you.

Sincerely,

Melany Coco, MS, RD, LD

President

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

## References

*Policy Priorities | Child Nutrition 2025*. (2024, December 19). Kansas Appleseed.

<https://www.kansasappleseed.org/child-nutrition-2025/>





## TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF JUST FOOD OF DOUGLAS COUNTY, KANSAS

Members of the House Committee on K-12 Education Budget,

My name is Jessica Cooney, I am the Director of Impact for Just Food of Douglas County, Kansas. I am writing to speak on the importance of including Governor Kelly's elimination of reduced-price copays for school lunches in the budget. Thank you for the opportunity to address this critical issue that impacts the health, education, and well-being of so many children in our communities.

Just Food is the largest food pantry in Douglas County, serving approximately 1,500 households weekly and 13,000 individuals a year. Our mission as an organization is not only to provide food to those in need but cultivate the self-sufficiency necessary to continue living full, healthy, and prosperous lives. Over one third of our shoppers are under the age of 18 and in 2024 we had nearly 70,000 visits to our food pantry, a 22% increase from visits in 2023.

The reduced-price lunch program was originally intended to ease the financial burden on families, however, even a minimal copay can create an additional barrier for families living paycheck to paycheck. This is especially true during times of economic uncertainty when the rising costs of housing, utilities, and other essentials leave little room for food expenses.

By eliminating reduced-price copays, Kansas has the opportunity to send a strong message that we value the well-being and potential of every child, regardless of their family's financial situation. I urge you all to prioritize our students and take this meaningful step toward ensuring that no child has to go through the school day hungry.

Thank you for your time and commitment to our children's future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jessica Cooney".

Jessica Cooney  
Director of Impact

1/24/2025

Dr. Craig A. Correll  
Coffeyville Public Schools  
[craig.correll@cvcilleschools.com](mailto:craig.correll@cvcilleschools.com)  
620.252.6400

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

Dear Chair Goetz and Members of the Committee,

As superintendent of Coffeyville Public Schools, I am testifying about the critical importance of the Child Care Capacity Accelerator Grant. Our district's preschool program, which has consistently thrived through strategic grant funding, demonstrates the transformative potential of targeted investments in early childhood education.

This year, we've pioneered an innovative approach by establishing on-site child care for our staff and community members. The \$10 million grant would enable districts like ours to expand such crucial programs. Currently, our facility serves close to 200 students in preschool and 8 children in childcare, leaving our community in a child-care desert.

Grant funding would allow us to:

- Improve facility infrastructure
- Increase enrollment capacity
- Support working families
- Provide high-quality early learning environments

These investments directly support workforce development, local economic stability, and children's educational foundations.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,  
Dr. Craig A. Correll  
Superintendent  
Coffeyville Public Schools

Dear Chair Goetz and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide Testimony as both a facilitator of the McPherson County Child Care Task Force and as a parent deeply invested in the well-being of our community's children. In my work with the Task Force, we strive to address McPherson County's child care challenges. I appreciate the chance to share what we have learned.

Through employer/employee and child care worker surveys, parent focus groups, and individual interviews with providers we find three things to be the largest barriers for parents and providers: cost for families, low wages for workers, and available seats. The prevailing business model, which places the majority of the child care costs on parents, has contributed significantly to these challenges, resulting in financial strain for families and inadequate compensation for child care professionals. Moreover, the financial constraints faced by child care providers make it difficult, if not impossible, to expand facilities and accommodate more children in need of care and education.

In 2023, we had a rare opportunity to apply for and receive funding through the Child Care Accelerator program facilitated by Kansas Children's Cabinet. The operational funds we received supported child care wages, created an early education pathway for high school students, and maximized the impact of local partnerships through matching opportunities. During this short period, we provided critical support to four child care providers in McPherson County, enabling them to hire staff and create additional child care seats within their existing licenses. We also enrolled students in an early education career pathway, preparing the next generation of child care providers in our county.

Through our focus on expanding stakeholders and recruiting community partnerships, we have increased the number of community members invested both emotionally and financially in McPherson County's child care system. These efforts have generated over \$100,000 in local funding, which, when paired with matching funds, has helped make child care providers more financially stable in the short term and sustainable for future families.

In addition to the operational support, the Accelerator funds also allowed our Task Force to save a closing center and reimagine their business model. With collaboration from KDHE, local child care licensing, and local builder, the child care provider was able to transform

from a struggling center to a thriving Small Center Pilot. Keeping 24 children in care and 24 families in the workforce.

The proposal for Child Care Capacity Accelerator Grant restarting with a \$10 million investment could be critical for many, especially rural child care centers. This funding opportunity is unprecedented and has the potential to address the overwhelming demand for child care services that far exceed available local resources. This investment is not just a financial commitment; it is a declaration of faith in the resurgence of Rural Kansas.

Investments in child care have profound implications on the well-being of our children, the economic stability of our families, and the future prosperity of our communities. We depend on child care and with these investments it can depend on us. Together, we can create a brighter and more equitable future for all Kansans.

Thank you for your attention and dedication to Kansas children,

Betsy Davis

Director of Community Services

McPherson County Community Foundation

[betsy@mcphersonfoundation.org](mailto:betsy@mcphersonfoundation.org)

January 29, 2025

Nick Engels, Owner of Littles Early Learning & Beehive Child Care  
(316) 253-3576 & [nick@beehivechildcare.com](mailto:nick@beehivechildcare.com)  
Public Comment on KSDE Budget  
House K-12 Education Budget Committee

Dear Chair Goetz and Members of the Committee,

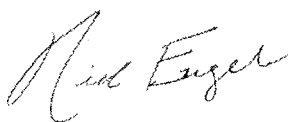
Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am Nick Engels, a small business owner in Butler County. Through our property management business, a background in education, and a husband and father of seven daughters, my wife and I found ourselves with an opportunity to start a child care business about six years ago. We currently own a freestanding center in Benton (just east of Wichita), and we own and operate nine child care programs in schools through a partnership with Circle Public Schools. We recently opened a new center in Augusta, Beehive Child Care. Because of the demand for our center in Benton and receiving a portion of grant dollars through the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund Accelerator grant, we added two classrooms to our center for 18 infant slots. These slots have been full since our first day of opening the infant spots. We are excited to serve our area of the state (and maybe eventually statewide) with child care opportunities for families in Kansas communities.

We are so grateful for the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund Accelerator grant. We applied and were awarded substantial grant dollars to assist in funding our operations and our addition to our Benton center and our school programs. These dollars also helped us purchase the Augusta center. Being completely open and transparent, the child care industry is not a super lucrative endeavor. Grant opportunities like these have given viability to our projects to add slots to assist Kansas families.

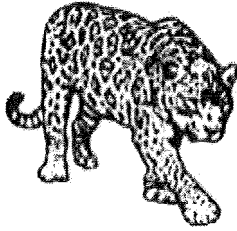
About once a month, I am presented with different opportunities to bring another child care program to Kansas in different communities throughout the state. We have researched, discussed, and designed programs for these communities, but the startup cost is staggering and has prevented these opportunities from getting off the ground. Grants like this Accelerator Grant are crucial to bringing child care programs to our Kansas communities.

Thank you for your consideration and support of early childhood education and care in Kansas. We've all seen the research and understand its importance in our communities. I believe firmly that the best educators of our children are their parents, however the ability to live on a single income is not an option for many families or those one families with only one parent. Thus, our community and in turn our economy is dependent on child care options for our Kansas families. My ask is that you continue to explore ideas to assist in funding child care opportunities in Kansas, and I believe the Accelerator Grant is a great model. Please reach out to me if you have any questions about my testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nick Engels". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a large initial "N" and a stylized "E".

Nick Engels, Owner  
Littles Early Learning/Beehive Child Care  
3242 SW Rustic Rd  
Benton, KS 67017  
(316) 253-3576  
[nick@beehivechildcare.com](mailto:nick@beehivechildcare.com)



From the desk of,  
Laura D. Evins  
USD 252 EC Coordinator



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Neosho Rapids Early Childhood Education Center 240 N. Commercial 66864  
Olpe Early Childhood Education Center 314 W. Listerscheid Olpe, KS 66865  
**Ryan Muhlig, Superintendent, [rmuhlig@usd252.org](mailto:rmuhlig@usd252.org)**

January 29th 2025  
Laura Evins, USD 252 Southern Lyon County  
District Early Childhood Coordinator - [levins@usd252.org](mailto:levins@usd252.org)

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

Dear Chair Goetz and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I hope this email finds you well. I am writing to express my strong support for the additional \$10 million allocation for the Child Care Capacity Accelerator Grant, specifically aimed at expanding and building early childhood education facilities and programs across Kansas.

As you may already know, there is a significant unmet demand for quality child care options in our state. In fact, previous grant rounds have already revealed a staggering \$60 million in unfunded projects, underscoring the urgent need for expanded capacity. This funding is not just a matter of supporting new physical infrastructure, but of investing in the well-being and future of our children, families, and communities.

As the District Early Childhood Coordinator, I've seen the critical need for expanded child care services in our schools. In our district, we offer child care options to support working families, but the demand far exceeds our capacity. We are often forced to turn families away due to limited space and resources, which impacts parents' ability to return to work and children's early development. With over \$60 million in unfunded child care projects across the state, the additional \$10 million would be instrumental in covering updates and operational costs to expand child care facilities, helping to meet the growing demand and providing much-needed slots for families in our community. This investment would not only support working parents but also lay a strong foundation for the children's future success.

For families in Kansas, access to affordable, quality child care is a critical need that directly impacts their ability to work, pursue education, and contribute to the local economy. In my own community, I have witnessed firsthand how difficult it can be for parents to find child care slots, especially in rural or underserved areas. Expanding early childhood education facilities would give families the opportunity to participate fully in the workforce and improve their quality of life.

Beyond the immediate relief this funding would provide to struggling families, the long-term benefits are immense. High-quality early childhood education lays the foundation for a child's success in school and later in life. Investing in these programs means investing in the future of our workforce, ensuring that children from all backgrounds have the opportunity to thrive from an early age.

The \$10 million allocation would be essential for covering critical construction and operational costs in fiscal year 2026, enabling providers to increase their capacity and meet the growing demand for child care services. More importantly, it would create lasting change by adding much-needed child care slots to communities throughout Kansas, allowing more families to access quality care close to home.

I strongly encourage you to consider this funding request, as it would have a far-reaching and positive impact on the children and families who rely on these vital services. The return on investment in early childhood education is profound, benefiting not only the individual children served but also their families, their communities, and the state as a whole.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to testify on the KSDE budget and Children's Cabinet recommendations. I look forward to the opportunity to see this critical investment in Kansas's future become a reality. Please reach out with any questions at [levins@usd252.org](mailto:levins@usd252.org).

Laura Evins, EC District Coordinator  
USD 252 Southern Lyon County  
Neosho Rapids Center: 620-342-7761  
Olpe Center: 620-475-3278



**January 26, 2025**

**Chairman Goetz and Members of the House Committee on K-12 Education Budget:**

**RE: Written Only Proponent Testimony - in Support of Funding the Reduced-Price Copay in the Budget**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written-only testimony on behalf of the Kansas Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. Founded in the 1955, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world with state chapters in all fifty states including Kansas. Social workers provide the majority of mental health services in Kansas and across the nation. Social workers have been licensed at three levels of practice since 1974 - baccalaureate (LBSW), the master level (LMSW), and the independent clinical specialist social worker (LSCSW).

Kansas social workers have seen first hand that school meals are one of the most important tools in the fight against childhood hunger and ensuring future student success. We have observed when children experience hunger that they are more likely to have lower test scores, poorer grades as well as more behavioral and mental health problems. Proper nutrition is a key component to Kansas kids' futures.

Hunger is a barrier to learning. We believe eliminating this burden, we can reduce childhood hunger, we can reduce the stigma our low-income students face in our school cafeterias, and we can increase academic success. The rate of food insecurity – a lack of access to enough food for a quality life – in Kansas has risen from 11.7% to 13.5% between 2020 and 2022, the latest year of data compiled by Feeding America, an anti-hunger charity. Currently - one in five Kansas children are food insecure.

**On behalf of the Kansas Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, I am writing to express our strong support to eliminate the reduced-price meal co-pay as it would be targeted financial relief for Kansas families.**

Low-income families spend a third of their income on food costs. This budget proposal offers targeted relief to families who have already been identified as low income. I urge you to fund this budget line item so the families who need a little extra help can get it.

Thank you for allowing me to offer written-only support.

**Sincerely –**



**Becky Fast, MPA, LCSW**  
**KS Chapter Executive Director, National Association of Social Workers (NASW)**



## PARKWOOD DAY SCHOOL

January 27, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter to share my testimony of being the Director of Programs of five centers in five different Counties in the State of Kansas. Our centers are located in Johnson, Douglas, Leavenworth, Anderson and Wyandotte Counties. We serve economically diverse populations with varying care needs. I have worked in childcare for over 30 years in private, public school and faith-based settings. The need for full-time care for families has increased over the years and the current workforce has become younger and less educated. Even though the look of childcare has changed over time there are many parts of the field that are stuck in the past.

The most dated items to be addressed are the rate of pay, benefits and educational opportunities for most individuals working in the current field of early childhood. Over 20 years ago after I finished my degree and obtained my director's license without loans. I signed my first ECE employment contract, making \$12 dollars an hour with limited benefits. Today \$13.50 is the average starting wage for most early childhood employees. Many employees in early childhood across the state of Kansas are still offered limited or no benefits. Together, employers and our State Representatives need to address increasing early childhood educators' wages, provide competitive benefits and an affordable path to completing a CDA, AA or BA in early childhood or a related field.

Our five early childhood programs are inclusion-based centers. I started this project by opening a family group day care home in 2006 in Johnson County. After three years I began working with area partners to create centers where children of different abilities can attend with their peers. We work with area school districts, therapists and community resources providing inclusive care services in the classroom for children, teachers and parents. It has been a struggle to keep outstanding teachers in the field and provide the resources needed to support families without raising tuition costs. We are at a point without receiving State sustainable funding we will lose families due to increased tuition. Forcing them to make care choices with unlicensed home and center programs. We will also lose teachers because we will not be able to pay a livable wage with annual increases, proper benefits and educational resources.

Please take the time to understand the challenges we face daily in the State of Kansas in the field of Early Childhood. We are the ones on the ground directly working with families to provide quality care and resources.

Sincerely,  
Paula George  
Parkwood Day School Programs.

Parkwood Day School  
10211 Nall Avenue, Overland Park, KS 66207 913.217.7104

January 29, 2025

Smoky Hill Child Care Foundation dba/Ellsworth Childcare and Learning Center  
Meghan Goding ellsworthcclc@gmail.com  
Public Comment on KSDE Budget: Written  
House K-12 Education Budget Committee

Dear Chair Goetz and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

In my capacity as the Executive Director of Ellsworth Childcare and Learning Center, I have a profound awareness of the pressing need for accessible childcare slots and the necessity for grant funding to sustain our operations. My primary responsibility is to maintain seamless operations, which include supporting the workforce of our community, the recruitment and retention of qualified teaching staff, as well as delivering safe and high-quality early education and care to the children and families we serve.

The Ellsworth Childcare and Learning Center (ECLC) is currently the only childcare center in the county and was established 12 years ago to address the needs of the community at that time. As the community has grown and the academic and emotional outcomes for children attending our facility have improved, it has become essential to continually adapt and expand our services. Currently, we are licensed to accommodate 117 children and anticipate a consistent increase in enrollment. As a non-profit organization, securing grant funding is crucial in ongoing operations and enhancing access to high-quality childcare without imposing additional financial burdens on the families we serve through increased tuition fees. Approximately 52% of the children and families we assist face at least one at-risk factor as identified by the Children's Cabinet. Early childhood is a critical period for brain development, and high-quality early education programs can foster cognitive, social, and emotional skills that lay the foundation for future success. Investing in early childhood education is vital for narrowing the achievement gap for children, thereby providing them with the opportunities necessary to realize their full potential.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to testify on the KSDE budget and Children's Cabinet recommendations. Please reach out with any questions at ellsworthcclc@gmail.com.

Meghan Goding, Executive Director  
Michelle Skurkis, Board President

January 29th 2025

Dallas Gosselin, Norton County Economic Development  
[dallas@nortoncountyks.gov](mailto:dallas@nortoncountyks.gov)

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

Dear Chair Goetz and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Dallas Gosselin, I am the executive director for Norton County Economic Development. We're located in the Northwest Corner of the State, bordering Nebraska. Our organization has been diligently working towards childcare solutions, but we've faced continual issues with the ability to stack capital. Ultimately, childcare operations don't net enough income to qualify for loans while also making the rest of their budget balanced. As we know, childcare suffers from a wicked dichotomy, a high cost of service for the parents and low profitability for the providers.

When our childcare coalition first began in early 2023, we assumed we could spur local mothers to start in-home daycares. We quickly learned that this wouldn't be our solution, as the interest just was not there. Oddly enough, folks really don't like to have their business out of their house. Our group conducted interviews with local providers seeking to expand capacity... That unfortunately can't easily happen due to regulation and square footage requirements.

To expand our ideas, we recently conducted a series of county-wide meetings, in which we released a survey that received almost 200 responses. Every respondent agreed that childcare availability is a problem in Norton County. We have a serious problem that impedes our future growth. Without additional grant funding programs designed for non-profit childcare operations, the future growth of childcare operations is at serious risk.

We are currently in partnership with a local business, a local childcare center, and several community partners to find a viable solution for childcare capacity increase. With a \$600,000 local donation, hopeful to be paid with additional grant funding, we believe that properly funding the Childcare Capacity Accelerator Grants would be the final step in seeing real value being added to these communities. As childcare is difficult to iron out, funding is becoming more and more difficult to find, and the timeline of establishing a thoughtful, impactful plan, continued funding is paramount to the long-term success of growth in Kansas. Without meaningful facilities to support having a child, we will continue a concerning trend on birth statistics. Kansas has a chance to welcome in a new generation of "baby boomers" by supporting a strong childcare system throughout the state.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to testify on the KSDE budget and Children's Cabinet recommendations. Please reach out with any questions at [dallas@nortoncountyks.gov](mailto:dallas@nortoncountyks.gov).

Sincerely,

Dallas D. Gosselin

Executive Director

Norton City/County Economic Development



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KANSAS NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION / 715 SW 10TH AVENUE / TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1686

Timothy R. Graham  
Director of Government Relations & Legislative Affairs  
Written Testimony  
House Committee on K-12 Education Budget  
January 29, 2025

Chairperson Goetz, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer public comments on the budget.

Kansas NEA is a member-driven organization that represents all 40,000 educators in the state of Kansas. We have nearly 22,000 members. The positions we advocate for have been proposed, debated, and adopted by several hundred members that were selected by their peers to attend our annual Representative Assembly.

KNEA's resolution covering school funding states:

***F-1-2. STATE PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL FUNDING***

*Kansas NEA believes the State of Kansas must ensure that Kansas public schools are equitably and adequately funded. To that end, Kansas NEA supports the following:*

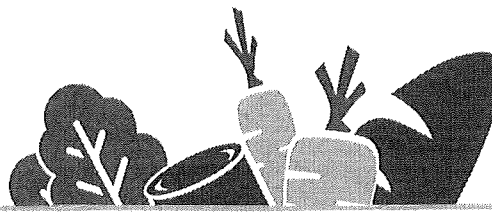
- a. An automatic escalator in the base state aid per pupil that reflects the annual increases in school district expenses;*
- b. Transportation reimbursement for all students more than one mile from school;*
- c. Funding for at-risk students, as defined in Kansas statute, at a rate of 0.484 of the base budget per pupil;*
- d. Full state funding of special education excess costs;*
- e. Money set aside for school based programs to promote a safe environment; and*

KNEA believes that every student should have the opportunity to receive a world-class education. KNEA further believes that school districts must have the funds to offer competitive salaries and benefits. To meet these needs, KNEA believes that the state of Kansas must ensure that Kansas public schools are equitably and adequately funded by maintaining current levels of funding as established in the Gannon ruling. This should include an annual CPI adjustment as stipulated by the Kansas Supreme Court.

KNEA also strongly advocates for the full statutory funding of special education. We ask that the legislature appropriate the second year of a multi-year plan to reach 92% funding of the excess costs of special education by fiscal year 2029. This enhancement should equal about \$75 million in new funding.

Additionally, KNEA supports Governor Kelly's recommendation to add \$5.5 million in enhancements to the budget to eliminate co-payments for students on reduced lunch programs.

Thank you for your time.



# Flint Hills BREADBASKET

January 27, 2025

Testimony In Support of Funding Reduced-Price Copays

Chairperson Goetz and Members of House Committee on K-12 Education Budget,

As the Executive Director of the Flint Hills Breadbasket, a non-profit food hub in Manhattan, I have the privilege of serving many of the people in my community who are experiencing food insecurity. In 2024, the Breadbasket served 2289 unduplicated households, with children residing in 43% of those homes. Of the total individuals served (6,182), 35% (2147) are children aged 0-17. Of the senior citizens served, 22% also have children living in the household- indicating multi-generation homes and/or homes where grandparents are serving as primary caregivers to school aged children. The Breadbasket and our partner locations (8 within Riley County) play a crucial role in providing nutritional stability and support for an ever-growing number of families.

Despite our long history and deep community support, the Breadbasket is only one piece of food security for our families. We rely on programs like TEFAP, SNAP, CSFP, and free/reduced meal programs to meet basic food needs. Food banks and pantries are increasingly strained as more families come to us for support, whether due to an emergency, increased food costs, or limited income. Our budgets and food procurement resources are stagnant while the number of people in need grows.

School nutrition programs are critical partners in our efforts to make sure that school aged children are ready and able to learn each day. I can speak to this in two capacities- as the director of the Breadbasket and as a member of the USD 383 Manhattan-Ogden Board of Education. Since being seated in 2018, I have seen steady growth in the number of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices. I can also attest to the positive impact of the universal free meal program between 2020 and 2022. Eliminating the reduced-price copay will have a positive impact on our students and their families. We know that children have more positive outcomes when their physical needs are met, and our school nutrition programs are wonderfully equipped to provide students with healthy, balanced, flavorful, and important food choices.

Offering financial support to expand access to school meals is a direct way to support children, families, and communities in Kansas. As with many challenges, solutions can be complex and require collaboration from people and organizations in all sectors. I am proud to serve my community in these two capacities because I have the good fortune to work alongside people who routinely go above and beyond to help others. I hope that you will support this proposal that will help so many Kansas children.

Respectfully submitted.

Karla Hagemeister

Executive Director  
Flint Hills Breadbasket

Board Member  
USD 383 Manhattan-Ogden BOE



Testimony of Cara Harbstreet, MS RD LD (Kansas City, Kansas)  
In Support of Funding Reduced-Price Copays

Chairman Goetz and Members of the House Committee on K-12 Education Budget:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of funding the reduced-price copay in the budget. I want to share my personal experience with the issue of school meals and why I strongly support including funding reduced-price copays in the state's budget.

As a registered dietitian with a decade of experience, I know the importance of balanced nutrition for health and chronic disease prevention. This is especially important for school-aged children, who have unique nutrition needs during periods of growth and development. School meals should not only provide nourishing foods for breakfast or lunch, but be a positive experience for students to engage and socialize with their peers outside of the classroom. A 2021 review found that free school meals were associated with increased participation<sup>1</sup>, a critical metric for public schools to fund their kitchen operations. Additionally, research shows that when children have consistent access to nutritious food, they perform better academically, have improved concentration, and improved diet quality. There are also fewer behavioral issues and bullying incidents reported by teachers and school staff.

Eliminating the copay for reduced-price school breakfast and lunch is a crucial step towards ensuring that all students, particularly those from low-income households, can receive the balanced, nutritious meal they deserve without the barrier of additional costs. The proposed line item in the FY 2026 budget is not just about food — it's about equity. No student should have to face the stigma of being unable to afford a full meal, and no parent or caregiver should have to choose between buying a meal and other basic needs.

I urge you to consider the needs of all families in the state of Kansas, and invest in the well-being and potential of every single child. Please make it a priority so our schools can foster a healthier, better nourished, and more equitable future.

Thank you for allowing me to support this proposal today.

Cara Harbstreet, MS RD LD

References:

1. Cohen, J. F. W., Hecht, A. A., McLoughlin, G. M., Turner, L., & Schwartz, M. B. (2021). Universal School Meals and Associations with Student Participation, Attendance, Academic Performance, Diet Quality, Food Security, and Body Mass Index: A Systematic Review. *Nutrients*, 13(3), 911. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13030911>



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**Proponent:** Elimination of the reduced-priced co-pay for Kansas kids

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**Dear Chairman Goetz and Members of the House K-12 Education Budget Committee:**

On behalf of the Kansas Food and Farm Coalition, we are writing to express our support of the proposal to eliminate the reduced-priced co-pay for school meals in the 2025 budget.

Eliminating the reduced-price co-pay for school meals would increase access to healthy school meals for 36,000 Kansas kids. Investing in child nutrition will pay dividends for our state - as we know that kids who have access to food benefit from improved health outcomes and better academic performance. With 1 in 5 Kansas kids currently experiencing food insecurity in our state, this investment represents an opportunity to chip away at that statistic.

We strongly encourage you to invest in Kansas kids and eliminate the reduced-price co-pay for school meals.

Respectfully,

Harvesters  
Kansas Food Action Network  
Kansas Rural Center  
KC Healthy Kids

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*The Kansas Food and Farm Coalition (FFC) is a group of long-standing Kansas nonprofit organizations concerned about our food system - from farm to fork. In recognition of how interwoven food system issues are, these organizations have come together to support policies that grow Kansas communities' local food systems. This includes policies that support small and mid-sized farms, increase production and sales of locally grown foods, increase access to healthy food for all, and improve food security in our communities.*

Testimony of Lindsey Hatfield, Hutchinson, KS  
In Support of Funding Reduced-Price Copays

Chairman Goetz and Members of the House Committee on K-12 Education Budget:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of funding the reduced-price copay in the KS budget. I have a personal connection with this issue and would love the opportunity to tell you why I support funding reduced-price copays in our budget.

I was raised by a single mother, who consistently worked multiple jobs to provide for me and my two older sisters. We received reduced-price lunches in school and even though it was helpful to have a lower cost lunch for all three of us, it would have been incredible if those meals could have been covered by the state of KS. Our family struggled when she was a single mother, and so many families today struggle to put food on their tables.

I am a mother of two school-aged children, and my husband works as a para educator in their school. We see firsthand how food insecurity has affected children in our school system. Food insecurity and hunger make it extremely hard for kids to focus and learn in class. We need to INVEST in the children of Kansas, and I know that if we eliminate the reduced-price copay for schools, we will be taking a huge step in ending child hunger.

Please fund this budget line item and provide the much needed extra help that these families and most importantly, these children need.

Thank you for your time and for allowing me to support this proposal.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Lindsey Hatfield', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

4200 S. 4th  
Street  
Cantwell Hall  
913-758-6564



## SISTERS OF CHARITY OF LEAVENWORTH

OFFICE OF JUSTICE, PEACE, AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



January 27, 2025

To: House Committee on K-12 Education Budget

From: Ashley Hernandez

RE: Support Eliminating Reduced Price Meal Co-Pay

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Dear Chair Goetz, Vice Chair Hill, and Members of the Committee on K-12 Education Budget,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Ashley Hernandez, and I am the Organizing and Policy Coordinator for the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth (SCL) Office of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), here to express our strong support for eliminating the reduced-price meal co-pay for low-income families in Kansas.

Eliminating the reduced-price meal co-pay is a targeted and impactful form of financial relief for Kansas families who need it the most. This aligns with the principles of integral ecology, Catholic Social Teaching, and the mission of the SCL JPIC Office, reminding us of our shared responsibility to care for one another and the common good. With low-income families already spending a third of their income on food costs, this measure **benefits those struggling to make ends meet**. By removing this financial burden, the state can provide immediate relief, freeing up resources for families to cover other essential needs.

Integral ecology, as articulated by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, emphasizes the interconnectedness of human and environmental systems. Addressing food insecurity is a key aspect of this vision because **hunger and poverty harm both human dignity and the social fabric of our communities**. By removing barriers to essential nutrition for Kansas children, we strengthen the bonds of solidarity and build a more just and compassionate society.

**Hunger is a well-documented barrier to learning.** When children face food insecurity, they are more likely to experience lower test scores, poorer grades, and increased behavioral and mental health challenges. The principles of Catholic Social Teaching, particularly the dignity of the human person, the preferential option for the poor, and the call to solidarity, further compel us to act. **Proper nutrition is not a luxury**, it is a necessity for the development, well-being, and success of our children. By ensuring access to school meals for all eligible students, we are equipping Kansas kids with the tools they need to grow, learn, and thrive.

This policy would allow nearly 36,000 additional low-income children to access free meals at school, leveling the playing field for families who may otherwise struggle to afford school meals. As hunger disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable students, the **potential for improved academic performance, better health outcomes, and fewer school absences is immense.**

The financial investment in this initiative is modest compared to its far-reaching benefits. Governor Kelly's allocation of \$5.5 million in the 2025-2026 proposed budget is a wise use of state resources, as it will help eliminate the breakfast and lunch co-pays for families whose children qualify for reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). At just \$2 million for breakfasts and \$2.7 million for lunches, this policy is an **investment in our future workforce, our communities, and the economic stability of Kansas.**

**One in five Kansas children faces food insecurity.**<sup>1</sup> These are not just numbers; they represent the children in our neighborhoods, schools, and communities who are being left behind. Eliminating the reduced-price meal co-pay demonstrates Kansas' commitment to its youngest residents and their potential to build a brighter future for our state. By making school meals accessible to every Kansas child, we are creating the foundation for a stronger, more prosperous Kansas. This measure is more than just a policy; it is a statement of our values, affirming that no child in Kansas should go hungry during the school day.

I urge you to support this proposal and eliminate the reduced-price meal co-pay for low-income families. Let's give every Kansas child the opportunity to succeed, one meal at a time.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ashley Hernandez  
Organizing and Policy Coordinator  
SCL Office of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation  
[ahernandez@scls.org](mailto:ahernandez@scls.org) | (913) 758-6585

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Kansas Appleseed. (n.d.). A Pathway to Universal Free Meals for All Kansas Children: The State of School Meals in Kansas. In [www.kansasappleseed.org](http://www.kansasappleseed.org). [https://www.kansasappleseed.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Kansas-Appleseed-Report-on-Universal-Free-Meals\\_.docx.pdf](https://www.kansasappleseed.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Kansas-Appleseed-Report-on-Universal-Free-Meals_.docx.pdf)