



PO Box 654
Lawrence, KS 66044
KansasInterfaithAction.org

<https://kansasinterfaithaction.org>
mrieber@kansasinterfaithaction.org
(913) 232-2336

Rabbi Moti Rieber, Executive Director
Rev. Dr. Annie Ricker, Board Chair

Written Testimony by Rabbi Moti Rieber in favor of eliminating the reduced-price school meals co-pay for Kansas kids in the 2025 state budget

House Committee on K-12 Education Budget, Rep. Jason Goetz, chair

January 29, 2025

Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I serve as executive director of Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multifaitth issue-advocacy organization that “puts faith into action” by advocating on behalf of people of faith and the public regarding critical racial, economic and climate justice issues. I write in support of expanding access to meals at school, by having the state pay the co-pay for students on reduced-cost school meals.

We should be thankful to live in a world of God-given wealth and resources. In such a world, no child should go hungry. Yet one in five Kansas kids face food insecurity today. School meals are one of the most important tools in the fight against childhood hunger and ensuring future student success. A school meal may be the only time a food-insecure child has access to nutritious food during the course of the day, which makes it imperative that we make this as accessible to such students as we can. Students who participate in school meals benefit from improved health outcomes, better test scores, fewer school absences, and fewer behavioral referrals.

The many diverse faith traditions and communities of belief in Kansas believe we have a moral imperative to create a future where everyone has the nutritious food they need to live and thrive. Our partners at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) say it well: we are called “to minister to human need with compassion and imagination. God works through the family, education, the economy, the state and other structures necessary for life in the present age. Our church is committed to ending hunger at home and around the world. A critically important way to work toward this goal is by actively advocating for policy changes that address the root causes of hunger.”¹ We believe increasing access to school meals is an important way to help achieve this goal.

Members of the committee, addressing childhood hunger is one of the most important - one might say, holy - policies this legislature can pursue. Every action to ensure the health and well-being of Kansas’ children is an investment in the future of our state and benefits all people. Ending the co-pay for reduced price school meals is right for our state, for our schools, and most importantly, for our kids. Please vote in support of this budget item.

¹ ELCA.org: Combating Childhood Hunger: Supporting the nutritional needs of America’s children, https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Child_Nutrition_Supporting_N (accessed 1/27/25).

January 29th 2025

Tamisha Sewell Tree House Early Education Foundation
620-870-4973, tamishad@gmail.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'm a childcare provider, USD 446 school board member, early childhood advocate, and a founding participant of Links to Quality. I've been in childcare for over 16 years, including eight years as an in-home provider, and for the last four, I worked to renovate a building into a childcare center. Despite thorough planning, we faced numerous obstacles, like lead-based paint, extensive HVAC replacements, and many other challenges that delayed our progress.

To keep my in-home daycare running while the building renovations were happening, I hired an assistant and worked as a grant writer to cover loan payments, but the funds I needed weren't coming through. I tried many fundraising efforts, including local partnerships and seeking investors, but nothing worked. Eventually, I transitioned to a nonprofit, which opened up new funding options like the Early Childhood Block Grant. These grants, combined with others, helped me complete the building renovations. The most crucial of these was the \$387,905 Accelerator grant, which made the center's completion possible.

Thanks to this funding, I opened a center with 53 much-needed childcare spots in Independence. This would not have been possible without the Accelerator Grant. However, the need for more childcare remains high across the state, with many areas considered childcare deserts. With additional grants, we could add even more spots and support parents returning to the workforce while ensuring children are in high-quality care. For example, with more funding, we could create an all-infant care center to meet the growing demand for infant spots.

Infant care is especially needed in my community and across Kansas, with many providers unable to accept children under 18 months due to the financial strain of low ratios. With funds such as the Accelerator grant more spots for childcare in rural communities that are in high need could be created. The critical early childhood years, from birth to five, are vital for brain development, and continued investment in early childhood education is essential for the state's future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the KSDE budget and Children's Cabinet recommendations. Please feel free to contact me at tamishad@gmail.com with any questions.



January 23, 2025

Karen Siebert

Advocacy & Public Policy Advisor, Harvesters—The Community Food Network

Kansas Food Bank

Second Harvest Community Food Bank

Testimony in support of Summer EBT Program budget recommendation

Chairman Goetz and members of the Committee:

This testimony is submitted on behalf of Harvesters—The Community Food Network, the Kansas Food Bank and Second Harvest Community Food Bank, which together serve the hungry and food insecure in all 105 counties in the state. Last year, our networks of charitable food pantries distributed more than 46 million pounds of food to those in need in Kansas, from our smallest rural communities to major metropolitan areas.

We are testifying in support of funding for the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer Program. Summer EBT provides low-income children who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals during the school year with \$120 on an EBT card to purchase groceries during the summer when school is not in session.

Our partner food pantries around the state see firsthand the impact of summer hunger in their communities. More low-income families turn to our network of charitable pantries in the summer as parents who are already struggling to make ends meet face the summer months without school meals and the added cost of childcare.

This state investment can bring nearly \$32 million of federal benefits directly to low-income Kansas families for grocery purchases annually. These resources are especially important now. The most recent Map the Meal Gap report from Feeding America shows that food insecurity in Kansas increased 31% over the previous year and food insecurity among children increased an alarming 40%.

Food inflation has been particularly hard on low-income families, with the cost of food rising 28% since 2019, well outpacing wage increases. While we all feel the impact of food inflation, it hits low-income families particularly hard. People in the lowest income brackets spend nearly 1/3 of their income on food, while the top 20% of earners spend just 8% of their income on food. And these Summer EBT funds will be spent in local grocery stores, which is especially important for our small and rural businesses.

Summer EBT is a relatively new nationwide program, but the USDA spent more than a decade testing the program through pilots in multiple states. Data from those programs and research from the similar Pandemic EBT program show that providing families with summer grocery benefits reduces child hunger and supports healthier diets.

The Summer EBT program is an important resource that will help low-income Kansas kids get the nutrition they need in the summer and we respectfully ask for your support of this budget request.



Testimony of Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health
To House Committee on K-12 Education Budget
January 29, 2025

Chairman Goetz and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the K-12 Education Budget. Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health (LDCPH) serves Lawrence and Douglas County residents and works to create abundant and equitable opportunities for good health.

LDCPH, along with others, is in support of funding the reduced-price copay for school meals in the budget. Food insecurity is a problem in Douglas County. Food security is a focus area of our Community Health Improvement Plan, with a goal of reducing food insecurity and hunger in Douglas County. According to the Douglas County Community Health Assessment, which was published in 2023, food insecurity has hovered around 16% for over a decade. Children are particularly vulnerable to food security and children from food-insecure homes are more likely to develop chronic health conditions such as obesity, asthma, anemia, and are hospitalized at higher rates.¹

By reducing these copays for children who are already eligible for reduced price school meals, we will lessen the burden of food insecurity on families and children throughout Kansas. As you're aware, the economy in our state continues to face challenges, and many families are struggling to put food on the table. For countless parents, the meals provided at school play a vital role in ensuring their children receive the nutrition they need. But even paying for the reduced-price copay can be a struggle for some parents. While it might not seem like a lot of money to many, finding 70 cents extra every day for the copay is a struggle, especially when grocery bills keep getting higher.

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 us to provide written support to this budget item. We hope that you will consider this request while considering the budget process.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Smith, MPH
Executive Director
Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health

¹ "2023 Community Health Assessment (CHA)." *2023 Community Health Assessment (CHA) | LDC Public Health, KS - Official Website*, Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health, 2023, ldchealth.org/493/2023-Community-Health-Assessment-CHA.



200 Maine, Suite B
Lawrence, KS 66044-1396

OFFICE: 785.843.3060 FAX: 785.843.3161
CLINIC: 785.843.0721 FAX: 785.843.2930

Phyllis Stowell, SCL

Contact

804 Glenview ST
Leavenworth, KS
66048

Dear Rep. Jason W. Goetz, Rep. Scott Hill and
Members of the Education Budget Committee,

I am writing to encourage you to affirm the
recommendation for removing the free and
reduced lunch co-pay for children who meet
federal guidelines.

As a former education for nearly 45 years, I have
personally witnessed the reality of hunger and
the struggle parents have in providing for
nourishing meals for their children. Often, the
free and reduced breakfasts and lunches served
in our school cafeterias are the main meals for
these children. Your committee recommendation
and passage by the legislature of omitting the co-
pay will ease the burden our families face.

Our children will receive the nourishment
necessary to be successful in receiving and
pursuing their education thus benefiting the entire
state of Kansas in the future as adults.

Thank you for reading my testimony.

Sincerely,
Sister Phyllis Stowell, SCL



Kansas PTA
715 SW 10th Street, Topeka KS 66612
www.kansas-pta-legislative.org
kansaspta@gmail.com

January 29, 2025

Written Testimony to House K-12 Budget Committee

Honorable Chair, Representative Jason Goetz

Rose Souter, Committee Assistant, K.12.budget@house.ks.gov, 785-296-7501
Room 286-W, State Capitol Building

Supportive of K12 Budget as recommended by KSDE, SBOE and the Governor.

Hearing: Wednesday, January 29, 2025, 3:30 pm, Room 546-S

Honorable Chair Goetz and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to share written testimony in support of the K-12 education budget, as recommended by the Kansas Department of Education, the State Board of Education and the Governor's Office. Passage of this budget bill would uphold the Gannon general education school finance agreement and make another incremental investment toward fully funding special education. The bill is in alignment with [Kansas PTA Legislative Priorities](#) including: investing in public education (priority 2), fully funding special education and other education mandates (priority 3), and investing in early childhood (priority 5). The Kansas PTA supports the requests for:

- \$72.6 million to allocate the next incremental reimbursement to local districts for providing mandated special education services to students enrolled in public and private schools;
- \$11 million to increase childcare access through grant programs and \$13.4 million to expand childcare slots, increasing the likelihood of kindergarten readiness among other benefits to the participating families and the Kansas economy;
- \$5.5 million to cover costs of school meals for students eligible for the reduced priced lunch program, in recognition that a hungry child struggles to learn; and
- \$500,000 to offset the costs of Advanced Placements tests for at-risk students, removing barriers to post-secondary education.

The educators and staff of our Kansas public schools continue to rise to the challenge and beat the odds ([KASB, July 2023; August 2023](#)).

- The number of college credits earned by high school students reached an all-time high in 2024.

- The number of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses and receiving a passing score reached a new high in 2024 ([KSDE, 2024](#)).
- The statewide high school graduation rate increased between the school years ending 2023 to 2024, including Kansas youth eligible for free/reduced lunch, students with disabilities, students in foster care, for those unhoused, in the military, and among black and Hispanic students.
- Kansas students continue to perform at or above the national average on multiple standardized metrics ([NAEP, 2022](#); [NCES 2024](#)).

Our educators, students and families patiently await full funding of special education, serving students enrolled in public and private schools. Yet, concern is growing as the state and federal special education funding shortfall erodes the recent restoration of general education. Our K-12 public educators rose to the decades-long challenge of deep cuts to general education funding, which just reached a purchasing-power this past school year to match the pre-2009 recession cuts (aka the Montoy agreement). Our educators rose to the challenges of a global pandemic. Let's recognize the new 2023 the baseline ([KASB, 2024](#)), monitor progress, and invest in our public schools to ensure all Kansas kids have equal opportunity to achieve.

We urge this committee to adopt the recommendations of the Kansas Department of Education, the State Board of Education and the Governor's Office. Thank you for your consideration.

Denise Sultz, Kansas PTA President
President@kansas-pta.org
[@KsPTALeg](#)

Cc: Devin Wilson, VP of Advocacy
 Rachel Russell, Legislative Liaison
 Mary Sinclair, PhD, Kansas PTA Advocacy Team

THE PTA POSITION

Kansas PTA is a nonpartisan association that promotes the welfare of children and youth. The PTA does not endorse any candidate or political party. Rather, we advocate for policies and legislation that affect Kansas youth in alignment with our legislative platform and priorities. PTA mission and purpose have remained the same since our inception over 100 years ago, focused on facilitating every child's potential and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Testimony of Cynthia Thompson, Salina, Kansas
In Support of Funding Reduced-Price Copays

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of funding the reduced-price copay in the budget. I'm a mom and grandma. Our kids attended USD305. We always had enough to eat here, but it was always tight. I know the humiliation of standing in the special line to apply for reduced price lunches at fall enrollment. We were lucky that our kids were never hungry, but my heart breaks for those who are. If you have more than one kid in school, it's not always easy to find the money for even a reduced-price meal. It's just my husband and me at home now, but when I buy my groceries I am astounded at how much more expensive things are and I wonder how parents feed their kids.

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 support this proposal.

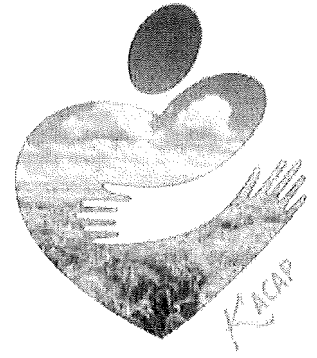
Cynthia Thompson
851 Beatrice
Salina

Testimony of the Kansas Association of Community Action Programs (KACAP)

Presented to: Kansas House Committee on K-12 Education Budget

Date of Hearing: January 29, 2025

Submitted by: Jessica Wederski, Executive Director



On behalf of the eight (8) Kansas Community Action programs, who are all members of the Kansas Association of Community Action Programs, Inc. (KACAP), we strongly support the measure to eliminate the reduced-price copay for students eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in Kansas. This proposal represents a significant investment in the well-being, development, and future success of our children.

www.kacap.org

In 2023, Kansas Community Action programs served 3,728 families with children struggling to make ends meet. For many of these children, even the reduced copay can be a barrier to consistent access to nutritious meals, which are critical for their growth, learning, and overall health. This is particularly concerning for our families who are already struggling with the rising costs of basic needs. By eliminating the reduced-price copay, Kansas would ensure that all students—regardless of their family's income—can access the food they need without financial strain.

Proper nutrition plays a crucial role in a child's academic performance. Research shows that students who receive regular, nutritious meals perform better in school, exhibit better behavior, and are more likely to graduate. By removing the copay, we remove one more obstacle to a student's success. We are not only supporting the immediate health and well-being of these children but also for investing in their future potential.

This measure also helps to reduce the stigma associated with free and reduced-price meals. When every student has access to the same meals, regardless of financial status, it fosters a more inclusive and supportive school environment. It ensures that no child is singled out or made to feel different because of their family's financial situation.

We urge you to support this vital initiative. By eliminating the reduced-price copay for Kansas children, you are making an investment in their health, education, and future success. We thank the Kansas House Committee on K-12 Budget for taking time to learn more about the impact the cost of K-12 lunches have on Kansas families and encourage your support of funding for this issue.

Community Action, Inc.
ECKAN: East Central Kansas Economic Opportunity Corp.
Economic Opportunity Foundation
Harvest America Corp.

Mid-Kansas Community Action Program
Northeast Kansas Community Action Program
Southeast Kansas Community Action Program
Wichita Sedgwick Co. Community Action Partnership

USD 258 Humboldt
801 New York Street, Humboldt KS



January 27th, 2025

Dr. Amber Wheeler, USD 258 Superintendent
amber.wheeler@usd258.net, 620-473-3121
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. Early childhood education continues to be a priority for myself as, not only a superintendent, but a mom to a four-year-old. Our district received an accelerator grant last year and are currently in the process of building our Cubs Community Care Center. We will open two home-style daycare rooms within this new facility in August, with a focus on providing slots at the infant and toddler levels. We know that quality childcare is essential for us to attract and retain high-quality teachers for all our children. Additional slots will be filled by other organizations that provide services in our building, such as mental health and our special education partners. Finally, additional slots will be available for our community to ensure that our youngest learners have access to high-quality care while parents are working or attending courses to improve their families' quality of life.

This facility also focuses on providing essential services, including alternative methods of learning for high school, college students, and adults, connections to our local college, and skill-oriented learning. Finally, through a local partnership, we will be able to offer critical primary healthcare services, as well as additional mental health services all within our rural community. None of this would be possible without the Accelerator Grant. It has provided us with the crucial funds to cover the building itself. We have quality sustainability plans that will allow us to fund these endeavors, but could never have provided the initial funding itself.

As we continue to learn more about the importance of early childhood learning and development, these Accelerator Grants will provide vital funds to ensure that all our littlest learners have access to high quality learning and development opportunities and that our economy can continue to grow strong by providing necessary childcare for those families in the workforce.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to testify on the KSDE budget and Children's Cabinet recommendations. Please reach out with any questions at amber.wheeler@usd258.net.

Sincerely

Dr. Amber Wheeler

USD 258 Superintendent

January 24th, 2025

Jane A. Works, The Growing Place Childcare and Preschool
1050 Industrial Road, Humboldt, Kansas. 66748
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 Jane Works from the small community of Humboldt in Allen County. My husband and I built a childcare/preschool center twenty years ago because we saw the need. Now our building has expanded to handle 124 children. I've been privileged to work side by side with the two directors I have had over this 20 years. Hands on Learning is my goal as we provide a childhood for many.

We decided from the beginning to be a 501(c)3 since we weren't expecting to make money (True) and we were more eligible to apply for grants (again, True).

I write today to encourage you to provide \$10 million for expanding and building facilities and programs in Kansas. Our childcare center is in the middle of using the last Accelerator grant that you funded. Thank you. We will have room to double our capacity for birth to 3 year olds, 39 slots!

The next step is to hire and train the necessary staff. Sometimes it's hard to compete with McDonalds for wages. We pay between \$12-\$20 per hour and always have to rely on a local manufacturing company for funding. Another local industrial employer is also working with us to subsidize the program. We must all work together. Gone are the days of most women staying at home to raise their children.

Humboldt is not alone. Neodesha has also just built a large childcare facility and I'm sure will run into the same financial problems we do,

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

Respectfully,

Jane A. Works



Dr. Brent Yeager, Superintendent. Olathe Public Schools

byeagerec@olatheschools.org

House K-12 Education Budget Committee

Written Proponent

January 29, 2025

Public comment on Kansas State Department of Education budget

Chairman Goetz and Members of the Committee:

Olathe Public Schools supports the Kansas Department of Education and Governor Laura Kelly's budget recommendations.

Olathe Public Schools operates 58 public schools, serving approximately 29,033 students. The second largest school district in the state has over 4,500 employees, 32 percent free and reduced lunch qualifying students, a large special education population, and maintains an almost 95 percent graduation rate.

The 2024 Legislature fully funded the K-12 budget that included the base funding as well as over \$72 million in special education funding. We thank them for their commitment to valuable resources that help us serve our community and the needs of students. In Olathe, almost every dollar of new money went directly to our staff compensation and benefits. Our large population of special education students, and the district commitment to serving them, requires continued funding to fulfill the special education cost demands in pursuit of reaching the statutorily required 92 percent of excess costs.

We support the State Department of Education's budget to continue to fund the K-12 schools adequately and equitably. The Governor's budget recommendations adding to K-12 funding request fulfills that on-going commitment and the recommendations should be included in the approved budget.

- Governor recommends fully funding base state aid and \$72.6 million for SPED, and the same amount for the next four years to reach 92 percent excess cost funding in 2029.
- Includes a two-year budget request to ease district budget planning.
- Proposes the state pays school meals co-pay cost for 37,000 students in the reduced income lunch program. Cost \$5.5 million. Also recommends \$500,000 to pay AP testing for low-income students.

Thank you for your continued support for funding Kansas public schools.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Yeager", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Brent Yeager, Superintendent
Olathe Public Schools