



**Proponent testimony to the  
Senate Committee on Education  
Senate Bill 383  
Laura Hochman, School Leader  
Kansas Connections Academy  
February 10, 2026**

Chair Erickson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 383. My name is Laura Hochman, and I am the school leader at Kansas Connections Academy. We are a public virtual school authorized through USD 218 in Elkhart, Kansas, serving students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Today, I am here to discuss Kansas Connections Academy — which you will hear me refer to as KCA — and, specifically, our virtual special education program.

#### Kansas Connections Academy Overview

- KCA began in 2001 as Elkhart Cyber School and transitioned to Kansas Connections Academy in 2010. Today, we are one of 71 accredited public virtual schools in the state of Kansas.
- We follow the same state standards, employ licensed Kansas teachers, and provide full special education services. - we meet the same accreditation requirements as traditional counterparts -- delivered virtually.
- Our overall enrollment continues to grow steadily year over year, currently averaging between 1,200 and 1,300 students. The percentage of students enrolling with IEPs is increasing at a notably faster rate. Students receiving special education services now represent approximately 15% of our total enrollment — about 200 students — and during the current enrollment season, we are seeing a growing number of families with students who have IEPs applying each day.
- The IEPs our team supports encompass a broad range of exceptionalities, including autism, speech and language needs, developmental delays, giftedness, ADHD, dyslexia - just to name a few.
- This broad range of exceptionalities, brings with it a wide variety of instructional needs and specialized services.

---

10551 Barkley St, Suite 113, Overland Park, KS 66212

301-202-4856

913-876-4604

[connectionsacademy.com/kansas-online-school/](https://connectionsacademy.com/kansas-online-school/)

- Our special education team includes licensed special education teachers, school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and social workers. Together, they collaborate to provide the same services students would receive in person at a brick-and-mortar school — the only difference is that these services are delivered through a virtual model.
- In addition to the professionals who directly serve our students, we have an administrative team that oversees the department, collaborates with community and state agencies, and ensures all documentation meets both state and federal compliance requirements
- KCA also provides assistive technology, job and life skills programming, modified and alternative curriculum options, and a range of accommodations -- all determined by each student's IEP.
- We are currently serving students in nearly every county in Kansas and work diligently to ensure that students with IEPs statewide receive the highest quality education. This includes traveling in person for evaluations, state testing, and graduation ceremonies.
- KSDE requires virtual schools to meet the same legal obligations as in-person, brick-and-mortar schools when serving students with disabilities, yet no additional funding is provided because KCA teachers are not employed by a school district. While reimbursement funding has technically been available, those funds historically have not been received directly by KCA.

The language in Senate Bill 383 permitting special education reimbursement to be directed to non-district-employed service providers is critical and would help alleviate the financial burden on KCA in meeting required services for students.

### Impact & Outcomes, Closing & Call to Action

Students with IEPs enrolled in KCA's virtual program are achieving strong outcomes. They are consistently passing their classes, making meaningful progress toward their goals, and graduating on time. Our families are highly engaged and grateful to have found an educational

environment where their students can thrive. In addition, KCA students with IEPs outperform the state average across all categories of state assessments.

These successes reflect the dedication of our KCA team — and of virtual educators across Kansas. However, dedication alone is not sustainable, particularly as enrollment among students with IEPs continues to grow. Every student deserves access to a free and appropriate public education, regardless of zip code, learning style, or whether instruction occurs in a classroom or through a virtual setting.

Our special education teachers are serving students statewide with a full range of needs, yet they do so without equitable resources. If the expectation is equal service, funding and policy must reflect that expectation. These students deserve nothing less.

Thank you again for your time today and for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the students at Kansas Connections Academy. Madam Chair, I would be pleased to answer any questions at the appropriate time.