

USD 258 Humboldt  
801 New York Street, Humboldt KS



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March 4, 2024

Dear Kansas Legislators:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the creation of a unified office for early childhood services. Currently, I have the opportunity to both live and work within this field. I am the Superintendent for USD 258 Humboldt Schools. I currently sit on the board at our local private early childhood center, The Growing Place. I also currently have a three-year-old that attends that daycare and preschool.

When my little one was born, there were no slots available anywhere near my community. I was a principal and trying to lead a building returning from COVID shut-down. During this stressful time, I was desperate for care for my infant. We used family and friends, and finally found a local woman who was willing to watch him. We were lucky and this was a good situation for him, but I know many more who were forced to place their child in questionable situations. Due to some early concerns, I had the opportunity to work with our local Birth to Three program who proved to be amazing people that helped my son's development and provided support to parents. We now work with private daycare and K-12 Special Education services. I had the background that allowed me to navigate a disjointed system, but many others do not.

Our district recently was awarded a grant for the creation of a community center that will house two new childcare rooms. Through this process, we will work with the Children's Cabinet for the grant, KSDE for funding purposes, KDHE for licensing, and DCF for payment support. We will also work with a variety of early childhood programs, such as Parents as Teachers, Birth to 3, Families Together, and many others to help families during a child's most formative years. This system would be much better served, both in services and financially, if programs and services were unified. There is nowhere this is more important than in rural areas of Kansas that do not have a local office for most of the services. I would hope that the committee will place a high emphasis on providing connections with both K-12 education, where these students will immediately enter, and higher education who will help staff early childhood services.

Finally, thank you for your consideration in this centralized support system. I believe we can be more efficient and more effective with this model moving forward. I support this as an educator, and most importantly, as a parent.

Sincerely,

*Dr. Amber Wheeler*, Superintendent