



**Legislative Special Education Task Force
Testimony: Special Education Funding (written only)
January 5, 2024
Submitted by: Dr. Tonya Merrigan, Superintendent**

Chair Williams and Members of the Special Education Task Force;

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these written comments urging your support of funding special education excess costs for all districts, at the 92% level set in statute. While Blue Valley's student enrollment has decreased by 1% since 2017, **our special education disability enrollment has increased 23.1% in that same time period**, including a **4% increase** in the 2023-24 school year. *In our district, more than 18%—or one in five—of Blue Valley students receive special education services.*

While we have experienced a growing special education student population, our reimbursement rate has decreased and currently accounts for only **63.1%** of our district's expenditures on special education services. This funding inadequacy means that *the first \$12 million of the state's base aid per pupil funding is diverted from the district's general fund to supplement special education spending.*

The primary goal of the Blue Valley district is **to ensure every student attending our schools has the educational programming and opportunities, delivered by quality educators, to allow them to thrive** long after they leave our doors. We embrace every student who walks through our doors and always work to provide them what they need regardless of the cost. Indeed, many parents of special education students report that it is the quality of our services that initiated their move into the district. Fully funding special education will support all students as we would use that revenue to improve pay for our most valuable resource, our teachers and other staff.

We commend the legislature for passing a bill creating the special education task force, to more fully examine special education funding models and to make recommendations accordingly. However, no matter the methods employed to fund special education services, *we ask this committee to recommend that our student services are appropriately funded in FY25 by funding special education at the statutory requirement.*

Blue Valley values our past partnerships with the legislature, knowing we share similar values and hopes for student achievement in Kansas. **We, therefore, respectfully urge this task force to recommend funding special education excess costs at a level that ensures these shared values may be achieved in our district.**

USD 229 Blue Valley Schools: Quick Facts

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| K-12 Student Enrollment | 21,903 | ACT District Composite Average* | 22.9 |
| Early Childhood—grade 12 Enrollment | 22,322 | ACT Statewide Average | 19.4 |
| Average Daily Attendance | 95.6% | SAT District Average | 1330 |
| Graduation Rate | 97.4% | SAT Statewide Average | 1245 |
| Teacher's with Master's Degree or Higher | 76% | *with 95.9 % taking ACT | |