
**Testimony of G. Keith Wilson, Principal Lawrence Virtual School
Regarding SB 361
Senate Education Committee
Tuesday, February 7, 2012**

Good Afternoon, Madam Chairperson and Members of the committee:

No responsibility in life is more complex or demanding than being a parent in today's society. And when parents actively participate in their child's education with the assistance and guidance of certified instructors, their children, family and all society are the benefactors. That is exactly what thousands of parents do throughout the state of Kansas in virtual schools every day. My name is Keith Wilson and I am lucky to serve as the principal of one of those schools. The Lawrence Virtual School has been serving students Kindergarten through High School for the past eight years. I come to you with a deep concern as I read that this body is considering funding our virtual schools at 75% of the rate of students served in other school settings.

Lawrence Virtual School has a staff of over forty Kansas Certified Instructors K-12 and a supporting cast of a dozen more at our offices in Lawrence. This staffing is similar to many schools determined to be worthy of 100% of the Per Pupil Funding throughout our state. We pay rent for facilities we use for meeting and working with our families face to face, to administer the Kansas State Assessments and to provide social gatherings for our families throughout the year. We purchase curriculum and technology in a way that allows families to establish a school in their home. They are afforded one to one access to those materials and supplies that are shared in school environments being funded at 100%. We establish schools of "one" . . . one family. We educate the whole child in ways that are unique from other schools throughout the state, we must allocate our funds in unique ways due to the complex nature of establishing "schools of one" throughout Kansas and adhering to the policies and mandates of the state of Kansas to be one of the many accredited schools successfully educating students in our state. We don't do it better or worse than other school configurations in the state. . . . We simply do it differently in order to meet the needs of families and children throughout our state.

One such school of "one" is represented by an 8th grader who told her virtual teacher that she was so thankful that she was able to receive her education virtually. Her father has been by her side all year serving as her learning coach. Surrounded by materials and supplies, her home computer, and constant connections with her teachers, Ashley and her dad spend 6-7 hours a day engaged in her learning. This past summer, her dad was diagnosed with liver cancer and is not expected to make it through this spring. She said "this has been the most valuable experience for me to learn with my father and spend his last month's getting closer to him". She could not have had this time in any other school setting. Education is not getting in the way of her learning.

school and their district, TJ's dad was put in touch with LVS and he began serving as his son's learning coach while driving his truck. He set up a WiFi connection on the cab of his truck and he has received his education virtually. His special education teacher and dad have been a great team all year.

These stories are representative of the thousands of stories we could share with you of "schools of one" that are needed to serve and assist Kansas Families. From medical reasons, to bullying, to children of divorce to religious and social beliefs families come to our schools as a viable education option for their children. I am not sure how I explain to children in our virtual school that our state believes that their education, in the manner being delivered, can no longer continue because the state deems the value of that education being delivered and received is only worth three fourths of fellow students being educated in other ways.

Some families have been with us for years and some know that their journey will be only a year or two until changes in their home occur. We are not providing any of them with a subpar education nor are we educating at a three fourths pace. Our families are needing and worthy of 100% of our effort, 100% of our dedication, 100% of our determination and 100% of our funding.

But as Dr. Doll indicated, SB 361 does cut funding by \$600 per virtual student. I have attached an amendment to my testimony that changes the student count from .75 of an FTE to 1.0. In New Section 4, sub-paragraph (8) (v) on Page 7 at lines 9-10, I am suggesting that .75 be struck and replaced by 1.0. SB361 drops the weighting on all students including virtual students and raises the BSAPP to \$4492. However, the current language recommends that virtual only be given .75 of the new BSAPP.

I have served students in education for over 26 years in brick and mortar and virtual school environments and I can tell you the quality and costs associated with each is identical. Some students thrive in virtual school environment. It is not for all children. But for those approximately 4000-5000 students who attend virtual schools across the state, it provides an opportunity and choice to be successful.

I appreciate your attention and ask that you consider the amendment attached to my testimony. I stand ready to answer any questions that you might have.