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Olathe, KS 66062

**To: House K-12 Budget Committee;**

**Rep. Larry Campbell, Chair**

**From: Cassandra Barton; Insight School & Kansas Virtual Academy**

**Date: February 16, 2017**

**Re: Opposition to HB 2324**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

I am Cassandra Barton, Head of School of Insight School of Kansas and Kansas Virtual Academy. These are two virtual schools within Spring Hill School District and are managed by K12, Inc, a virtual education provider. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in opposition to HB 2324.

K12 Inc. is a company that provides online school services and curriculum to school districts across the nation. Our products and services are designed to provide alternative opportunities for public school students from kindergarten to 12th grade. At Insight and K12, this includes:

- Providing a full range of services and supports for our students
- Utilizing the rigorous, interactive, research-based and standards-aligned K12 Curriculum
- Hiring and training KS certified teachers and staff to instruct and support our students in a virtual environment
- Providing the technology to allow our students and staff to interact in many live sessions

We do applaud the committee for taking the time to examine numerous finance proposal ideas, including this one. This is the key part of the process. However, we would be remiss if we did not offer comments on the implications that HB 2324 places on virtual education.

Our opposition to this plan rests solely on the proposed funding levels for virtual education. For the 2016-2017 school year, full time virtual education students are funded with a flat cost of \$5,000 per pupil. This is actually a reduction from the current law prescribed in the second year of the Block Grant, which was set to be \$5,600 per full time virtual education pupil for the School Year 2016-2017. This reduction came during the 2016 Special Session.

HB 2324 would set full time virtual education funding per pupil to be 105% of the general base-state-aid-per-pupil. The bill includes a schedule for the base-state-aid-per-pupil as follows: \$4,082 for School Year 2017-2018, \$4,312 for School Year 2018-2019, \$4,542 for School Year 2019-2020, \$4,772 for School Year 2020-2021 and \$5,000 for School Year 2021-2022. Therefore, this would be a 14% cut to current funding per full time virtual education pupil and a 23% cut to the \$5,600 level as prescribed in the Block Grant. Even the goal of the stair-step increase over the next five years would never restore fully the intended \$5,600 funding level to full time virtual education students.

When this committee eventually works a school finance bill, or assembles several pieces of them together, we ask the committee to follow the recommendations of the 2015 Legislative Post Audit report on virtual education. This report illustrated the funding for full time virtual education students was not high enough prior to 2015.

Understanding this, the 2015 Legislature immediately approved increasing virtual education funding in the Block Grant.

There are dozens of different virtual schools and programs across the state. This is a good thing as we believe in local control. Different school districts have different needs and that correlates with virtual education. In the case of Spring Hill School District, a 14 to 23% per student cut, or even more as seen in other proposals introduced in the House, would result in reduced services the school can offer its virtual students. For example, we would expect cuts could need to occur in many areas of our schools. We would have to examine reductions and/or eliminations in the following areas:

- Teacher technology
- Professional development
- Face-to-face offerings for field trips and social outings
- Face-to-face testing venues
- Elementary elective courses and teachers
- Middle and high school elective options
- Family Academic Support Team
- Academic advising team
- Elementary math and reading specialists
- Overall teaching staff

If the committee wants to use a base-state-aid-per-pupil system for virtual education funding, we would recommend the implementation of a virtual education weighing to cover the difference between base-state-aid-per-pupil to \$5,600, as intended in the Block Grant.

Other than this aspect of virtual education funding, we are fine with the bill's approach.

We want to serve as a resource to the committee for any questions you may have regarding virtual education.

Respectfully,

Cassandra Barton