



# LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

FROM BLUE VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT 229

**House K-12 Education Budget Committee**  
**Proponent Testimony: HB 2582, Mental Health Intervention Weighting**  
**Presented by: Dr. Tonya Merrigan, Incoming Superintendent, USD 229 Blue Valley Schools**  
**February 20, 2020**

Madam Chair and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of HB 2582, as we understand it. My name is Tonya Merrigan and I am the incoming superintendent of Blue Valley Schools. I am especially pleased to see a bill such as this, given that my master's degree is in school counseling and I have 15 years' direct experience as a math teacher, counselor, or administrator.

Several years ago, our school district and our county experienced a significant rise in teen suicides and other mental health issues. This led to a discussion and eventual partnership with Children's Mercy Hospital to provide twenty master's level social workers in our schools. During the first three years of this partnership, our Board approved \$600,000 per year to fund this mental health intervention program.

The mental health teams in our district now consist of school psychologists, counselors, and the social workers from Children's Mercy Hospital. The twenty social workers must spread their time and services across our 38 schools and programs. I have attached an annual report on our project, highlighting descriptions and statistics from the 2018-19 school year. This report provides a brief look at how highly valued these services are by students and parents in our district.

For the past two years, we have wanted to hire additional social workers to ensure there is more adequate mental health support in each learning center; however, we struggle to find additional resources to both strengthen and maintain this critical support system in our district.

The value we place on the health and well-being of our students and staff is now enshrined in our district's strategic plan. This includes identifying a social-emotional curriculum, with a plan to work with staff and others in our community to support it.

While we are not entirely certain of all details of the weighting proposed in HB 2582, we are hopeful that such a **weighting could assist our district and others in providing mental health programming in a way that best fits our students, families, and community.**

We applaud all those on this committee who are providing a proactive look at the growing need for mental health services to support student learning in our schools. We urge your support for HB 2582 and a weighting that will support critical mental health interventions such as ours.

I am happy to respond to any questions, either now or going forward. You may contact me at [TMerrigan@bluevalleyk12.org](mailto:TMerrigan@bluevalleyk12.org).