



United School Administrators of Kansas

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Dr. Diane DeBacker, Interim Commissioner  
Kansas State Department of Education  
120 SE 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Interim Commissioner DeBacker:

United School Administrators of Kansas (USA|Kansas\*) is submitting this letter on behalf of Kansas' Race to the Top (RTTT) application and plan developed by the Kansas Department of Education in collaboration with the state's education community. We believe that Kansas is a strong contender for the RTTT funds based on evidence of past success thus far in the four core reform areas of the development of common core standards and assessments; effective teachers and leaders; collaborative data systems to support instruction; and the continued support and technical assistance provided to struggling schools.

Education administrators are committed to ensuring that each and every child in Kansas receives a quality education that will help them reach their potential and become successful, productive adults. As a professional association representing education administrators at the building and district level, USA|Kansas strives to serve, support, and develop educational leaders committed to the continuous improvement of education in Kansas.

### **High expectations and accountability for student success**

*"High achievement always takes place in the framework of high expectation." – Charles F. Kettering, American engineer and inventor of the electric starter*

Kansas has made significant progress and continues its plans for developing and adopting common standards that are internationally benchmarked, aligned with work and post-secondary education and based on research and evidence. At the same time, the state respects the traditional role of district decision-making in developing curriculum and adopting textbooks that will best meet the learning needs of students at the local level. Currently, Kansas standards are based on national standards developed by professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Science Foundation.

We believe that Kansas is a leader in the initiative to establish national common standards for the collection and reporting of educational data and has mentored many states in areas of data governance, data quality certification, master data management and the data request review process. The KSDE is currently working with state agencies to enable data users to have access to the full spectrum of student information from pre-kindergarten to adulthood. The Kansas Connected Systems group, comprised of representatives from the KSDE, Kansas Department of Revenue, Kansas Department of Administration, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas Social and Rehabilitative Services, Kansas Board of Regents, Kansas Department of Corrections, and the Kansas Department of Commerce, is exploring ways of sharing data across agencies in order to increase the data available to each agency without an increase in reporting requirements for the reporting entities.

## **Educational leadership**

Kansas has placed a great deal of emphasis on recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers and leaders. To meet the State's objective of providing an effective educator in each classroom and an effective leader in each school, the KSDE formed two separate Commissions. The **Teaching in Kansas Commission** was formed to evaluate and identify areas of teacher and principal shortage, including the preparation, recruitment, retention and licensure of Kansas teachers and generated recommendations for three states of implementation. The **Kansas Educational Leadership Commission** was formed to study and make recommendations about the critical role leadership plays in the success of student learning and achievement. As a member of the National Governor's Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices Policy Academy, the KSDE has engaged stakeholders across the state and nation in discussing new models of teacher compensation to recruit new talent to the teaching profession, to retain existing talent, to provide incentives for teachers to work in hard-to-fill content areas and geographical locations, and to pay teachers for their contributions to improved student achievement.

Research supports the link between leadership – at the district and building level – and improved student achievement and educational equity. Administrators recognize that effective leadership is an important influence on decisions that teachers and administrators make about their future. This is especially critical when we consider the human capital and resources necessary to support struggling schools and those professionals who commit to working with our most vulnerable students.

## **Low-performing schools**

The KSDE developed and implemented the Kansas System of District and School Support Framework for districts with schools that are actively engaged in continuous school improvement. The framework is based on research and best practices to develop transparent policy and agency procedures that can be used to drive improvement across the state. It provides strategies that leverage resources and consequences to allow districts to act independently to make improvements prior to state intervention to restructure. In addition, the KSDE formed the **Kansas Learning Network (KLN)** that mandates participation of the districts that are on improvement or have schools so designated. The Network was designed to develop regional and collaborative structures to create expertise and share resources that expand capacity to scale effective practices and strategies.

In Kansas, we know from first-hand experience that effective and successful leaders develop and maintain a culture of shared ownership at all levels, work to engage the community and make effective decisions about the allocation of resources. Administrators are concerned that the current unprecedented, economic challenges at the state and federal level will cripple programs that support quality instruction and leadership and have long-term, negative impacts on student achievement and academic progress.

The RTTT funds promise to stimulate innovation and encourage continued efforts to ensure that each child has the opportunity to benefit from a rigorous K-12 education experience. This is an exciting opportunity for the State of Kansas and we look forward to working with the Kansas State Department of Education to further develop common core standards and assessments; ensure effective teachers and leaders; strengthen collaborative data systems to support instruction; and enhance technical assistance and support provided to struggling schools.

Sincerely,



Cheryl L. Semmel  
Executive Director