



Kansas PTA
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Testimony to Senate Education Committee

Chairman, Senator Steve Abrams
Tuesday, February 19, 2013
Erna Fabert, Committee Assistant–296-7381
1:30 pm, Room 144-S

Chairman Abrams and Committee Members,

In honor of Parent Leadership Month, I appreciate the opportunity to share some of the priorities and concerns of the Kansas Parent and Teacher Association, thousands of Kansans strong and the largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the country with more than five million members nationally.

I serve as the Legislative Co-Chair for the Kansas PTA. I am a graduate of the Kansas public schools and a current consumer with two school-aged children. I have a Master's in Education from Harvard University and a PhD in Special Education from the University of Minnesota, with professional expertise in the area of school dropout prevention.

The mission and values of the PTA have remained the same since our inception over 100 years ago:

- PTA Mission - to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Among our core values, is a dedication to promote children's health, well-being, and educational success through strong parent, family, and community involvement ([read more here](#)). Through advocacy, as well as family and community education over the century, PTA has established programs and [called for legislation](#) that improves our children's lives including: the creation of kindergarten classes, child labor laws, public health service, hot and healthy lunch programs, juvenile justice system, mandatory immunization, arts in education and school safety.

However, the emerging nature and sheer volume of bills out of alignment with the [Kansas PTA Legislative Platform](#), challenging the quality of Kansas K-12 public education, is raising concerns among parents and teachers. The concerns stem from bills that appear to:

1. **Dictate K-12 curriculum** (without the input of KSDE or Kansas School Board of Education) – prohibits the use of Common Core education standards and requires new standards in five core academic areas ([HB2289](#)), establishes 'celebrate freedom' week and related curriculum ([HB2280](#)), establishes a personal financial literacy incentive program ([HB2282](#)).
2. **Shift toward punitive policy, over prevention and rehabilitation** - prohibits students from promotion to fourth grade if not reading at proficiency on third grade state assessments ([SB169](#), [HB 2004](#)) rather than investing in early childhood programs and other evidenced-based literacy strategies identified during the Governor's Literacy Summit last year, merge the Kansas Juvenile Justice Authority into the Kansas Department of Corrections ([ERO42](#)).

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3. **Challenge school finance** - amends article six of the state constitution regarding suitable educational finance (SCR 1608), amends school funding formula (HB2003), changes the calculation of at-risk funding (SB 103), requires districts to vote to increase property tax revenues over previous year (HB2047).
4. **Support voucher type programs, rather than adequately funding the traditional K-12 system** - Enacting the school district special needs scholarship program without safeguarding the rights of vulnerable population and penalizing districts for unfunded mandate (HB2263), allowing for a tax deduction of 100% of the amount donated toward charter schools while waiving all taxpayers rights to hold those schools accountable for the same student performance standards to which traditional public schools are held (HB2320, SB196), creating the coalition of innovation districts act (HB2319, SB176).

Note. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of bills affecting Kansas children and K-12 education.

Please allow me to elaborate on a few of the bills on the agenda for today or later this week.

- **Creating a coalition of innovation districts (SB176)**. This proposed legislation, similar to the charter school bills, appears to focus more on supplanting the traditional public school system rather than serving as a model site of innovation for the area district. While PTA supports quality public charter schools, the proposed legislation does not appear to meet these quality criteria (National PTA Public Charter Schools Position Statement). Scholarly evidence overwhelming finds that: a) charter-type school models are not getting higher test scores nor greater test score growth, b) are spending about the same, when transportation and special populations costs are factored, and c) nor are they serving comparable kids (Baker, 2013; Minnesota Institute on Race and Poverty, 2008). Moreover, adequately funded K-12 public education, as defined by the legislative cost studies and ruled on by the Kansas Supreme Court, is the choice parents are seeking. Parents are most likely to find positive student outcomes in such settings. Scholarly research demonstrates that money matters (e.g., as measured by Base State Aid Per Pupil), as evidenced by strong positive correlation between student outcomes and instructional related spending (Baker, 2012; Legislative Post Audit Cost Study, 2006).
- **Changing at-risk formula (SB103)**. The rationale for this bill does not appear to be need-based. The most compelling concern about the proposed change is that delayed point at which intervention is provided. Triggering funds with proficiency testing means that students must fail before services are provided. Intervening earlier in a child's educational career, based on highly predictive financial indicators, is actually more cost effective. Further, cuts to at-risk funding are likely to reduce student proficiency rates and could increase dropout rates (Levin, 2007, 2008; Vanden Burk, et al., 2011), in turn requiring more funding than originally proposed.

On behalf of the Kansas PTA, we thank you for your time and consideration.

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