



Oral opponent testimony on HB 2552, creating the Kansas Reading Readiness Act

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Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

KASB appears today in opposition to HB 2552.

As we've previously testified, KASB's permanent legislative policy opposes the use of tuition tax credits, vouchers or "school choice" programs to aid private elementary or secondary schools that are not subject to the same legal requirements as public school districts. We are joined on this testimony by the United School Administrators-Kansas, KNEA, Wichita USD 259, and Topeka USD 501.

This committee has previously reported a voucher bill to the full House for consideration, so we will not spend too much time reiterating our strong opposition to this portion of the bill. We do, however, feel it's important to note:

Like public school districts, private school systems have a gap between low income and non low income students. (Source: KSDE building report card data)

	English Lang. Arts – Percent at Lowest Level			Percent Economically disadvantaged	Percent Students with Disabilities
	Self-pay	Free/Reduced	Gap		
State Average	18.3	42.0	23.7	47.3	15.1
KCK Catholic	8.7	34.0	25.3	13.4	3.1
Wichita Catholic	4.0	16.2	12.2	24.7	4.0
Topeka Lutheran	11.0	14.4	3.4	17.8	4.0
Dodge Catholic	7.3	21.8	14.5	24.7	11.4
Salina Catholic	13.6	22.0	8.4	19.7	6.4

The table above shows the percentage of students scoring at "Level 1" on state reading and math tests for the state as a whole and for the five accredited private school systems, percentages of economically disadvantaged students, and percent of students with disabilities.

For both students who paid for their own meals and free/reduced eligible students, private school systems have a lower percentage of students scoring at the lowest level. This is to be expected because they have much lower percentages of low income students.



But each of the private school systems also has a gap between low income students and all students. In one case, the gap is higher than the statewide average.

In our view it is impossible to justify giving public school students a voucher to attend private schools when those schools also demonstrate achievement gaps, especially among the lowest learners that this bill purports to assist. And the bill contains no requirement that private schools track the voucher students to determine if they are indeed performing better at the private school. At the very least we would request an amendment requiring private schools to conform to the same transparency requirements already followed by the state's public schools.

From a practical perspective, it is difficult to determine how school districts will implement the evidence-based resources scheme envisioned by the bill's provision to give a student's at-risk weighting funding (0.484 x BASE aid) to parents, through an account established by the State Treasurer. The fund, as we understand the bill, would be established for public school students when they are in 3rd or 4th grade, if they are not reading at grade level, and wish to remain in their public school. The student/parents would have access to the fund until the student graduates from high school and could use it to pay for "evidence-based programs" for additional services for the student.

JAG-K is an excellent example of an evidence-based program that appears to be showing good results for the state's at-risk high school students. In fact, Tuesday, February 11 was JAG-K day at the Statehouse and those students represented the program well.

There must be a critical mass of interested and eligible students in order for a school or district to consider participating in the JAG-K program. If one or two parents decide they want to use the at-risk weighting account to enable their student to participate in JAG-K, what is the school district to do? This is only one example of the myriad of evidence-based practices school districts would be expected to manage under this bill.

And touching again on transparency, the bill does not contain any reporting requirements showing the evidence-based practices are more or less effective than programs already used in the public schools.

Other concerns:

Involving the State Treasurer's office in approving applications by private schools to participate in the voucher program is problematic. We suggest deferring to the Kansas Department of Education's list of accredited private schools.

For these reasons, KASB opposes HB 2552. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.