

**House Education Budget Committee  
Written Testimony on HB 2552**

Submitted by John Allison, Superintendent, Olathe Public Schools USD 233  
and Todd White, Superintendent, USD 229 Blue Valley Schools

February 13, 2020

Chair Williams and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to HB 2552, which would create the reading readiness program and establishes a new voucher program for students.

**Identification of eligible students**

HB 2552 would determine the academic eligibility of third and fourth grade students for the reading readiness program based on the most recently administered state assessment for English language arts. We are concerned that this eligibility criteria:

- Does not consider any progress or continuous improvement a student has made. Students begin kindergarten with different fluency levels. We begin working immediately to close the gap that exists between those children who have benefitted from early learning programs and those who have had little exposure to basic early childhood literacy skills.
- Makes the state assessment for elementary students a high-stakes exam that creates additional pressure and may impede not only their academic progress, but their social emotional progress.
- Does not consider the number of students who move into our school districts each year. The economic growth in our region means that families are relocating from other communities in Kansas, from other states, and from other countries to attend schools in Johnson County. The students who enroll in our schools have varied educational experiences and, in some cases, limited mastery of the English language. Regardless of what grade they are in or their proficiency level, Olathe and Blue Valley Schools are committed to working with them to improve their literacy skills.

**Investing in strategies that work**

Olathe and Blue Valley Schools are grateful for the investments the legislature has made in early childhood education and K-12 education. Students will benefit from access to early learning programs, high quality teachers, and programs and services that support literacy skills.

We also believe the Dyslexia Task Force's recommendations and continued efforts will help advance the work our teachers and schools are doing to identify struggling readers at an earlier age and implement new systems of support for these students.

Our districts understand the urgency of students reading at grade level, which is why we make significant investments in high-quality staff, professional development, and evidence-based programs. Please understand that these investments have proven to be effective in our districts. Unfortunately, if a parent decides to move their child to a private school upon being deemed eligible, the loss of funds to the school district could compromise the quality programs and services that have worked effectively for many of our students.

While some parents may feel their children can best be served in a private school setting, our districts do not support creating a voucher program that redirects public school funds to private schools – especially when this policy could negatively impact other students in the district.

We have a common interest – ensuring that students acquire the literacy skills necessary to succeed in school and in life. Olathe and Blue Valley Schools remain committed to working with you to achieve this goal.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact:

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