

February 12, 2020

Testimony to House K-12 Education Budget Committee

Honorable Chair, Representative Kristey Williams

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Room 286-N, State Capitol Building

Oppose [House Bill 2552](#) – Creating the Kansas reading readiness act voucher-like program.

Hearing: Thursday, February 13, 2020, 3:30 PM Room 546-S

Honorable Chairman Williams and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding HB 2552 – Creating the Kansas reading readiness act. **The Kansas PTA is opposed to this bill.**

Kansas PTA has testified in opposition to similar bills that direct public dollars for private schools. We have the same concerns as noted previously, beginning back in 2014 when the [tax credit scholarship program](#) was established. The legislative platform and priorities of Kansas PTA affirms that our membership opposes the use of vouchers for the tuition of non-public schools, as well as, the use of tax credit scholarships or related programs often referred to as school choice or education freedom. Our opposition stems from a number of concerns: non-public schools are not required to accept all students and can discriminate in admissions, can require religious instruction to the exclusion of all but one, can operate under different rules of transparency and accountability, and can ask parents to waive their children's access to special education services ([KS PTA Legislative Priority 11](#)). This bill appears to be particularly problematic for the following reasons:

- The public funds for private schools appear to come directly from the school finance formula and the portion that targets some of the highest-risk students. This is happening at a point in which district budgets have yet to be restored to constitutional levels of adequacy. Our public schools are still digging out from a deep hole created by the 2012 tax policy. Yet in the name of accountability, the Kansas legislature expects our teachers to fix all of society's ills with one hand still tied behind their backs. In addition to the unprecedented high bar of preparing every single child to be college and career ready, teachers and principals are expected to eliminate bullying, prevent suicide, remedy dyslexia, prepare students for active shooters, mitigate the effects of vaping and opioid addiction, and the list goes on.
- At-risk dollars are being taken from our yet-to-be-adequately-funded state accredited public schools that must report on the use and impact of these expenditures. Instead, these dollars will be given to non-public schools with no requirement to verify whether the at-risk funds are actually closing the achievement gap. Nor are the non-public schools required to report on how those dollars are used.
- Further, this bill appears to totally dismiss the expertise of teachers and principals, not to mention the reality of budgeting on-demand for the needs of at-risk students. Of the many reasons why at-risk readers struggle to make meaningful academic progress, the choice of intervention used by our educators is among the least likely.

Beyond these issues of inequity and blatant disrespect, empirical evidence warns against the implementation of voucher-type programs.

- Many other educational approaches have a higher return on investment. School vouchers are not a proven strategy for improving student achievement. Studies of U.S. and international voucher programs show that “strengthening neighborhood public schools with a menu of proven policies, from early childhood education to after-school and summer programs to improved teacher pre-service training to improved student health and nutrition programs ... yield much higher returns than the minor, if any, gains that have been estimated for voucher students” ([Economic Policy Institute, Carnoy 2017](#)).
- Kansas private schools have yet to close the achievement gap. Mr. Tallman with KASB has submitted evidence today that demonstrates a disproportionately higher number of low income Kansas students in private schools have lower academic achievement compared to their peers, as in public schools ([KASB Testimony, Feb 2020](#)).
- Money matters. Educational researchers like Drs. Lori Taylor and Bruce Baker have repeatedly demonstrated that the level of public school funding, along with how it is used, is directly correlated and causally linked to students’ educational attainment ([Taylor et al, 2018, Baker, 2019](#)).
- Kansas public schools are highly efficient. Dr. Lori Taylor affirmed that the Kansas K-12 system is highly efficient, more so than most other states in the country, finding that “buildings were producing nearly 96% of their potential output, on average” ([Taylor et al, 2018](#)).
- Funding general education classroom teachers to provide differentiated instruction is a powerful tool and an evidenced-based use of at-risk funds. The What Works Clearinghouse of the U.S. Department of Education offers this instructional guide <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/3> “to help educators identify struggling readers and implement evidence-based strategies to promote their reading achievement ... to implement Response to Intervention (RtI) and multi-tier intervention methods (MMTS).”

Kansas PTA believes the prudent course of action would be to commit to the Gannon school finance resolution, to strengthen our centers of learning that welcome all Kansas youth, and to invest the resources required by our great Kansas educators to provide every child with the opportunity to achieve rigorous state education standards ([Gannon v State, 2019](#)). Kansas legislators have a constitutional obligation to provide adequate and equitable opportunity for all students to achieve, not just a select few.

On behalf of the parents, teachers, and patrons of the Kansas PTA, we oppose HB 2552 and we thank you for your time and consideration.

Kansas PTA Advocacy Team

Lauri DeNooy, Kansas PTA President
presented by Mary F. Sinclair, PhD, Team Advocate

THE PTA POSITION

Kansas PTA is a [nonpartisan](#) association that promotes the welfare of children and youth. The PTA does not endorse any candidate or political party. Rather, we advocate for policies and legislation that affect Kansas youth in alignment with our legislative platform and priorities. [PTA mission and purpose](#) have remained the same since our inception over 100 years ago, focused on facilitating every child’s potential and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.