



February 13, 2020

House K-12 Education Budget Committee

**Written Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 2552.**

Chairwoman Williams and Members of the Committee:

The Shawnee Mission School District legislative platform reflects the policy priorities of our Board and our District. Our Board, our teachers, and our parents continue to push for the full funding to complete the Supreme Court's resolution of the *Gannon* lawsuit, which concluded the State had underfunded K-12 education in Kansas. We look forward to securing funding the Court determined as adequate to provide increased teachers' pay, and hire additional counselors, nurses, and social workers, in order to address the social-emotional needs of our students. We also need to address the significant expenses related to addressing special education services wherein the formula funds us below the state average per pupil, which is further below the statutory required level of funding.

We oppose House Bill 2552 because it purports to address one specific issue - third and fourth grade reading below grade level - in a manner that diverts State funding to non-public schools and away from providing adequate funding. One critical feature of House Bill 2552 is Section 7, which articulates public school districts' specific requirements to address below grade reading levels. The list of public school duties, including providing parental input, does not exist for non-public schools. None of the statutory obligations and costs to address the low student performance are required of the non-public school recipient of a voucher from a student who chooses to attend a non-public school. The non-public school receives the pupil and State funding but none of the responsibilities placed upon the public school system. As is often the case when we discuss non-public school funding, apparently only the public school system has the duty to serve every child.

The Kansas Constitution does not allow public funds for non-public school education. Sound educational policy should not identify students with needs, and require public schools to fund remedies for low performance, but at the same time divert public funds to non-public schools which are not required to address the needs of a student who has a voucher solely because of the academic need. The Kansas Constitution, and a voucher concept that explicitly does not address student need, is contrary to the Shawnee Mission School District platform.



Specifically, our platform states:

*“Strong public schools, grounded in our state constitution, have been the foundation for the success of the state of Kansas, and are crucial to the future well-being of our democracy, in Kansas and across the nation. SMSD supports policies that maintain local non-partisan democratic control over public education in Kansas, and rejects policies that would divert public resources to non-public entities. To support these principles, SMSD will:*

*18. Support legislation to repeal or reduce the private education tuition tax credit program, and oppose vouchers, or similar programs, such as the Kansas Hope Scholarship Act from 2019.”* <https://www.smsd.org/about/legislative-information/legislative-advocacy-and-platform>

If I can provide any additional information or answer questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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