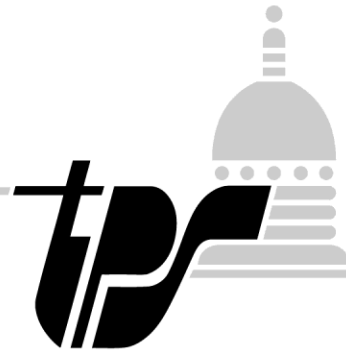


February 15, 2012



Chairman Aurand and Members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 2718. We appreciate your efforts to allow districts to raise funds for programs and activities that are not required by state law, however the mechanism set forth in HB 2718 whereby local property taxes can be unilaterally levied with no equalization state aid is problematic for several reasons.

First, the bill does not address disparity in property valuation statewide. What one wealthier district can raise for their LOB with one mill, as compared to another less wealthy districts, raises the equity issue that has been inherent in the school finance debate for many years. Due to this fact, Topeka Public Schools opposes modifications to the formula that fail to balance increased local funding options with increased state equalization aid and/or disparately increase reliance on local property taxes.

Second, all students should be afforded access to extracurricular programs and activities. While it is not reasonable to expect that every district across the state would choose to offer the same extracurriculars, an equal opportunity should be available for districts to offer programs and activities that will enhance their community and school system at a level that is reasonable for the local population.

Third, districts such as Topeka Public Schools with high "at risk" populations suffer from low property valuations. These students are the very students that need and can benefit from activities outside the school day and typically cannot afford to finance out of pocket expenditures for extracurriculars. It is also important to consider Legislature's own 2006 study showing: 1. a direct link between urban poverty and low student achievement and a correlation between spending and student achievement, and 2. the additional challenge and financial burden of educating at risk students in urban settings.

We at Topeka Public Schools understand the desire to enhance students' education and extracurricular options beyond what the state finances, as well as the desire to keep all of these funds in their own local activities budget. However, the reality is that local property taxes support local education and every student should have an equal opportunity to be prepared to compete in the workforce.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Julie Ford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Julie Ford, Superintendent
Topeka Public Schools, USD 501