

My name is Eric Teetsel and I'm here representing the Family Policy Alliance of Kansas. We represent thousands of individuals and families across our state who share our desire to make Kansas the best place in America to live and raise a family. We believe Kansas kids deserve an educational system that gives them a wide open future and the fuel to explore God's specific calling for them. To that end, **we strongly support HB 2540.**

One of the things that makes Kansas such an attractive place to raise a family is the quality of our schools. I myself am a product of public education (including two years at East Middle School in Leavenworth). Now, as a dad of two young girls and an uncle to several others, I see that our schools are central to our communities. There is much that divides us, but from the "car line" to the chorale concert, school is where we connect with friends, delight in the growth of our children, and unite around our mascot.

Two fundamental principles are central to the success of our schools: universality and diversity. The administrators, teachers, coaches, and staff who serve our kids and their parents are world-class professionals dedicated to the mission of, in the words of the Department of Education, to provide "a quality, high-level education that promotes student achievement and prepares *all students* for *global* success." Or, as the Kansas National Education Association puts it, "to prepare *every student* to succeed in a *diverse and interdependent world.*"

Unfortunately, there exists a blind spot in current policy that hinders the tenets of universality and diversity, and prevents educators from more fully achieving their mission. The statewide policy of the Kansas State High School Activities Association requiring students to be enrolled in a minimum of five subjects (or equivalent) to participate in KSHSAA sanctioned events excludes an entire class of students and their families from inclusion in the community. **HB 2540 solves this problem.**

A growing number of families have decided to provide for their child's education in non-traditional ways. This includes homeschooling, cooperative programs, virtual schools, and more. Parents make these choices for different reasons; maybe because of a physical or cognitive need, or a religious commitment. Whatever the reason, ultimately, the choice is driven by the desire to do what is in the best interests of the child – a choice a child's parents are best suited to make.

The decision to seek an alternative to the traditional, public school model should not preclude these families and their kids from inclusion in certain activities. The Kansas State High School Activities Association rightly states that, "our

association is strengthened by equity and diversity,” and “interscholastic activity programs promote positive school/community relations.” Indeed, by developing a policy of inclusivity and welcoming families whose children are enrolled less than full-time, schools will contribute to their goal of preparing all students for a diverse, interdependent world.

Furthermore, a policy of inclusion will enhance the educational outcomes for non-traditional students. Creating even small opportunities for our children now can lead to big futures. The Kansas State High School Activities Association also rightly states that, “participation in interscholastic programs promotes student academic achievement.” While parents may decide that their child’s curricular needs are best served in another way, they may retain an interest in the benefits provided by activities. While there exist extracurricular opportunities for students outside the public schools, sometimes parents cannot afford to pay for private lessons or private instruction. Plus, for especially gifted students, certain scholarships are available only to students participating in extracurricular activities.

Finally, in Kansas, we recognize that decisions made by families and by their local communities are best. HB 2540 honors the preference for local decision making by placing authority in school boards to enact their own policies for inclusion of students that reflect the particular needs and interests of their community. Not every homeschool family will choose to have their children participate in public school activities, but why not open the doors of opportunity for children whose families believe they will benefit?

Family Policy Alliance of Kansas urges the committee members to pass HB 2540 and move the bill swiftly to a floor vote.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Eric Teetsel
President & Executive Director
Family Policy Alliance of Kansas