

K-12 Budget Chair and Members,

My name is Meghan Hemenway and I am the parent of two children at Rising Star Elementary School in Lenexa and in the Shawnee Mission District. I am also the co-president of our PTA in what turned out to be a very unusual school year. I chose to keep my kids in the remote learning model for the entire year for a number of reasons the first being the safety of teachers, staff and family members of the students and staff in our community.

Knowing what we do about this global pandemic and after witnessing the high quality learning my children have received for more than three quarters - the end of the last school year and now this one - I am surprised and worried that HB2119 is being considered. I do not support the bill nor using public dollars for private education.

I have one child in gifted education and the second one is being tested in a remote-learning year. My children have done well enough - test scores etc - to continue to excel academically and the teachers and staff at not just their elementary school but in the district have supported and provided an individualized education plan for my children. I am aware that this is not everyone's experience, but the idea of further removing funding from schools that have faithfully and tirelessly strived to educate all children is insulting and short sighted. No one wants to be working, parenting, or governing in a global pandemic. There are no clear answers, but the idea of abandoning the public good at such a time is to try to find someone to blame for this situation and pushing the problems farther out into the future rather than finding solutions now.

Our elementary school has been Title I until the state reduced funding in 2019. Our population and its needs have not changed so without the funds teachers, staff, and parents have tried to cover the gap. I am glad that my children are in a diverse community school rather than making it to adulthood being surrounded mainly by people who look like them. I did not and would not choose to put them in private school. Their cultural, social, and emotional development is important to me and their school community is part of preparing them to be members of a diverse society.

Raising our children is a collective responsibility and should not be taken lightly or decided by people from one demographic. The well being and education of our children will affect every single Kansan. How well we care for them physically, emotionally and socially as well as how we choose to educate them will affect all of our futures.

Thank you,
Meghan Hemenway
Shawnee Mission School District parent and PTA president
Lenexa
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