



February 20, 2012

Chairwoman Gordan and Members of the House Education Budget Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 2580, which will create a new charter school system in Kansas. I am Dr. Julie Ford, Superintendent of Topeka Public Schools. The School Board of Topeka Public Schools adopted a legislative platform this year and took a strong position against the creation of a new charter school system. Specifically, the Board stated that they oppose the use of tuition tax credits, voucher systems, charter schools or choice plans to aid private elementary or secondary schools that are not subject to the same legal requirements and accountability standards as public school systems. Topeka Public Schools believes this issue is not education "choice," but rather allows the use of public funds to support schools that can discriminate in admission, provide sectarian religious instruction, and "compete" under different rules than public schools.

The Kansas Constitution in Article 6 provides that The Kansas State Board of Education be elected to determine educational policy for the state's primary and secondary schools. The local board of education is elected by the community to determine educational policy for that district's schools. We believe that creating a separate commission and appointing an authorizer will not only be unconstitutional, but will also create a system with no quality control.

The current charter system in Kansas works. The charter schools are under the umbrella of the local board and some flexibility is granted to Kansas charter schools. The Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) provides quality control and sets high expectations, including annual visits and oversight. Hope Street Academy in Topeka Public Schools is an example of a charter school that is very successful and has met AYP the past several years.

It is the belief of the Topeka Public Schools Board of Education that Kansas policy makers should adhere to the Kansas constitutional requirement to suitably and equitably fund education with a state finance system. It is our opinion that this is one more effort to undermine and underfund public education.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak in opposition to HB 2580.

Respectfully submitted,
Dr. Julie Ford

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

Topoka Public Schools

Topoka Public Schools Board of Education promotes the following tenets as guidance for Kansas policy-makers as they make decisions that will impact the students and families we serve.

School Finance

Kansas policymakers should adhere to the Kansas Constitutional requirement to suitably and equitably fund education with a state finance system.

Such funding for education should be reliable, fair and financially sustainable, and not overly reliant on local funding or limited by political pressures. Allowance for spending on education should be directly tied to the educational needs of the state's student population in order to adequately prepare students for success in the workforce.

The current funding formula is sound. The main problem is that it is not funded.

Any formula revision must take into consideration the 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.

About Topoka Public Schools

Enrollment: *more than 14,000 students*

Free & Reduced Lunch Students: 77%

Special Education Students: 19%

English Language Learner Students: 8%

Student Ethnicity:

Caucasian - 42%

Hispanic - 27%

African-American - 20%

Native American - 2%

Other - 9%

Key components for the school finance formula:

The formula must maintain weightings for special populations in order to suitably address the wide array of students Kansas educates.

The formula must adequately fund the base per pupil because per pupil funding is the primary source of funding for the regular classroom.

The formula must consider the cost of educating today's students from year to year, with consideration to inflation.

The formula must balance local effort with the state obligation to suitably fund education under the Kansas constitution, and thereby balance increased local funding options with increased state equalization aid. It should also mediate reliance on local property taxes.

The formula must link local effort with state equalization responsibilities and strike a balance between districts with low property valuations and those with high property values, as well as the excess costs required to educate special populations.

Districts must be afforded flexibility in operational funds to allow each district to meet the unique needs of the community and it's student population.

Kindergarten must be full day and funded in the formula consistent with grades 1-12.

Taxes:

The current tax structure should be maintained to ensure adequate funds are available for crucial state functions such as education. A sound tax system is one where sales tax, property tax, and income tax are balanced. Above all, cutting state taxes without providing offsetting revenues would, at best, shift the burden for funding schools to local taxpayers and thereby further disqualify Kansas' education system. At worst, it would erode the quality of the education we provide for our students.

Other issues of interest:

Quality early childhood programs are vital to a student success. Topeka remains committed to a comprehensive P-12 educational system.

Career pathways and technical education should be promoted, with an emphasis on public private partnerships that provide a continuum of exposure to possible career opportunities for students.

The Kansas State Board of Education must continue to be elected to determine educational policy for the state's primary and secondary schools as established in Article 6 of the Kansas Constitution.

Tuition tax credits, voucher systems, charter schools, or choice plans to aid private elementary or secondary schools are not subject to the same legal requirements and accountability standards as public school systems. The issue is not educational "choice" but using public funds to support schools that can discriminate in admission, provide sectarian religious instruction and "compete" under different rules than public schools.



Leading Learners

Topoka Public Schools

