



Testimony to House Education Budget Committee  
HB 2767 Tax Credit Scholarships  
March 6, 2012  
Dave Trabert, President

Chairperson Gordon and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present this written testimony today. It is an honor and privilege to provide this information as you examine alternate learning opportunities to improve education achievement in Kansas.

The purpose of HB 2767 is to provide eligible students with an opportunity to attend qualified schools of their parents' choice by receiving tax credit scholarships funded by taxpayer contributions.

There are three fundamental issues that must be addressed relevant to HB 2767: (1) the necessity or merit of providing parents and eligible students with such opportunity, (2) the benefits of providing the opportunity and (3) the mechanics of doing so. I'd like to address my comments to the first two issues.

Some parents have the means to send their children to a private school or move to a neighborhood with public schools that they believe are best able to meet their children's educational needs. Many Kansas parents, however, are forced to send their children to the public school in the neighborhood where they can afford to live. No child's educational opportunity should be limited by their parents' income. There are ways to provide parents of all means with educational choice. We believe parents, not government, should choose where their children attend school and HB 2767 is appropriately designed to benefit low income families.

Providing low income parents with a choice could alone justify this legislation, but there are also significant education achievement benefits associated with school choice.

Many education professionals recognize there is no single 'silver bullet' that drives student achievement, but that a broad array of reforms working in conjunction is what truly makes the difference. The best example is found in Florida, where state officials implemented multiple reforms beginning in 1999 that they credit for considerable gains in student achievement. Greatly expanded school choice is one of the key elements of Florida's plan, including one of the nation's broadest tax credit scholarship plans. When they began implementing their plan in 1999 Florida had some of the worst performances in the nation, and especially so with minorities and low income students. Like all states, Florida is still far from where they'd like to be but Florida's Low

Income students have made remarkable progress on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) relative to both the United States overall and to Kansas.

<b>Table 1: NAEP Scale Score 4th Grade Reading</b>							
	<b>1998</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>United States</b>							
All Students	213	217	216	217	220	220	220
Low Income	195	202	201	203	205	206	207
achievement gap	-18	-15	-15	-14	-15	-14	-13
<b>Florida</b>							
All Students	206	214	218	219	224	226	225
Low Income	190	204	205	209	213	217	216
achievement gap	-16	-10	-13	-10	-11	-9	-9
<b>Kansas</b>							
All Students	221	222	220	220	225	224	224
Low Income	206	211	206	208	212	213	212
achievement gap	-15	-11	-14	-12	-13	-11	-12
<i>Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, The Nation's Report Card</i>							

<b>Table 2: NAEP Scale Score 8th Grade Reading</b>							
	<b>1998</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>United States</b>							
All Students	261	263	261	260	261	262	264
Low Income	245	249	246	247	247	249	251
achievement gap	-16	-14	-15	-13	-14	-13	-13
<b>Florida</b>							
All Students	255	261	257	256	260	264	262
Low Income	241	249	245	246	249	255	254
achievement gap	-14	-12	-12	-10	-11	-9	-8
<b>Kansas</b>							
All Students	268	269	266	267	267	267	267
Low Income	254	251	253	254	253	255	256
achievement gap	-14	-18	-13	-13	-14	-12	-11
<i>Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, The Nation's Report Card</i>							

Fortunately, the achievement gaps have narrowed somewhat in Kansas and across the country, but Florida's gains are much more pronounced. Florida has a smaller achievement gap, they closed the gap between Low Income and All Students by more points and their scale score improvement is more than twice the national average.

<b>Table 3: Comparative Changes in Achievement Gaps - Low Income</b>						
Region	4th Grade Scale Score Summary			8th Grade Scale Score Summary		
	2011 Scale Score Gap Low vs. All	Points Gap Closed 1998-2011	Low Income Points Improved	2011 Scale Score Gap Low vs. All	Points Gap Closed 1998-2011	Low Income Points Improved
U. S.	-13	5	12	-13	3	6
Florida	-9	7	26	-8	6	13
Kansas	-12	3	6	-11	3	2

*Source: U. S. Dept. of Education, The Nation's Report Card*

To be certain, tax credit scholarships alone are not responsible for Florida' progress but state education officials say their tax credit scholarship program is an important element of closing achievement gaps.

Kansas state assessment scores reflect similar results, showing some degree of progress but still well below what most citizens would consider acceptable levels. State assessment results classify students in five categories: Academic Warning, Approached Standard, Meets Standard, Exceeds Standard and Exemplary. The Kansas Department of Education (KSDE) equates proficiency with Meets Standard but the definition of Meets Standard is well below what most parents would consider proficient.

For example, the definition of Meets Standard in Reading is less than full comprehension of grade-appropriate material:<sup>1</sup>

**Meets Standard** – When independently reading grade-appropriate narrative, expository, and technical text, a proficient student has *satisfactory* comprehension.

**Exceeds Standard** – When independently reading grade-appropriate narrative, expository, and technical text, an advanced student has *full* comprehension:

The definition of Meets Standard in Mathematics also does not require accurate performance on all grade level tasks:<sup>2</sup>

**Meets Standard** – A student scoring at the meets standard level *usually* performs consistently and accurately when working on *most* grade-level mathematical tasks. The student demonstrates *sufficient* content knowledge and application skills..

<sup>1</sup> Kansas Department of Education, Performance Level Descriptor Guidelines,

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

**Exceeds Standard** – A student scoring at the exceeds standard level *usually* performs consistently and accurately when working on *all* grade-level mathematical tasks. The student demonstrates *well-developed* content knowledge and application skills.

As shown in Table 4, most of the districts that would be affected by HB 2767 have fewer than 50% of their Economically Disadvantaged students (eligible for Free / Reduced Lunch) performing at grade level on the Kansas assessment test.<sup>3</sup> It is particularly noteworthy that the percentages drop off precipitously in Grade 11 – indicative that students did not fully grasp basic functions in earlier years and struggle to keep up as the material becomes more difficult.

**Table 4: Kansas State Assessment Results for 2011 Economically Disadvantaged Students**

USD	District	% F/R Enrolled	Reads Grade-Appropriate Material with Full Comprehension			Usually Performs Accurately on all Grade-Level Math Tasks		
			Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 11	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 11
	State of Kansas	48%	51%	49%	39%	48%	43%	28%
259	Wichita	74%	45%	35%	26%	44%	29%	16%
500	Kansas City	88%	39%	31%	22%	40%	33%	16%
501	Topeka	75%	39%	38%	27%	41%	35%	18%
253	Emporia	66%	57%	46%	37%	51%	29%	35%
443	Dodge City	80%	52%	47%	21%	53%	36%	23%
457	Garden City	71%	53%	43%	45%	54%	41%	32%
202	Turner	71%	43%	42%	34%	43%	37%	34%
234	Ft. Scott	62%	28%	50%	40%	18%	44%	31%
250	Pittsburg	65%	51%	50%	32%	33%	29%	17%
308	Hutchinson	65%	50%	49%	40%	39%	42%	25%
409	Atchison	65%	36%	58%	29%	31%	72%	26%
413	Chanute	60%	48%	47%	37%	49%	52%	52%
428	Great Bend	63%	45%	59%	31%	43%	68%	19%
445	Coffeyville	72%	40%	54%	33%	32%	24%	23%
446	Independence	57%	46%	53%	45%	30%	49%	15%
453	Leavenworth	56%	42%	44%	34%	41%	31%	24%
470	Arkansas City	67%	55%	60%	51%	58%	66%	38%
480	Liberal	77%	42%	43%	42%	40%	27%	33%

*Source: KSDE 2011 State Assessment*

It’s good that some progress has been made but Kansas’ Economically Disadvantaged students are still far below acceptable levels of achievement. HB 2767 would allow low income parents some measure of freedom to choose the school best suited for their child, rather than be forced to attend a school dictated by their economic status. It also only applies to students currently enrolled in a public school and the scholarship amount is less than state taxpayers would otherwise spend on each recipient, so state taxpayers would actually save money by providing low income parents with this measure of choice.

<sup>3</sup> Table 4 only reflects three grade levels but KSDE provided All Students / All Grades data to KansasOpenGov.org which supports this statement.

Accordingly, the question before the committee is not whether to allow low income parents some degree of the choice that parents of greater means currently enjoy, but WHY NOT allow them that freedom.

WHY NOT allow low income parents the freedom to choose the school they feel is best suited for their children?

WHY NOT allow taxpayers of means to fund scholarships for low income students in a manner that would have a positive impact on the state budget?

WHY NOT begin to enact reforms that education officials in other states credit for significant gains in student achievement when Kansas students are nowhere near achieving their full potential?

HB 2767 is an important piece of the education reform tapestry needed in Kansas and we strongly encourage its passage.