

Chairwoman Williams and members of the House K-12 Education Budget Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to HB 2550, which creates the student empowerment act to provide an educational savings account for students who are academically at-risk. We are renewing our opposition to this bill as was offered last year in opposition to HB 2119. We are opposed to the use of public funds to fund private or non-public schools. HB 2550 would have the effect of eroding the funding for the programs and services that are the most effective and most essential offerings for students in Topeka who are considered academically at-risk.

The 27,386 students of Shawnee County, Kansas, are served by five public school districts. Leadership from all five Shawnee County public school districts worked collaboratively to create the 2021-2022 Shawnee County Legislative Positions. These legislative positions were mutually created with the belief that Shawnee County students are the top priority. Significant societal benefits are gained by supporting exemplary public education, and all Kansas students deserve an adequate and equitable public education. Shawnee County utilized the KSDE endorsed curriculum guidelines and does not support or implement CRT.

You will find information about the Shawnee County Public School system on the front of the One United Voice document attached and our positions on school funding, teacher recruitment, access to technology, social emotional health and Constitutional responsibilities on the reverse. We offer this as a guide for policymakers who are making decisions that impact our public schools. Information about Topeka Public Schools is also attached.

You have received testimony outlining a number of concerns with the bill not only as written, but in concept. Rather than reiterate those concerns, we draw you to the One United Voice legislative platform. To ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed, all schools supported by public funds must serve all children on the same basis as public schools. We oppose “school choice” programs which divert public funding to schools which are not required to serve disadvantaged and disabled students with the greatest needs.

One of the best ways to help students who are academically at risk do better in school is to address the challenges they face because of their poverty. Expansion of early childhood education programs helps ensure that students show up at school ready to learn. Expansion of Medicaid, which will increase health insurance coverage for a significant number of families in our community, promotes family access to health care, as well as increased opportunities for students to be successful in school. Support services at schools and help for students’ families in the community help students and families with the things that make it harder for them to succeed. Full funding of the statutory commitment to pay 92% of excess special education costs would have great impact on services available to free and reduced price lunch eligible students.

Under HB 2550, some schools receiving public funds would not have to provide important programs and services required and offered by public schools. HB 2550 would work to erode our public school system. Public funding for schools is put to better use when invested in our public schools. Please oppose HB 2550.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this important issue,

Dr. Tiffany Anderson, Superintendent, Topeka Public Schools USD 501
Mr. Lalo Muñoz, School Board President, Topeka Public Schools, USD 501