



Testimony before the

**House Committee for K-12 Education Budget**

on

**HB 2068**

by

**G.A. Buie, Executive Director - USA-Kansas and Kansas School Superintendents Association**

**Testimony provided on behalf of the USA-Kansas and Kansas School Superintendents Association**

Madam Chair and members of the committee

Thank you for this opportunity to address the committee.

Our organization stands as an opponent to HB 2068.

I'm sure it comes as no surprise USA-Kansas will be opposed to expanding the tax scholarship program. We have been opposed from the beginning. It should be noted we are not opposed to private schools, or the opportunities they can provide. Our organization supports school leaders and members who work in private schools throughout Kansas.

When this bill was originally placed into law it was promoted as a bill to support financially challenged students to attend a private school if their home (public) school was one of the lowest performing schools in the state.

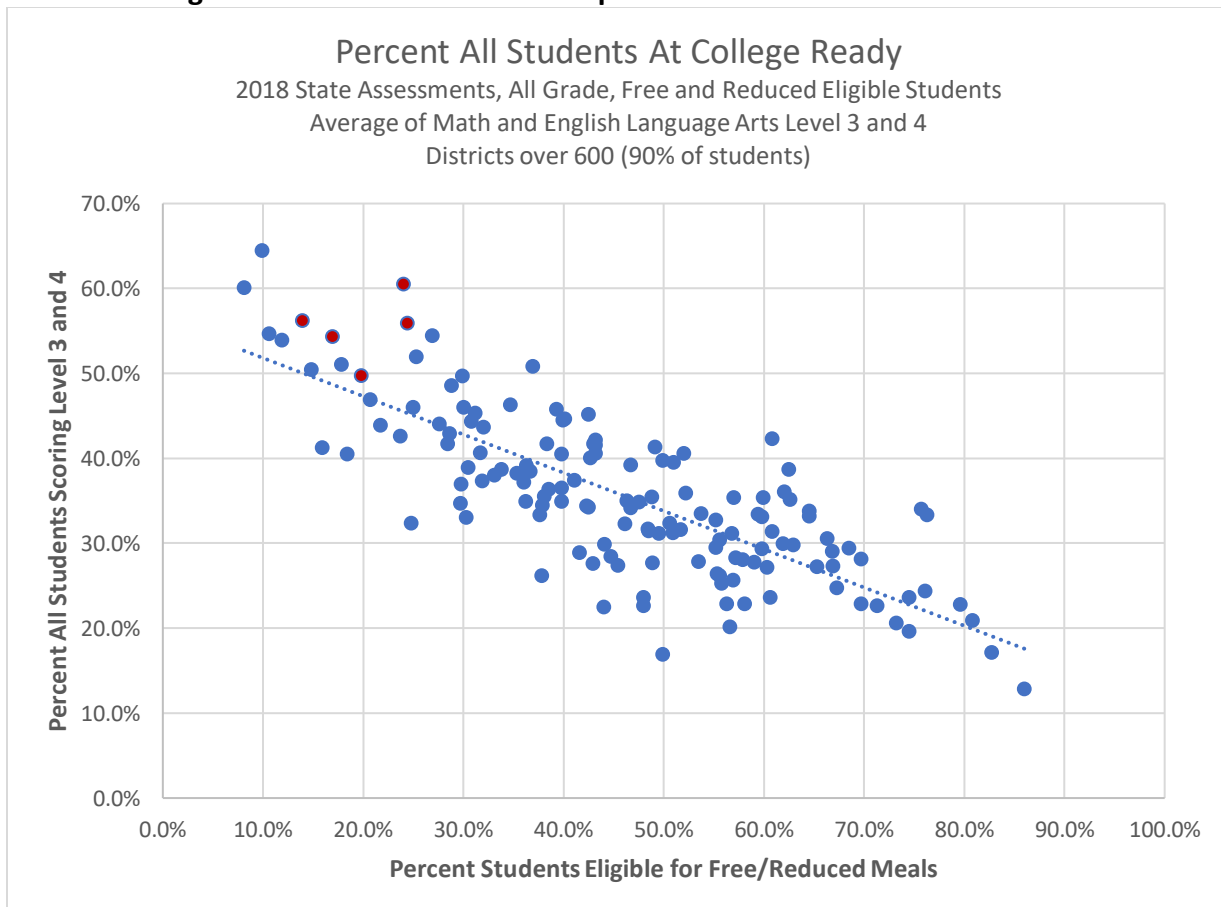
As this bill is amended it completely removes the provision of a student attending one of the lowest 100 performing schools. It would allow any student attending a public school, including leaving a higher achieving school, to attend a private school. As our organization reviewed the changes in this bill, it is our belief it transforms a tax scholarship provision to a state supported private school voucher.

Is the premise private schools offer a better education compared to its public counterpart? What we do know about private schools, school leaders have the ability to maintain optional classroom sizes, easily remove distracting students, and admit optimal students with an

established skill level. So, it would make sense if private schools would outperform public schools when they are in control of the enrollments and the students who attend.

Using a public school example in Kansas City USD 500, in 2017 the average high school graduation rate for the five high schools was 71 percent, but Sumner Academy, one of those five high schools, has a 100 percent graduation rate. Do they have better programs, better teachers, what truly sets them apart? Sumner Academy has the ability to control the student enrollment in the KCK school district. Students must demonstrate certain qualifications to be admitted to Sumner Academy. Students unable to meet these rigorous requirements remain in one of the four neighborhood high schools. Yes, it is possible they have stronger teachers or higher expectations, but maybe it's because they are able to narrow their focus, limit curriculum to college bound students, and push students harder because if they don't perform, they are moved from the program.

**There is strong correlation between student performance and student income level.**



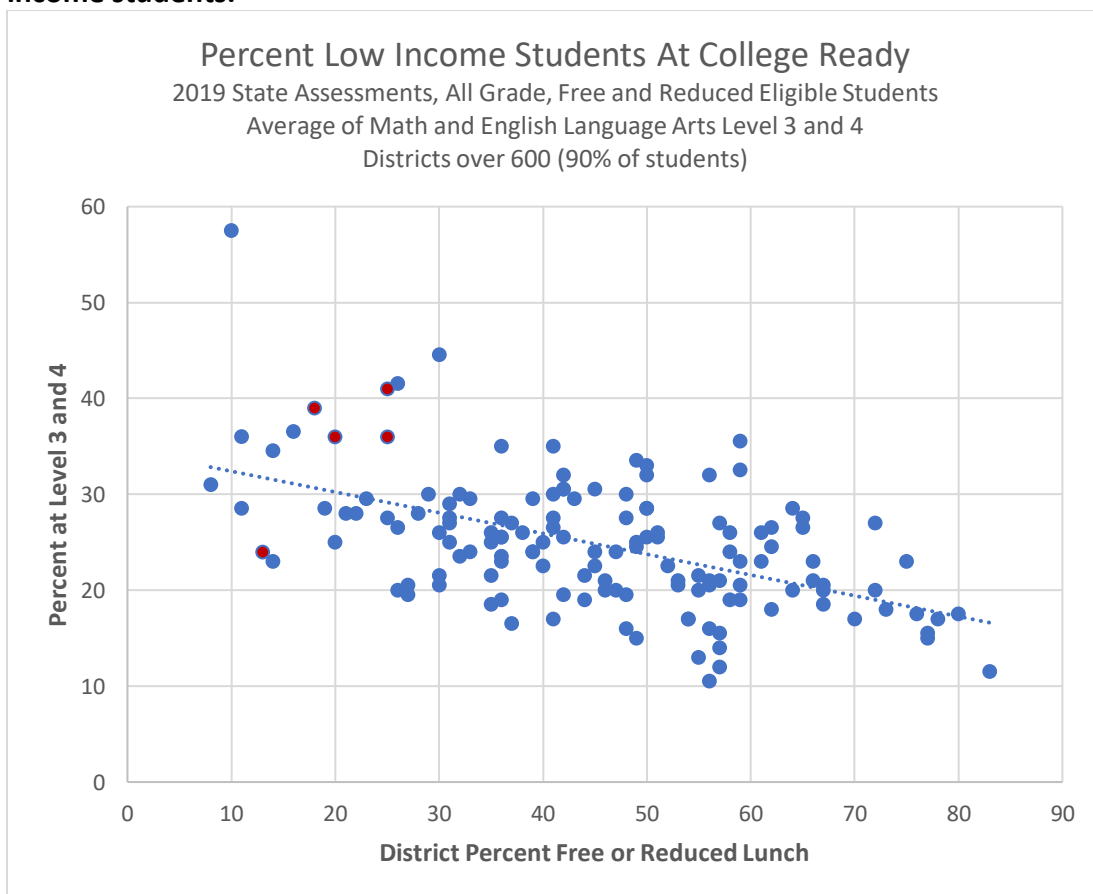
This chart shows each district or private school system with over 600 students, which represent over 90 percent of all students in the state (in accredited schools). Each dot shows the percent of that district's students eligible for free or reduced prices meals in 2018, and the average

percent all students scoring at level 3 or 4 on state reading and tests, sometimes called “college ready.”

Note the strong trendline: as a district’s low-income percentages increases, performance tends to decline, due to well documented reasons why low-income students struggle. Essentially, low income students are more likely to face out-of-school issues that negatively affect learning, and their families have fewer resources to assist them.

The five accredited private school systems are in red. They have among the highest percentages of students testing at college-ready levels, but they are also among the lowest in percent of free/reduced lunch students. Three of the five are slightly above the trendline; two are higher, but none of these private school systems have as many special education students as public school systems (another group that tends to struggle in school due to factors largely beyond the schools control).

**Low income students are more likely to be struggle in districts with higher percentages of low income students.**



The first chart shows that as student poverty increases, the percentage of students reaching standards declines because low income students are more likely to struggle. But this second chart shows that as poverty increases, performance among low income students also decreases.

In other words, low income students on average do worse in schools with high poverty than low income students in low poverty schools. This is one reason studies have justified “high density” weighting in Kansas. There are at least two possible reasons. One is a difference in the capacity of the school system. A lower poverty school may be able to devote more resources and attention to low-income, at-risk students because there are fewer to serve, or students may be positively impacted by more economically advantaged peers.

The second reason could be student characteristics. High poverty schools could be more likely to have students in deeper, generational poverty with more severe needs. In other words, some free/reduced meal eligible students have much more challenging issues than others which require more specialized supports.

Again, private school systems have better results for low income students than average, but they also have lower percentages of low-income students than average. Four of the five systems are above the predicted trendline, but one – the largest – is actually below the trendline for low income students.

**Like public school districts, private school systems have a gap between low income and non-low income students.**

	Math – Percent in LOWEST Level			English Lang. Arts – Percent at Lowest Level		
	All students	Free/Reduce	Gap	All students	Free/Reduced	Gap
State Average	23.3	40.0	11.7	29.5	41.9	12.4
KCK Catholic	13.3	36.1	22.8	12.3	34.0	21.7
Wichita Catholic	8.7	18.8	10.1	7.1	16.2	8.6
Topeka Lutheran	13.6	22.1	8.5	11.7	14.4	2.7
Dodge Catholic	11.1	24.5	13.4	10.9	21.8	10.9
Salina Catholic	14.8	23.0	8.2	13.6	22.0	8.4

The table above shows the percentage of students scoring at “Level 1” on state reading and math tests for the state as a whole and for the five accredited private school systems.

For both, all students and free/reduced eligible students, private school systems have a lower percentage of students scoring at the lowest level. As previous data has shown, this is to be expected because they have lower percentages of low-income students.

But each of the private school systems also have a gap between low income students and all students, and in most cases, the gap is within a few percentage points of the statewide gap for all students. In one case, the gap is substantially higher than the statewide average.

**Like public schools, many private schools have lower achievement in high school.**

	Math – Percent in LOWEST Level			English Lang. Arts – Percent at Lowest Level		
	All students	All H.S.	Low Inc. H.S.	All students	All H.S.	Low Inc. H.S.
State Average	23.3	41.1	57.2	29.5	34.2	48.6
KCK Catholic	13.3	25.3	63.8	12.3	18.7	59.4
Wichita Catholic	8.7	8.1	8.2	7.1	5.4	11.2
Salina Catholic	14.8	25.5	43.5	13.6	14.4	29.2

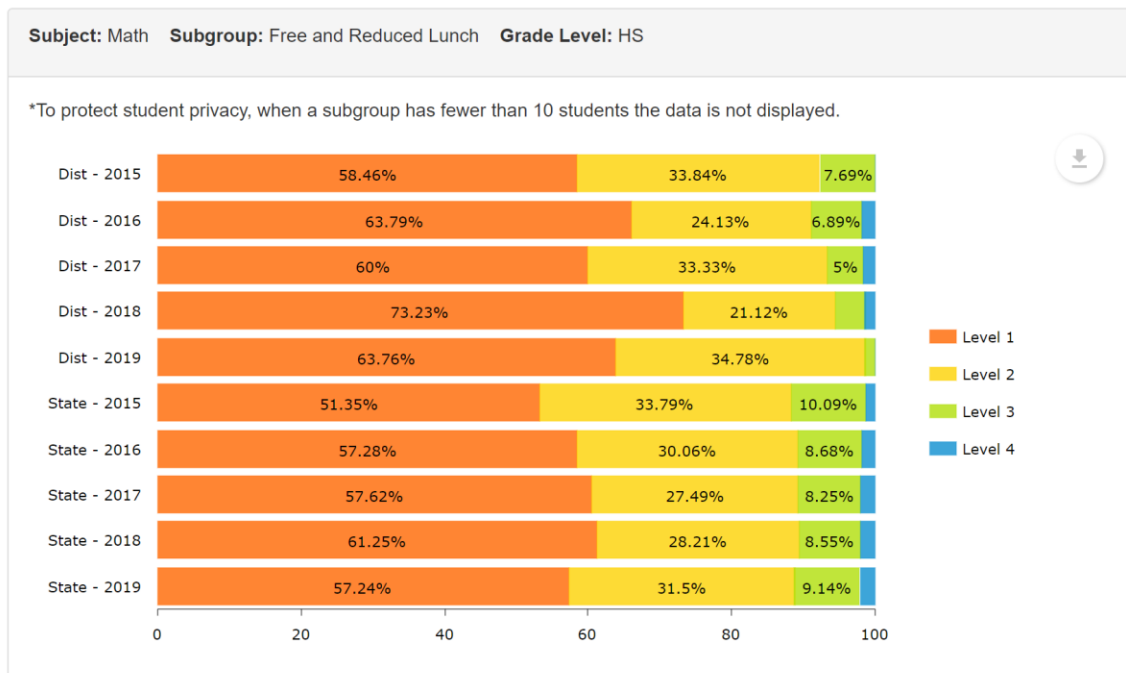
Statewide, high school students are more likely to test below standard in both reading and math, and low-income students perform even lower. The state’s largest private system, Kansas

City Kansas Catholic schools, also has a gap between all students (grades) and high school, and a higher percentage of low-income high school students scores in the lowest level than state average.

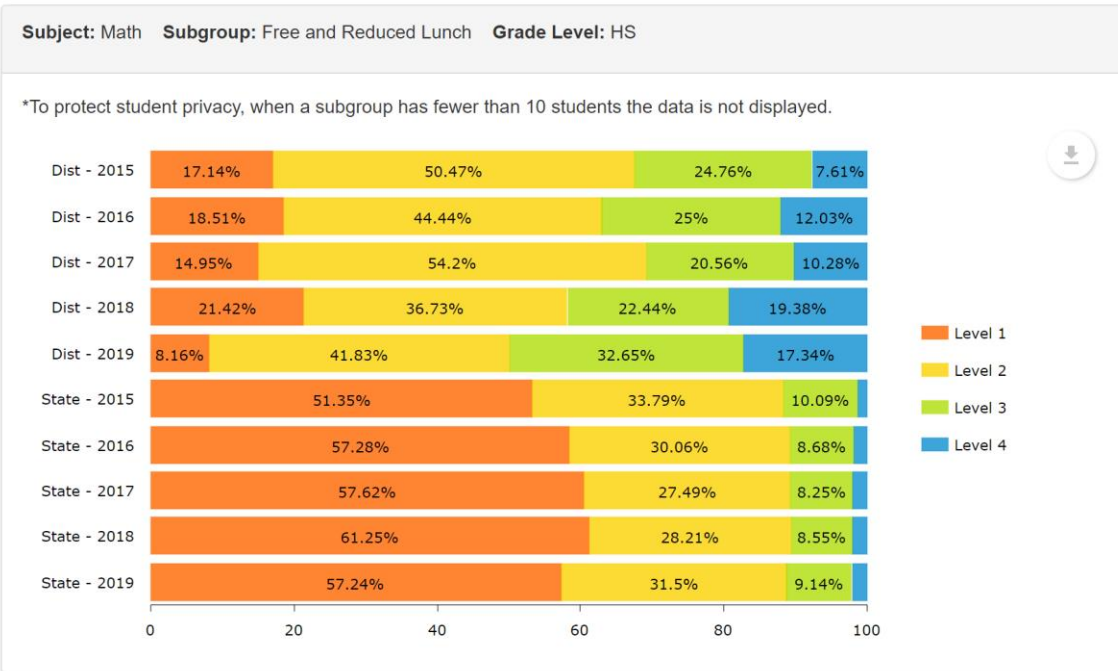
The Wichita Catholic schools have about the same performance across all groups. The Salina system has large gaps between all students, high school, and low-income high school in math, and low income high school in English Language Arts. The other two systems do not have high schools.

Note: with a relatively small number of low-income students, such as low income students at high only, there can be consideration variation year to year.

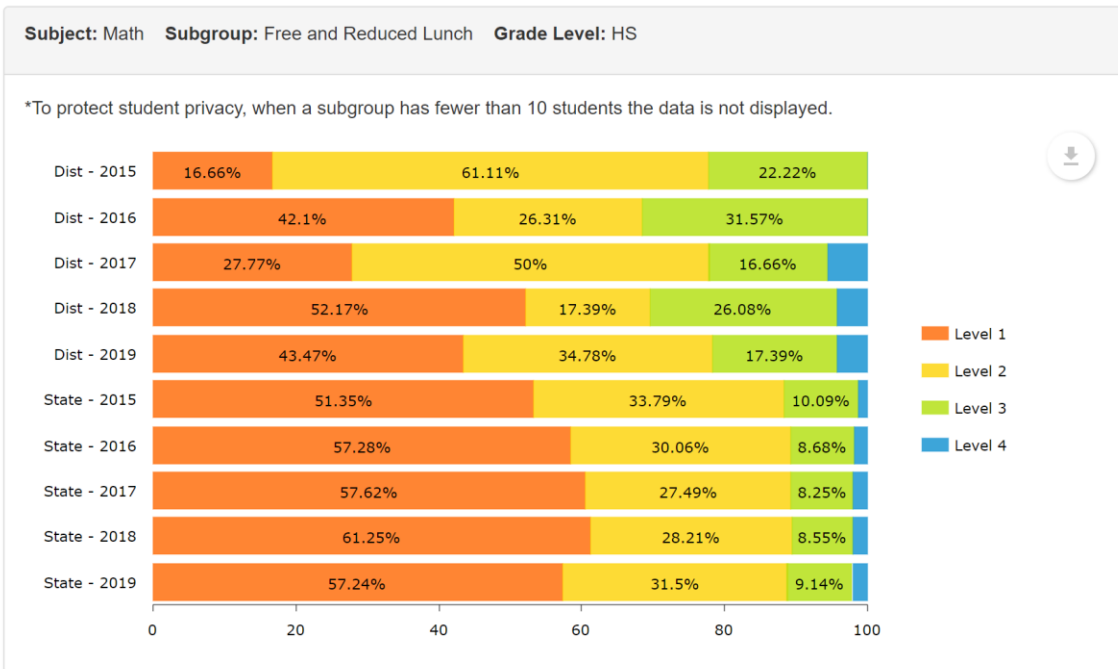
### KCK Catholic Performance Level Reports



## Wichita Catholic Performance Level Reports



## Salina Catholic Performance Level Reports



In the end, there is no strong evidence in Kansas that private schools are out performing their public-school counterparts. We have both public and private schools who are showing strong growth.