
Written Testimony
HB 2068
House Committee for K-12 Education Budget

Mrs. Pam Stranathan, Superintendent, USD 231 Gardner Edgerton School District
January 26, 2021

The Gardner Edgerton School District (231) presents this written testimony in opposition to House Bill 2068 being heard today. This bill would expand the tax credit for low-income students' scholarship programs to include any student eligible for the free or reduced lunch program, diverting public dollars away from public schools. In doing so, this bill threatens to erode public schools' ability to continue in their role as the engine that drives Kansas's success.

Thankfully, due to the outstanding schools in the Gardner Edgerton School District, there are currently no students who qualify for the tax credit scholarship program. However, if there were, this bill would hurt our ability to provide an outstanding education to every student we serve.

The Gardner Edgerton School District has been a long-standing opponent to public funding of private schools, including offering public tax credits that decrease state revenue, which does not comply with the same standards and requirements of public school districts, including governance of an elected local school board.

HB 2068 being heard today would require any private school receiving tax scholarship recipients to meet the same accreditation requirements as public schools but would not require private schools to have the same accountability and admission standards as public schools. Essentially, this bill serves as the platform for a "selective admission" process for private schools while at the same time diverting state revenues and, therefore, decreasing funding available for public education.

We are gravely concerned this practice would lead to discrimination against students with special needs. Many private schools would shy away from accepting these students due to additional costs, sometimes in the tens of thousands of dollars for one student alone. Additionally, this would divert funds that are desperately needed to adequately educate students with similar needs who choose to remain in our district.

In closing, USD 231 is proud of the critical and essential support provided to students identified as "at-risk" or have special needs. We provide an outstanding level of service, even though the necessary costs far exceed the amounts currently provided through state and federal aid.

Thank you to the members of the House Committee for K-12 Education Budget. We trust you will make the right decision in not advancing this legislation.