



Testimony: SB 61 – Private Tax Credit Scholarship (Opponent)
House K-12 Education Budget Committee
February 23, 2021
By: Dr. Tonya Merrigan, Superintendent (written only)

Thank you for the opportunity to enter written testimony opposing SB 61, which would expand the tax credit for low-income students scholarship program to include any student eligible for the free or reduced lunch program.

Blue Valley has a student population of more than 21,600 and consistently ranks in the top tier of high-performing schools, both in the state and in the nation. (See "Quick Facts" at end of testimony.) Currently, there are no students in the Blue Valley school district participating in the tax credit scholarship program.

The Blue Valley Board of Education has a long-standing priority position that states:

[Blue Valley] opposes public funding of private schools, including offering public tax credits that decrease state revenue, that do not comply with the same standards and requirements of public school districts, including governance by an elected local school board.

SB 61 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. As we reviewed SB 61, several questions came to mind:

- Would private schools receiving these students be required to provide Individualized Education Plans (IEP) for students needing special education services, and would these schools be required to provide needed special education services? If not, who is responsible for these?
- Would private schools be required to provide dyslexia screenings to students and dyslexia training to teachers, as required of public schools? If not, who is responsible for these assessments and services?
- Would private schools be allowed to use admissions testing or other gate-keeping criteria in determining student admissions?

These are critical questions to the Blue Valley school district, since we currently are reimbursed only 62% of special education excess costs (state law sets that level at 92%) and we anticipate spending \$3.7 million more on at-risk student services than the district is reimbursed.

Before ending, we want to express our thanks to the committee for its work toward improved student learning in Kansas and, as well, our commitment to work with the committee toward that end.