



House K-12 Education Budget Committee
Written testimony for HB 2550, creating the student empowerment act (Opposition)
Prepared by Brent Yeager, Superintendent
February 1, 2022

Chair Williams and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition to HB 2550, which would create the student empowerment act and provide education savings accounts for academically at-risk students.

I want to preface our testimony today by saying this: The Olathe Board of Education and staff are committed to providing programs and services that help students progress academically and emotionally. We recognize the anxiety and frustration students, parents, and stakeholders sometimes feel as we attempt to balance the safety and well-being of our students alongside the obligation to provide the high-quality education our community has come to expect.

The Olathe Board of Education has a long-standing policy position that states:

Schools receiving public funding should be required to meet state accreditation requirements, provide information about students and financing on the same basis as public schools, and accept all students on an equal, non-selective basis.

HB 2550 proposes changes beyond trying to help students who may have regressed academically or are deemed at-risk. Rather, **HB 2550 proposes substantive changes in education policy, finance, and accountability.**

Academic accountability

Olathe Public Schools is continually adapting programs, creating new learning opportunities, and working with our business partners to provide students and parents with programs that challenge students academically. We recognize the learning experience needs to be highly individualized. That is why we remain focused on outcomes and providing our students with the high-quality learning opportunities that prepare them for success in post-secondary education and the workforce.

Our district continues to work with families to provide the best possible learning experience for students. Student academic progress is monitored, assessed, and communicated to both students and their families in various ways, including conferences and online reporting. We respect that parents may prefer alternative learning opportunities, whether it be homeschooling or enrolling their children in private schools, but we believe those programs should be held to the same rigorous academic and reporting standards as the school district.

Fiscal accountability

The Olathe Board of Education strives to be a good steward of taxpayer dollars. We are not only required, but support, a transparent budget process that allows parents and community members to have input and ask questions about how resources are used to support student learning. The district holds budget workshops and board meetings that invite public participation. An external accounting firm annually audits our budget to ensure we follow generally accepted accounting principles. That budget is also subject to an audit by the Kansas State Department of Education to ensure that expenditures comply with state and federal laws. And, at the discretion of the legislature, our district is audited by the Division of Legislative Post Audit – often to ensure that we are in compliance with state laws, and that we are achieving the outcomes intended by the legislature. All of this information and additional budget resources are publicly available for patrons.

HB 2550 does not impose these same requirements or establish similar expectations for nonpublic entities, whether private schools or other nonpublic learning environments. There are few financial requirements other than submitting receipts for educational expenditures (broadly defined). Unlike school districts, there is no requirement that private entities meet a minimum standard of submitting or publishing a budget plan for how public dollars will be utilized to achieve outcomes for students – something that has been an essential part of our conversations related to K-12 education funding and policy discussions with policymakers.

The funds being directed to nonpublic entities are taxpayer dollars, and we believe they should be held to the same level of accountability as our district.

The Olathe Board of Education appreciates the legislature’s investment and interest in working with us to ensure that each child has the opportunity to learn. We know we are making a difference in our students’ lives and remain committed to working with you to address the needs of all students. If you have any questions, please contact me at (913) 780-8022.

At-A-Glance: Our Students (2021-2022)

Enrollment (headcount)	29,404	Free and reduced Lunch	24.1%
Ethnicity of the student population		Title I schools (elementary)	10
Caucasian	64.9%	Range of poverty, 50.0% to 72.3%	
Hispanic	17.6%	Graduation rate	92.4%
African American	7.7%	Graduates pursuing postsecondary ed	91.8%
Asian	4.3%	Dropout rate	.8%
Other	5.6%	ACT (average score)	22.1
Attendance rate	94.4%	Scholarship dollars awarded	\$25.0m
