



SHAWNEE MISSION SCHOOL DISTRICT

January 30, 2020
House K-12 Education Budget Committee

Written Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 2465.

Chairwoman Williams and Members of the Committee:

The Shawnee Mission School District presents this testimony in opposition to House Bill 2465, which would expand eligibility for the Kansas Hope Scholarship Act beyond its original legislative intent, diverting scarce public dollars away from public schools. In doing so, this bill threatens to erode the ability of public schools to continue in their role as the engine that drives the success of Kansas.

The Shawnee Mission School District legislative platform reflects the policy priorities of our Board and our District. Our approved 2020 legislative platform asserts: “18. Support legislation to repeal or reduce the private education tuition tax credit program, and oppose vouchers, or similar programs, such as the Kansas Hope Scholarship Act from 2019.”

<https://www.smsd.org/about/legislative-information/legislative-advocacy-and-platform>

While parts of the legislation seem aimed at rearranging components of the original bill, the changes to the non-public school law are significant.

At risk: The elimination of statutory compliance with the Kansas School Equity and Enhancement Act in House Bill 2465 eliminates the “at-risk” as defined by statute requirement and replaces that provision with the assertion the student is “eligible for free or reduced-priced meals under the school lunch act.”

- There is a qualitative and measurable difference between complying with the law and a simple assertion that a student is eligible.
- Further, this language muddies the meaning of at-risk by removing the connection in law between “eligible for free meals” and the additional requirement in the law for participating in a district program “that maintains an approved at-risk student assistance program.” KSA 75-5132. This bill eliminated the requirement that a non-public school maintains an approved at-risk student assistance program.
- Finally, in current law, compliance with KSA 75-5132 at-risk eligibility means “eligible for free meals.” HB 2465 broadens eligibility to include “eligible for free or reduced-priced meals” again broadening the definition beyond that used in the public school system.

Finally, the provisions repeal the original program obligation to focus on elementary schools, and particularly low performing elementary schools. Such a change, which eliminates the provisions that were at the heart of the argument for the original legislation (to provide resources for needy low-income elementary students who might not have other options), seems to lay bare the intention of this legislation: to divert public funds to private schools, and to make any child in Kansas eligible for those funds. Such efforts do nothing to provide hope for the more than 460,000 students who attend public schools in Kansas.

If I can provide any additional information or answer questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David A. Smith".

David A. Smith
Chief Communications Officer

Direct line: 913-993-6448
E-mail: davidsmith@smsd.org