



Written testimony before the House K-12 Education Budget Committee in opposition to House Bill 2218

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Madam Chair, Members of the Committee:

Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS/USD 500) is the largest school district in Wyandotte County and the fifth largest school district in Kansas, with just over 20,000 students enrolled. We are determined to empower every one of our students to reach their full potential: academically, socially, and emotionally. With this focus, we can ensure that by 2031, all our students will graduate with a Diploma+ endorsement prepared for college and careers.

We oppose HB 2218 because we believe it will dilute public education opportunities in Wyandotte County. KCKPS believes that the State of Kansas should strive to provide a constitutionally adequate and equitable educational opportunity for ALL Kansas students.

HB 2218 became available in written form on January 30, 2023. USD 500 and many other districts have struggled to understand the details included in this newly proposed educational funding model. In our initial review, we identified several areas of concern. This is not an exhaustive list. We will continue to evaluate it. Hopefully, we will be allowed to provide future comments.

Before addressing our concerns, we want to express our unequivocal and fundamental belief that every parent or guardian should continue to have the right to send their child to the best educational opportunity they desire. KCKPS and other Kansas public schools are responsible for providing that opportunity for all children. Therefore, public resources should go to public schools.

These are some of the more specific concerns we have with this bill:

- HB 2218 sets up a separate organizational board to administer this program. Article VI 2(a) of the Kansas Constitution says *The legislature shall provide for a state board of education which shall have general supervision of public schools, educational institutions, and all the educational interests of the state.* This proposed bill appears to conflict with Article VI.
- HB 2218 provides for a transfer of funds from the state general fund to the student's parents or guardians for use in a non-accredited educational setting. The language appears open to any student in the public or private setting. It also seems to provide state resources for services currently unavailable in public schools. The size and scope of this program could ultimately destroy our public education system, which is the only system in our state that serves all students.

- Nothing in this bill ensures that the state appropriation will pay for the actual cost of the unaccredited educational setting. There is no protection for the student or family against additional expenses that may be required by the non-public educational setting they are interested in attending. ESA funds provided to students and families often would not cover tuition costs alone. For many families, an ESA and a tax credit scholarship would be necessary to meet the overall cost of the non-accredited educational setting.

USD 500 is greatly concerned with the increasing education “reform” rhetoric and disingenuous culture wars surrounding public schools. The needless debate around Education Savings Accounts and education tax credit scholarship programs are tactics that seek to divert critical public school funding to the private sector.

Despite claims that school voucher programs lead to corresponding gains in student success, no credible research has suggested that vouchers improve academic performance. If anything, some programs have been found to have a negative impact on student achievement. Non-accredited school settings are not required to provide performance data.

We respectfully ask that you reject HB 2218 and direct future efforts to fund the Kansas public school system fully.