



SMAC PTA LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

January 20, 2022

The Kansas legislature officially started last week. Now is the time for us to pay close attention to what is happening in Topeka and to stay informed and engaged.

Public education advocates believe this may be a difficult session. Below is a quick overview of some of the issues expected from the legislature.

- Bills to expand or create voucher type mechanisms
- Criticism of student achievement while disregarding the impacts of COVID
- Attempts to legislate curriculum & graduation requirements
- Focus on teaching concepts of race and history as well as books used for curriculum and on library and classroom shelves
- Focus on masks and vaccines, including current vaccine requirements

Below is a little more detail on each of the above items.

Bills to expand or create voucher type mechanisms divert public tax dollars to private schools and are in opposition to:

Kansas PTA Priority 11: Public Dollars for Public Education. Kansas PTA opposes the use of vouchers for the tuition of non-public schools, also known as tax credit scholarships, choice, education freedom. Non-public schools are not required to accept all students, can discriminate in admissions, mandate religious instruction, operate under different rules of transparency and accountability, waive access to special education services and such.

Criticism of student achievement as district's have begun receiving additional state funding per the Gannon court case and federal funding for COVID relief, is expected to be used in the justification of voucher type mechanisms. However, there is little acknowledgement that COVID has disrupted and continues to disrupt student learning due to causes beyond districts' control. **Students and teachers need consistent support during this time.**

Attempts to legislate curriculum & graduation requirements are expected to continue. Last year the legislature attempted to require a financial literacy course and a civics exam to graduate. This usurps the constitutional authority of the State Board of Education and local school boards, who have a better understanding of need and how new requirements fit within current schedules, and is in opposition to:

Kansas PTA Priority 1 – Kansas Constitution. Kansas PTA supports efforts to preserve the Kansas Constitution. This includes Article VI, regarding public education, to protect non-partisan elections of local school board members, to retain legislators' obligation to provide suitable finance for ongoing

educational improvement, as well as State Board of Education oversight of state education standards and accreditations.

Thus, per the Kansas constitution, it is the responsibility of the elected legislature to adequately fund schools, while the elected State Board of Education has the responsibility of creating curriculum standards and requirements to graduate. Additionally, local boards of education are responsible for overseeing curriculum.

This focus on race and history as well as books used for curriculum and on library/classroom shelves is happening nationwide as we see these things increasingly being scrutinized in state legislatures and laws being passed in a few states. These were also topics of discussion during an interim legislative education committee meeting in Kansas. As explained above, in Kansas, standards and curriculum responsibility lies with our elected State Board of Education and local school boards, not the legislature. Additionally, below is some guidance from the National PTA:

National PTA believes students should have an honest and fair understanding of how our nation's history has unfolded, and we encourage the implementation of diverse and inclusive curricula in K-12 public schools nationwide and has adopted a position statement on Inclusive Curricula in K-12 Education which includes recognizing racism, classism, and other issues in the world and developing a student's awareness to openly address these situations.

National PTA believes in the value of all children and helping all children reach their full potential. Our association also believes that providing students with age-appropriate and accurate history lessons in our nation's public schools will help them become the critical thinkers we need to make this a more just, prosperous and equitable country.

The focus on masks and vaccines appears to be continuing and evolving. There are now concerns that some legislators intend to propose changes to the current vaccine requirements for attending Kansas public schools, making them more lenient. **Our schools need to be able to take necessary actions to maximize opportunities for in-person learning and to protect the health of students and teachers.**

The above is just a snapshot of the issues we need to watch for this session. Please make it a point to stay informed and engaged, and watch for action items.