



# SMAC PTA LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

February 4, 2021

Oh, Topeka...it's going to be a rough legislative session this year. But, the SMSD bond passed, so let's all take a moment to appreciate that our local community supports our public schools. 😊

And, back to Topeka. We'll start with a simple **ACTION ITEM** and go over the details of some current legislation that needs to be watched and likely taken action on soon.

## **ACTION ITEM – Who are your state legislators?**

Get ready to contact your legislators by putting their contact info in your phone. To find your state representative and senator, enter your full address at [openstates.org](https://openstates.org). Encourage others in your school to do the same.

## **HB2068 & SB61 Tax Credit Scholarship Expansion**

These identical bills were introduced in House and Senate committees. SB61 has passed out of committee. Testimony in opposition to these bills, allowing for \$10M in public tax dollars to be diverted to private schools, was provided by [Kansas PTA](#), [SMSD](#), [Kansas Association of School Boards](#) (KASB), and other education advocacy groups.

Education advocates opposed this program when it was established in 2014. One concern was that there would be continued efforts to expand the program leading to more tax dollars being moved to private schools. And that is what we are seeing now.

When established, the program was for at-risk students identified as receiving free lunch (Kansas at-risk funding criteria) and attending one of the 100 lowest performing schools. The expansion opens up the program to reduced lunch students and students attending any public school in Kansas, moving it away from its original at-risk intent.

Additionally, opposition to using public tax dollars for private schools continues to be:

- Private schools are not held to the same accountability standards as public schools.
- There is no review process in place to evaluate if the program is successful.
- Participating schools aren't required to be accredited by the state of Kansas.
- Private schools can choose which students they accept, whereas public schools educate ALL Kansas students regardless of ability, religion, sexual orientation, etc.

## **HB2119 Establishment of Education Savings Accounts**

The official name of this bill is the "Student empowerment act to provide an education savings account for students who are academically at risk."

That sounds good, but Education Savings Accounts (ESA's) are another voucher type tool that allows public tax dollars to be diverted to private schools. The most egregious part of this bill may be the hybrid/remote "at-risk" factor. This would allow for any student that resides in a school district that required remote or hybrid learning in the preceding year, to open an education savings account to be used for private, home, or on-line schooling.

This would encompass a great majority of public school students in the state of Kansas. They are essentially using this unprecedented, temporary pandemic as justification for implementing a long-term voucher type program that would ultimately harm public school children.

Education Savings Accounts would allow for an amount equal to the BASE student aid to be transferred from public funds to an individual student's account. The bill is scheduled for a hearing on Monday, February 8. Below are resources for learning more about the bill, the opposition to the bill, and how ESA's impact our public schools.

- [KASB Summary of HB2119](#)
- [Testimony in opposition from Kansas PTA](#)
- [ESA YouTube video](#) from Iowa parents opposing similar legislation

### **HB2059 Reducing the conceal carry age to 18**

Legislation has been proposed to allow individuals coming to Kansas who are allowed to conceal carry in their home state, to conceal carry in Kansas regardless of whether their state's gun laws are less restrictive than Kansas (e.g. restrictions on domestic abusers). Because some states allow individuals under 21 to conceal carry, some legislators in Kansas feel we need to reduce the age for Kansans if we will be allowing those under 21 visiting from other states to conceal carry while in Kansas.

Reducing the conceal carry age to that of many high school seniors puts this bill in opposition to gun safety line items in [SMSD's Legislative Platform](#) and [Kansas PTA's Legislative Priorities](#).

### **SUMMARY**

These are just a few of the things on the legislative agenda this year that could have an impact on our schools and in turn Kansas children. We also need to watch some of the proposed tax legislation, in particular bill SB22. There seems to be a desire to return to some of the policies during the Brownback tax experiment days that severely cut funding to our public schools.

With that, stay informed and engaged and please find ways to make sure others you know are also kept up to date with matters in Topeka.

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