



SMAC PTA LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

February 27, 2022

Thursday was “turnaround” day in the legislature. For a bill to continue through the legislative process it must have been passed by one of the chambers (House or Senate). Or, leadership can “bless” a bill by moving it to an exempt committee not subject to the “turnaround” deadline. A number of education bills we’ve been watching were “blessed” and quite a few, or portions of them, negatively impact our public schools and teachers who educate over 450,000 Kansas kids.

Education Bills Continuing in the Kansas Legislature

HB 2615 Creation of Education Savings Accounts (ESA)

The ESA voucher type program was originally under bill HB 2550, but it was combined with other bills under HB 2615. In addition to creating Education Savings Accounts, this bill allows K-12 students to transfer and attend any public school district regardless of address.

Education Savings Accounts divert public tax dollars to private schools that don’t have to accept all students, are not required to retain academically struggling students, and are not held to the same accountability and accreditation standards as public schools.

This bill puts public school funding at risk at a time when the restoration of funding (after over a decade of underfunding) won’t be complete until 2023. At that point, Kansas schools will be funded at 2009 levels, adjusted for inflation. The state also has never met its mandated obligation to fund 92% of special education expenses, leaving SMSD with \$8.5 million in unfunded SPED expenses that must be taken from other areas of the budget.

Opposition to voucher type programs is included in both [Kansas PTA \(Priority 11\)](#) and [SMSD](#) legislative platforms. To gain a better understanding of the issues around vouchers that divert public dollars to non-public schools, here are some resources:

- [SMAC PTA Legislative Update 1/31/22](#)
- [Kansas PTA Testimony in opposition to HB 2550](#) (original ESA bill number)
- [SMSD Testimony in opposition to HB 2550](#)

The [Kansas Director of the Budget estimated the cost](#) to administer the program at more than \$1 million annually, and for every 1% of Kansas kids that participate, \$22.5 million in public funds would be transferred to the ESA accounts to fund private and parochial school tuition.

HB 2662 Parents’ Bill of Rights and Academic Transparency

Bill HB 2662 has become the mega bill of this session, as it bundles together a wide range of issues, including:

- Requires school districts to maintain a public transparency portal on the district website that lists every piece of learning material used in the classroom by grade: curriculum, handouts,

books, activities, videos, posters, and so on along with the author, organization, website address, and more for each item. If an item is found to have been left off the portal or not added in a timely manner, districts are subject to lawsuits filed by anyone, not just parents.

- Seeks to change immunization requirements for attending a public school in Kansas.
- Allows a teacher to opt out of teaching required curriculum if it goes against their religious beliefs (ex. some students would learn about evolution while others would not).
- Requires all library books to be catalogued and reviewed for a parental review designation; one parent can challenge a book and have it removed from all libraries.

Kansas PTA supports transparency and parent rights, but has significant reservations with bill HB 2662. In particular, the public transparency portal seems unnecessary given current parental access: on-line parent portals, access to student laptops and backpacks, back to school nights, parent/teacher conferences, emails/calls to teachers, and so on. Such extensive documentation places a significant burden on our teachers—who are already stretched thin—and will take time away from their essential work of educating students. [KS PTA Testimony on HB2662](#)

Bill HB2662 provides no new funding for our schools, despite the fact that the [Kansas Director of the Budget estimated the bill](#) would have significant administrative costs for school districts, likely costing millions of dollars to develop the Parent Transparency Portal and to review each book, magazine, or other material offered in a school library.

HB 2690 At-Risk Funding / Teacher Bonuses

Districts with buildings that have a higher percentage of at-risk students (determined in the school finance formula by those receiving free lunch) receive a high-density weighting that increases the amount of at-risk funding they receive from the state. These schools need more resources (e.g., social workers, etc.) than other schools in their district. SMSD receives about \$1 million in at-risk high-density funding.

Bill HB 2690 would eliminate almost \$50 million in at-risk high-density funding and redirect it to a pool of money to be used for teacher bonuses in buildings that show specific gains in achievement. Although recognizing certain teachers with a bonus is laudable, removing this at-risk high-density funding could have disastrous effects. From the Kansas State Board of Education (SBOE) testimony:

In sweeping High-Density At-Risk funds, you are starving school districts of needed funds up front to accomplish these goals and unfairly targeting districts with high poverty levels. Schools cannot achieve goals without the proper resources in place at the beginning.

Additional Resources: [SBOE Testimony](#), [KS PTA Testimony](#), [KS Assoc. of School Boards Testimony](#)

Watch for Action Alerts

We will continue to follow these bills as they work their way through the legislative process. Thank you for staying informed and engaged and watch for Action Alerts from SMAC PTA or KS PTA.