



House Education Committee  
February 21, 2013  
HB 2248

Chairman Cassidy and Members of the House Education Budget Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 2248. We appreciate your efforts to allow districts to raise funds for programs and activities that are not required by state law, however the mechanism set forth in HB 2248 whereby local property taxes can be unilaterally levied with no equalization state aid is problematic for several reasons.

First, the bill does not address disparity in property valuation statewide. What one wealthier district can raise for their LAB with one mill does not compare to what another less wealthy district raises with one mill. This equity issue has been inherent in the school finance debate for many years. Due to this fact, Topeka Public Schools opposes modifications to the formula that fail to balance increased local funding options with increased state equalization aid or that disparately increase reliance on local property taxes. Our taxpayers would be unduly burdened by the property taxes that would be necessary to fund the programs and activities funded by a levy in a school district with higher property wealth. In fact, Topeka Public Schools brings in just over \$600K per mil and the most property-wealthy district in the state brings in approximately \$3 million.

Second, the Local Activities Budget option ensures that, due to the anomalies in taxpayer expense, the educational experience and quality of programming in districts across the state will vary dramatically. Our Board believes strongly that all students should be afforded access to extracurricular programs and activities. As one of our Topeka High School seniors testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee last week, many students stay in school in order to participate in extracurriculars that suit their interests. There has been increased focus in this body, and rightfully so, on career readiness and employment. Many extracurriculars expose students to interests and career paths that they choose to pursue post graduation. While it is not reasonable to expect that every district across the state would choose to offer the same extracurriculars, an equal opportunity should be available for districts to offer programs and activities that will enhance their community and school system at a level that is reasonable for the local population.

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Third, districts such as Topeka Public Schools with high "at risk" populations suffer from low property valuations. Our students are the very students that need and can benefit from activities outside the school day. These students typically cannot afford to finance the out of pocket expenditures necessary for extracurriculars. It is also important to consider Legislature's own 2006 study showing: 1) a direct link between urban poverty and low student achievement, and a correlation between spending and student achievement; and 2) the additional challenge and financial burden of educating at risk students in urban settings. We at Topeka Public Schools understand the desire to enhance students' education and extracurricular options beyond what the state finances, as well as the desire to keep all of these funds in their own local activities budget. However, the reality is that local property taxes support local education and every student should have equal opportunity to be prepared to compete in the workforce.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Patrick Woods". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C" and a stylized "W".

C. Patrick Woods, President  
Board of Education