



Chairwoman Williams and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 2150. There is no silver bullet in K-12 education, but many states across the country are enacting choice programs to specifically help select student populations especially in need of extra help. This could be foster children, low income children, special needs, or, as envisioned in this bill, students who have been bullied.

These choice programs are but one of the many ways that our students will receive the educational opportunities they absolutely deserve.

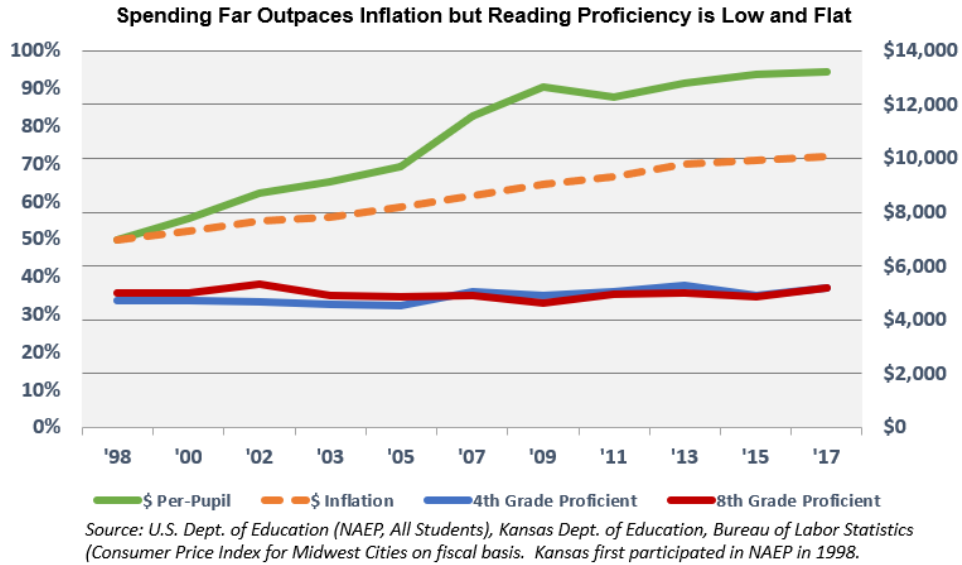
Certainly, many kids receive a quality education in Kansas, but the facts also make clear that many do not. This fact is true across districts and the state. This is true despite the best efforts of countless teachers, counselors, paraprofessionals, and others working in our public schools. Especially in an age of increased bullying, it should surprise no one that a public school system responsible for educating 500,000 students cannot serve each of those children equally well.

I would also like to point out the stagnating overall achievement in Kansas schools and the staggering achievement gaps between low-income and non-low income children. There are many reasons for these long-term trends and they must be addressed.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress demonstrates the difference in achievement for low income children compared to higher income students. This is data from a national exam and looks at all students from a statistically valid and representative sample of Kansas pupils.

Had per-pupil funding been increased for inflation since 1998, it would have increased from about \$7,000 per-pupil to about \$10,000; instead, it is well over \$13,000. At the same time, however, NAEP has only improved from 35 percent to 37 percent.

The ACT score for Kansas students is slightly lower than it was 20 years ago and only 29 percent are college-ready in English, Reading, Math and Science. State assessment results also reflect stubbornly low achievement; only about a quarter of high school students are on track to be college and career ready in Math and less than 30 percent are on track in English Language Arts.



From state exams, to the NAEP, to the ACT, or graduation rates. It is abundantly clear that “achievement gaps” are a tragic reality of education. Not just in Kansas but across the country. Higher income children are achieving academic success at a much higher rate than their lower income peers.

Again, many or even most students across Kansas get a fine education. However, even the lawyers representing Schools for Fair Funding in the on-going *Gannon v. State of Kansas* lawsuit testified that too many children are being left behind. The Court itself has also confirmed this point by referencing the 25% of low-income students who are behind their peers academically.

Some are forced to attend underperforming public schools while others struggle to find the right fit to suit individual needs. This is not to say that teachers and school administrators are not amongst our most dedicated citizens. It is simply a recognition of fact and experience.

The substance of HB 2150 aims, in a small way, to rectify both that statement and the numbers outlined above.

For some, moving to a different school district simply is not an option as money or a career prevents it. They send their kids to school based on a zip code and hope for the best. For many, the zip code-directed district is sufficient but the numbers suggest that it does not work for everyone.

I have also attached to my testimony the executive summary of a report from EdChoice that “reviews the literature” on the impact of school choice programs around the country. Their review of multiple empirical evidence studies suggests that school choice programs benefit the child taking advantage of that program and the public school system. The gains are modest, but they do exist.

Kansas Policy Institute is a strong supporter of Kansas public schools and wants them to be the best in country. Our public schools, our teachers, and our administrators spend their lives helping young people learn. Those schools will always be the place where the vast majority of Kansas families send their children.

However, the goal is not to have good public schools in and of themselves.

The goal is give every Kansas child the opportunity to succeed. That will mean attending a high-performing public school for most children, but it should also include a different avenue for children where the local public school does not seem to be the right fit. This is especially true when bullying may have made that school an environment in which it is impossible to learn.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present today. I urge the committee to support the bill and will stand for questions at an appropriate time.

## **A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on School Choice**

**EdChoice**

**May, 2016**

**Author(s): Greg Forster, Ph.D.**

### Executive Summary

This report surveys the empirical research on private school choice programs. It provides a thorough overview of what the research has found on five key topics:

- Academic outcomes of choice participants
- Academic outcomes of public schools
- Fiscal impact on taxpayers and public schools
- Racial segregation in schools
- Civic values and practices

The evidence points clearly in one direction. Opponents frequently claim school choice does not benefit participants, hurts public schools, costs taxpayers, facilitates segregation, and even undermines democracy. However, the empirical evidence shows that choice improves academic outcomes for participants and public schools, saves taxpayer money, moves students into more integrate classrooms, and strengthens the shared civic values and practices essential to American democracy. A few outlier cases that do not fit this pattern may get a disproportionate amount of attention, but the research consensus in favor of school choice as a general policy is clear and consistent.

The results are not difficult to explain. School choice improves academic outcomes for participants and public schools by allowing students to find the schools that best match their needs and by introducing healthy competition that keeps schools mission-focused. It saves money by eliminating administrative bloat and rewarding good stewardship of resources. It breaks down the barriers of residential segregation, drawing students together from diverse communities. And it strengthens democracy by accommodating diversity, de-politicizing the curriculum, and allowing schools the freedom to sustain the strong institutional cultures that are necessary to cultivate democratic virtues, such as honesty, diligence, achievement, responsibility, service to others, civic participation, and respect for the rights of others.

The size of the benefit provided by existing school choice programs is sometimes large, but is usually more modest. This is not surprising because the programs themselves are modest—curtailed by strict limits on the students they can serve, the resources they provide, and the freedom to innovate. Only a universal educational choice program, accessible to all students, is likely to deliver the kind of dramatic improvement American schools need in all five of these important areas.

Key findings:

- Eighteen empirical studies have examined academic outcomes for school choice participants using random assignment, the gold standard of social science. Of those, 14 find choice improves student outcomes: six find all students benefit and eight find some benefit and some are not visibly affected. Two studies find no visible effect, and two studies find Louisiana’s voucher program—where most of the eligible private schools were scared away from the program by an expectation of hostile future action from regulators—had a negative effect.
- Thirty-three empirical studies (including all methods) have examined school choice’s effect on students’ academic outcomes in public schools. Of those, 31 find choice improved public schools. One finds no visible effect. One finds a negative effect.
- Twenty-eight empirical studies have examined school choice’s fiscal impact on taxpayers and public schools. Of these, 25 find school choice programs save money. Three find the programs they study are revenue neutral. No empirical study has found a negative fiscal impact.
- Ten empirical studies have examined school choice and racial segregation in schools. Of those, nine find school choice moves students from more segregated schools into less segregated schools, and one finds no net effect on segregation. No empirical study has found that choice increases racial segregation.
- Eleven empirical studies have examined school choice’s effect on civic values and practices, such as respect for the rights of others and civic knowledge. Of those, eight find school choice improves civic values and practices. Three find no visible effect from school choice. No empirical study has found that school choice has a negative effect on civic values and practices.

**TABLE 1** Empirical Studies on School Choice

	Any Positive Effect	No Visible Effect	Any Negative Effect
Academic Outcomes of Choice Participants	14	2	2
Academic Outcomes of Public Schools	31	1	1
Fiscal Impact on Taxpayers and Public Schools	25	3	0
Racial Segregation in Schools	9	1	0
Civic Values and Practices	8	3	0

Note: Shows the number of empirical studies with each type of finding. The first row includes all studies using random-assignment methods. Other rows include all studies using all types of methods.