

February 8, 2021

To: House K-12 Education Budget Committee
From: Dr. Tiffany Anderson, Superintendent, Topeka Public Schools, USD 501
Dr. Scott Mickelsen, School Board President, Topeka Public Schools, USD 501
Re: HB 2119, Educational Savings Accounts, written only, oppose
Email: jennifer@summitstrategiesks.com

Chairwoman Williams and members of the House K-12 Education Budget Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to HB 2119, which creates the student empowerment act to provide an educational savings account for students who are academically at-risk. You will find that our testimony is similar to the testimony offered in response to HB 2068 regarding the tax credit for low-income students' scholarship program. We are opposed to the use of public funds to fund private or non-public schools. HB 2119 would have the effect of eroding the funding for the programs and services that are the most effective and most essential offerings for students in Topeka who are considered academically at-risk.

The 27,705 students of Shawnee County, Kansas, are served by five public school districts. Leadership from all five Shawnee County public school districts worked collaboratively to create the 2020-2021 Shawnee County Legislative Positions. These legislative positions were mutually created with the belief that Shawnee County students are the top priority. Significant societal benefits are gained by supporting exemplary public education, and all Kansas students deserve an adequate and equitable public education. You will find information about the Shawnee County Public School system on the front of the One United Voice document attached and our positions on school funding, teacher recruitment, access to technology, KPERS and social emotional health on the reverse. We offer this as a guide for policymakers who are making decisions that impact our public schools. Information about Topeka Public Schools is also attached.

You have received testimony outlining a number of concerns with the bill not only as written, but in concept. Rather than reiterate those concerns, we again draw you to the One United Voice legislative platform. For school funding, one of the best ways to help students who are academically at risk do better in school is to address the challenges they face because of their poverty. Expansion of early childhood education programs helps ensure that students show up at school ready to learn. Expansion of Medicaid, which will increase health insurance coverage for a significant number of families in our community, promotes family access to health care, as well as increased opportunities for students to be successful in school. Support services at schools and help for students' families in the community help students and families with the things that make it harder for them to succeed. Full funding of the statutory commitment to pay 92% of excess special education costs would have great impact on services available to free and reduced price lunch eligible students.

Support for mental health needs of students and staff has never been more critical and necessary. Educators expect many students will face additional mental health issues associated with the COVID pandemic. COVID-related issues follow years of growing concerns about mental health issues affecting student health, safety and learning, and when long-term access to health services may be worsened by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Districts have altered or increased services under on-site, hybrid and remote learning models, and our schools and mental health providers work together to determine the best delivery model for each community.

Topeka Public Schools Mental Health Intervention Team (MHIT) identifies and eliminates barriers for students and families which need clinical therapy and to access the local Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) services. To support staff in developing a deeper understanding of trauma, we have partnered with the Childhood Trauma Academy to offer Neurosequential Model in Education (NME) training. It is a way to educate school staff about brain development and developmental trauma and then to further teach them how to apply that in the classroom, particularly for those children with adverse child experiences.

Under HB 2119 and HB 2068, some schools receiving public funds would not have to provide important programs and services required and offered by public schools. HB 2119 would work to erode our public school system. Public funding for schools is put to better use when invested in our public schools. Please oppose HB 2119.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this important issue,

Dr. Tiffany Anderson, Superintendent, Topeka Public Schools USD 501

Dr. Scott Mickelsen, School Board President, Topeka Public Schools, USD 501