

Senate Tax Committee

Written testimony in support of SB 128: Establishing the Ad Astro Opportunity Tax Credit.

Submitted: February 7, 2023

Madam Chair and members of the Senate Tax Committee:

My name is Dr. Tad Nuce, and I serve as the Head of School at Berean Academy in Elbing, Kansas. On behalf of our school community, I wish to offer testimony in support of SB 128. As the leader of a Christian school, I constantly meet families who would love to send their children to Berean Academy, but realistically, will never be able to afford the cost despite relatively low tuition rates. For these low-income families, school choice does not exist. They have no option but to choose an area public school, which may or may not meet the academic, emotional, and spiritual needs of their children. Even for middle class families, the cost of enrolling three or four children in a private school is often beyond their ability to pay. Currently, true educational choice in Kansas is only available to more affluent families.

I am a proud Kansan whose blue-collar working parents moved often out of economic necessity, forcing me to switch schools 11 times before I graduated from high school. I attended a few private Christian schools when finances allowed. These were places where I flourished academically, emotionally, and spiritually, because in my experience, they were safe, nurturing places. More often than not, however, I was forced to attend public schools, where I struggled both academically and emotionally. In junior high, I was an honor student who lived in a trailer court. I was floundering in the public school because of daily bullying, so my grades dropped (it is very difficult to pay attention in class when one is dreading what might happen at lunch or in the locker room). My parents, who recognized I was struggling, met with the school's guidance counselor. His recommendation was that my parents try to buy me nicer clothes!

When I reached a point of contemplating suicide as a way out, my parents made tremendous sacrifices to enroll me in a non-accredited Christian school for my final three years of high school. Academically, the school was sub-par in some respects, but I flourished there because I finally felt safe in a nurturing environment. I transitioned from a student contemplating suicide to a young man full of hope and enthusiasm about the future. I attribute this radical change in my life to Christian education.

Berean Academy was established in 1946 and has several thousand alumni. We currently draw students from fifteen school districts with students driving up to 45 miles one way to attend our school. Our tuition rate for high school students is \$7700 this year, and we raise funds from alumni and current families to offer \$300,000 in financial aid annually. We are accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International. Our teachers all have certification either with the State of Kansas or ACSI. The average ACT score of our 2022 graduating class was over 24, and our 1st-9th grade students score (on average) in the 75th to 80th percentile on nationally normed achievement tests. During my tenure at Berean Academy (four years), we have a graduation rate of nearly 100%. Our teachers earn approximately 70% of public-school teachers with fewer benefits, yet they choose to serve here because we believe in the power of Christian education to transform lives. I see that transforming power every day – I experienced it first hand as a student.

Berean Academy is a non-profit owned by a parent association. No one is getting rich through private education at Berean Academy. Berean families in the Wichita, Newton, Whitewater, and Elbing areas

pay a portion of their taxes towards the public-school system, and only the public-school system. This bill would support true educational freedom, providing parental choice that considers the unique learning needs of each student and the values of their parents. SB 128 would finally provide a means to make education access equitable because it would give parents the financial freedom to direct the education of their children while providing accountability. As of right now, tax payers in Kansas who send their children to private schools must pay twice for their children's education, which seems very unfair, and limits who can actually attend.

As a conservative, I believe that competition in the business world leads to better products and services for the average consumer. Funding education through a system where dollars follow the student will encourage better educational outcomes for all students - public and private. With the Ad Astro Opportunity Tax Credit, this opportunity would become a reality. Under the current system (the one I grew up with), only one brand of education is provided to low or middle-income families. The current method only supports the system, rather than the student. Even though there are a variety of other schools in Kansas that are accredited, only public schools receive funding, and thus are the default choice of lower income families like the one I grew up in.

When only one type of school receives all the funding that comes from taxes, this system is favored above all other choices. We are asking for you to support students, not buildings. Please provide your support for the Ad Astro Opportunity Tax Credit, so that true and equitable educational choice for families can become a reality. Many states have already experienced the benefits of a school choice program - Kansas should be a leader in this movement, not playing catch up.

We are counting on your endorsement for SB 128, also known as the Ad Astro Opportunity Tax Credit. If you would like to speak with me personally, please feel free to call at 316-799-2211 or email me at tnuce@bawarriors.com.

Respectfully,

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