

Testimony before the  
**House Committee on K-12 Education Budget**  
by

Steve Nordby, Garden City High School Principal, Unified School District 457  
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Chairman Williams:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. I am Steve Nordby, Principal of Garden City High School, in Garden City, Kansas. I am also a father of two relatively recent graduates. I have had the privilege of working with students and parents in public schools since 1994. I am testifying in opposition to HB 2119.

As principal of a large diverse high school I work with many students every day. Our students come from homes that speak over twenty languages and have direct origins in over twenty-eight nations. With a school population that is over thirty percent English Language Learners and over sixty percent economically disadvantaged, I understand the varying needs of students and their families. As a National Blue Ribbon School (2012) recognized for closing the achievement gap, the dedicated staff of Garden City High School has proven that with the proper tools and support we can meet the needs of all students that enroll at GCHS.

Under this legislation, there is no requirement that would prevent private schools from selecting and recruiting high achieving students, both academically and athletically, while denying admission to other students.

Private schools accepting state public funding should be required to comply with all state requirements including, but not limited to: attendance and discipline reporting; auditing, including the annual KSDE audit and an outside audit conducted by a CPA; meeting teacher licensure requirements; and compliance with state statutes regarding suspension/expulsion. Private schools accepting state public funding should also be required to comply with all federal requirements of Title VI, VII, and Title IX just as public schools are required to do.

This legislation would reduce revenue for public schools, which has yet to be restored to full funding levels. This bill would remove needed resources to educate the high-needs students in public schools. There will be additional costs to administer this program. That additional cost will either require a tax increase or it will be necessary to reduce other areas of the state budget.

During my career, I have regularly encountered students / families who have chosen to leave public school to do virtual school or homeschooling only to return in a semester or two after experiencing little success and falling behind their peers. This bill could provide a financial incentive for families to make choices with no guarantees that children would have the needed support to be successful. I believe it could also allow for abuse of the system in unregulated homeschool settings.

The body of research on school voucher programs is clear, that school choice programs do NOT improve student achievement. Most recently, research on voucher programs in Indiana, Louisiana, and Ohio show that students in voucher-supported private schools do not perform as well as their peers in public schools in mathematics (Waddington & Berends, 2018; Mills & Wolf, 2019; Figlio and Karbownik, 2016).

To be very clear, I am not undermining the role of private schools. Private schools serve an important function in our communities and my school district has a very good relationship with our local private schools. However, private schools are no longer private schools if they accept public funding. And as such, they should be required to follow the same state and federal guidelines that the public schools must follow.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Steve Nordby