

Testimony before House K-12 Budget Committee
HB 2553– relating to open enrollment
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In-Person testimony in support
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Madam Chairman and members of the Committee

On behalf of the Kansas Policy Institute, it is my pleasure to testify in support of HB 2553. In many ways our testimony can be summed up with one sentence that KPI and I have repeated time and time again over the years. **THE QUALITY OF OUR CHILDRENS’ EDUCATION SHOULD NEVER DEPEND ON OR BE LIMITED BY THEIR ZIP CODE!**

A large percentage of our time over the years has been spent working on bettering the educational opportunities for the children of families who do not have the power or means to improve their children’s educational performance in the district where they reside. Those families with means have the ability to move where opportunity is best or opt out of the public school system and enroll their children in private schools. Complicating matters for many families is the fact that the prolonged Covid challenges have left many families with no choice but to pull their children out of their district schools and home-school them. During the hearing on HB 2514, testimony in favor of part-time enrollment provided some numbers. Rep. Estes, I believe, put pen to paper and concluded that if we’re paying \$16,000 per student, and we had 22,000 students drop out during the pandemic, that means the school districts are losing about \$350 million.

It has been suggested that inequality in educational opportunity is the civil rights issue of our time. We tend to agree. At the very least, students and families should have educational choice WITHIN the public school system. Families that do not have the means to leave the public school system or the ability or resources to educate their children at home, should still have the choice to have their child attend a public school outside their zip code where their child has a better chance to thrive and succeed. In current times, it may be the difference between being able to attend a school that is open or one that has a more robust virtual classroom experience. Their child may benefit from a program like JAG-K. Their home district may not have a program but the neighboring district might. The list goes on and on. Not all districts are the same. Not all districts are a suitable match for every child in the district.

At the end of the day, the question should always be: “What is best for the child”. The answer should never be what is best for the district, without regard to what is best for the student. In that regard, you may be interested in an example of how one district handles dissent. <https://sentinelksmo.org/santa-fe-trail-district-kicks-family-out-for-disagreeing-with-policies/>.

The mechanics of how this will work appears to be well thought out and fair. We stand in support of HB 2553.