

House Education Committee

Testimony Supporting Sub SB 60

AN ACT concerning schools; relating to the Kansas state high school activities association;
relating to participation by certain students.

March 17, 2015

By

Les & Natasha Miller

Chairman Highland,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 60. We feel that this legislation will give us more flexibility to give all our children access to the best education available to meet their individual needs. Families are complex because each individual is unique, and different children require different learning environments. Our family is especially unique because it is made up of our birth children and also two sets of sibling groups, which we have adopted. While all children pose challenges to parents and schools, children who have experienced the instability of being in state custody add additional complexity.

We have nine children in all and we summarize here our family schooling situation:

Our oldest two children graduated at the top of their classes from the former IQ Academy, a part of the Manhattan public schools, a virtual school. Our son was salutatorian 3 years ago and now has a 3.85 gpa in college. Our daughter was valedictorian last year and presently has a 4.0 gpa in college. Please refer to the letters attached, to see the difficulties we experienced in matching available educational opportunities to the skills and interests of our children. IQ Academy afforded our two oldest children much opportunity academically, far exceeding that available in our local school. However, IQ Academy could not provide sports and activities available locally.

Our next son is a sophomore at Fredonia High School. He has ADHD and needs the physical outlet that sports give him. He is very talented in football, lettering as a freshman and sophomore and starting on the varsity team. This year he was All League Honorable Mention Defensive Linebacker. An on-line education would probably not be suitable for his learning style. However, having the opportunity for a different learning situation from traditional public school, one more hands on, would be beneficial to him. He is struggling to make the grades currently.

Our 4th child is also a full time sophomore at Fredonia High School. He excels in band and enjoys cross country. He is a 4.0 student. With him, we have had to push the school district to keep him challenged in his current learning situation. We felt like we had hit a dead end when it came to getting him AP classes. Please refer to the attached letter, dated January 21, 2014, explaining our efforts in trying to get him an IEP as a gifted child just to get him access to AP classes. As of this year the school now has 4 AP classes available through their Greenbush program. So I guess that is some progress. I still am not impressed with their online option though. He is getting college credit for his Anatomy and Physiology class through Independence Community College, but that was difficult to work out because ICC doesn't generally grant college credit for sophomores.

Our 5th child is an 8th grader. I homeschool him part time and he is attending Manhattan Virtual Academy part-time. He will transition to full time at MVA next year. His love is fishing and outdoors and likes the freedom he has to adjust his schedule. Also he lost his hearing in his right ear this past year due to illness. He finds classroom situations difficult for him to hear in. Therefore the on-line school is more suitable for him.

Child #6 is also in 8th grade but he attends Fredonia Middle School. He loves athletics and has tried several different sports. He has RAD and it was difficult for me to fight the constant power struggles at home. However, he also struggles with addictive behaviors. Unfortunately, through the public school setting he has gained access to pornography (through poorly monitored ipads that the school provides) and to chewing tobacco. He has also been offered weed. All of this has happened at school or as the result of a school provided device. At school he ran a search on "how to make meth" and the school's monitoring system did not catch that. We are very unhappy! Michael was adopted when he was five. We are doing our best to help him overcome his past, and we would like more schooling options with him to better meet his needs.

Amber is 6th grade and attends Fredonia Middle School. She is doing well and is looking forward to athletics next year. She struggled with reading and had a hard time feeling the need to learn in the home environment. However, because she is competitive, she has greatly improved at public school since she is determined to keep up with her peers.

We have two younger children, Avarie age 5 and Kaishawn age 2. What their needs will be educationally is yet to be seen.

We have four children by birth and five through adoption. We care deeply about quality education. We have primarily homeschooled in the elementary years. After that we evaluate how to best meet their learning and physical needs. Education is not a one size fits all situation. This can easily be seen in our family.

We ask the state to consider this legislation, which could make it easier for families like ours to have more education options while still being able to participate in extra-curricular activities and athletics. We know that it is in the state's interest to provide all Kansas children with the best education possible, and parents are in the best position to determine how best to tailor the educational options available to their own children's interests and abilities.

Here is our main issue with the KSHSAA. We would like KSHSAA and the schools to all be on the same page. If KSHSAA is going to make agreements with the on-line public schools that state that full-time on-line students can participate in sports if they enroll in at least one class at the local brick and mortar school, then that agreement needs to be honored by the local schools and KSHSAA.

Our experience for our oldest son was that he was a full-time on-line public school student. He enrolled in music in our local school and participated in Select Choir and KSHSAA competitions his freshman year. The school allowed this due to the KSHSAA agreement.

Then we had a 7th grader who wanted to play football. He was homeschooled by us and not in an on-line public school. The school allowed him to take one class and then do football. However, in 8th grade our local athletic director apologized and said he had been to a KSHSAA meeting and learned that what had happened the previous year was illegal. He said our son must enroll in 5 courses to play football. Because our son is talented we felt forced to enroll him in 5 courses although our plan had not been to do this until his freshman year. (Due to his ADHD and learning needs we did not plan to enroll him in the on-line public school. Every child has different learning needs.)

At the same time we had another son in 8th grade. We approached the school about his being able to be in the on-line school of our choice full-time but participate in band and possibly sports if he desired (KSHSAA sponsored activities). We wanted to choose the on-line school for him because of the AP courses that were available to him through that avenue of schooling. Our local district had very limited AP courses available through their on-line option through Greenbush and no AP classes available to the brick and mortar students. The Greenbush program was inferior to the program we were using through Manhattan High School. Basically the Greenbush program was a credit recovery program. The Manhattan program was more college prep. College prep was what would meet our sons educational needs. The school board denied our request first stating it was KSHSAA regulation. When I showed them the on-line agreement from KSHSAA, they then said it was school policy. When I asked to see the school policy, then I was told it was a KSHSAA insurance issue. The KSHSAA official I was told I needed to talk to would not return my phone calls. I believe it was through an email from KSHSAA that they stated the decision to allow or not allow online students to participate in KSHSAA events is the local districts decision. (This, by the way, was stated in the KSHSAA agreement with on-line public school which is the whole reason I appealed to our board to allow our son to use this option in the first place.)

To sum this all up, basically we got the run-around between the school and KSHSAA. Each one blamed the other. We, as parents, want Kansas to make policy that will be clearly understood and followed in agreement by both KSHSAA and school districts with the result of giving students equal access to athletic opportunities. We are tired of being told one thing and then another.

Sincerely,
Natasha Miller

Dear School Administrators:

December 10, 2012

Our family has had one student graduate from a virtual school. He graduated as salutatorian of his class and is now excelling in college. Our second oldest is currently enrolled as a junior in that same school and is a straight A student. Our third child is full time at FMS, another is part time in FHS and the other three are currently home schooled. Because we would like to support our local school district, we were interested in the new virtual program you now have in place. However, we would like to share our reasons for not transferring to your program and then ask you to consider a related policy change.

First, our initial impression of your virtual program was that it was unimpressive in its presentation. We received a simple folder with four black and white sheets of paper. The presentation did not make us think the program is technologically advanced or up-to-date.

Second, not enough information was given about the program even after we visited the e2020 website. We were interested in the curriculum used and how it compared with our children's current on-line program. We tried to find information through Greenbush with whom you are partnering and found their website short on the virtual school information. The e2020 site was nicely laid out and it had good recommendations from others, but it did not give any samples of the curriculum for us to evaluate.

Third, from what we could tell, your virtual school does not offer weekly on-line classes with teachers. We have appreciated that about IQ Academy, the current virtual school we are using. During this class time (one for each subject), the teachers present material, power points, and instruction that is in addition to what is available through the course material.

Fourth, your virtual school does not appear to offer near as many Advanced Placement classes as our current school. Only five are listed compared to 19 through IQ. That lack of benefit alone is of great concern to us. That's because a student wanting to get an engineering degree, for instance, can be much better prepared for college by taking AP math classes all the way through Trigonometry and Calculus in IQ versus having to stop early preparation with the highest e2020 class of Pre-calculus.

More AP classes and a top-notch virtual school program would be a benefit to the Fredonia Schools. My brother, who is a 1989 FHS graduate, has a doctorate degree and teaches at Harding University in Searce, Arkansas. He contends that the students he gets who have taken AP courses are much better prepared for college then even those who take junior college courses.

We currently have an 8th grader who is academically advanced that we are planning to put into IQ Academy full time next year so he can benefit from the AP courses. He is currently in your high school for Band and Algebra and would continue with band, but my understanding after talking to school officials is that because USD 484 now has a virtual program, he is not and will not be able to participate in KSHAA sponsored activities unless he becomes a full-time student in your virtual program or in the local school. IQ Academy does meet KSHAA requirements, but it is local school policy that is preventing his participation.

We will also soon be making educational decisions for four other children as well. Each of them has different needs that we will consider in making schooling choices for them. There are many other students besides our children in the USD 484 school district who could benefit from greater schooling options as well.

With all that said, what we are asking is that you re-evaluate your policy concerning letting students from other on-line schools participate in extra curricular activities at FHS. Or even better we would greatly appreciate having you consider and decide to partner with a program like IQ Academy that offers more higher education options.

We have appreciated your help with the education of our children in various ways in recent years, and we look forward to a continued relationship.

Sincerely, Les and Natasha Miller

Dear School Administrators:

May 6, 2013

We are wondering what the current status is on the evaluation of the virtual program through Greenbush. (See copy of letter from Mr. Porter.) Even if Greenbush does make improvements to its course offerings, we seriously doubt it will be the college prep program we are looking for. It would be extremely hard to revamp a credit recovery on-line program into such.

Our son is entering high school this coming school year, and we are needing to make decisions. We have carefully evaluated the courses offered through our local school district to see how they compare with the course offerings through IQ Academy, our on-line school of choice. The major difference is the AP courses that are available to us through IQ. (See Course Offerings through IQ Academy.) Our son is on track to begin AP classes his sophomore year. We would like him to take his high school courses primarily through one school to keep up continuity in his education. (See pamphlet on AP courses to see what they entail.)

With that being said, our son has benefited through dual enrollment with Fredonia Middle School the past two years. Mr. Fischer gave him private saxophone lessons one summer, and he participated in band for his 7th and 8th grade years. Mr. Fischer would love to have him continue as a band student. Also, we would like to see him continue band because he enjoys it, and he benefits from the social interaction. However, he needs a challenge. He is gifted. He learns things very quickly. He would need the challenge of band competitions such as are sponsored by KSHSAA. Otherwise, he will become bored and move on to something else that draws his interest.

Our understanding is that it is local school policy that is preventing him from being able to participate in KSHSAA activities next year. He will be a full-time public school student, and he will meet KSHSAA guidelines for eligibility. (See KSHSAA guidelines.)

We are asking if you would consider changing this school policy so that our son can benefit from band. If we could meet his high school educational needs by just going through Fredonia High School we would consider it. We like to support the local school district as we can. However, we do take education seriously, and having seven children we are aware of how different the needs of each student can be. We have another son entering high school next year, and we plan to enroll him full time with Fredonia. It seems like the best fit for him.

Thank you for taking time to consider this matter. We will be at the board meeting to discuss this matter and answer any questions you might have. We appreciate your concern for the students in our district.

Sincerely, Les & Natasha Miller

To Whom It May Concern:

January 21, 2014

I am writing to request that my son, **** Miller, be tested for the gifted program. My understanding is that due to the fact that I have previously home educated him that there is not adequate documentation to support the need to provide this testing.

As his teacher from Kindergarten through 8th grade, with the exception of his 5th grade year, I am able to give you some important information that may help in this process.

We have four children by birth and three through adoption. We also are fostering to adopt two more children at this time. I am familiar with what is normal in childhood development. When **** was 18 months would build block towers stacking 20 or more blocks. His attention span was incredible for his age, as he would spend up to an hour in this type of activity.

**** never looked at things the same way as the other children. He insisted he had a “onehead” instead of a “forhead.” It was not “Sunday” unless the sun was shining. If you asked **** what the number 8 would look like if you split it in half, instead of the typical answer of two circles on top each other, he would answer two 3's facing each other.

**** spent hours in activities such as drawing intricate mazes that filled every inch of space on a sheet of paper. Or he spent hours sometimes even days playing on-going Monopoly games against himself. When I started schooling him, his primary struggle was transitioning from subject to subject because he was always so focused on what he was doing.

It was difficult to keep **** challenged in school. In Spelling it was rare for **** to ever miss a word. In addition his memory seemed to be almost photographic. I would give him a word off of a list of 20 or more words in random order, he would tell me “it was the 3rd word in the 2nd row.” He would memorize two page poems like they were nothing. This summer **** began using his memorization skills to memorize Scripture. He knows complete chapters of the Bible and not only does he know them, he can quote random verses out of those chapters upon demand.

I transition my children to public school by high school, but in 8th grade he was past my math capabilities. The 8th grade math teacher said he was ready for the high school Algebra class. Honestly, he did not find that challenging at all. As a freshman he is in Geometry this year, but his frustration is that he is going over material and writing material out that he understands already. Yes, some of it is new, but he understands it so quickly that all the practice gets boring. Fortunately, he is a perfectionist and that does not allow him to just slough off when he's bored.

**** has a goal of completing one year of college by the time he graduates from high school. We would like for him to have available to him AP classes beginning next year, but he needs an IEP to do that under our current school system. We are asking that the processes to make this a possibility for him be put into motion.

Thank you, Natasha Miller