

Topeka Public Schools Legislative Positions 2015

Your school board is the advocate for your community when decisions are made about your children's education. The school board represents the public's voice in public education, providing citizen governance for what the public schools need and what the community wants. School boards have taxing authority and are your community's education watchdog, ensuring that taxpayers get the most for their tax dollars. The school district is one of the most important employers and business partners within our community. That direct oversight, responsibility and patronage is the purpose for local control.

Topeka Public Schools Board of Education promotes these tenets as guidance for Kansas policy-makers as they make decisions that will impact the students and families we serve.

Finance:

Kansas policy-makers should adhere to the Kansas Constitutional requirement to suitably and equitably fund education with a state finance system.

Such funding for education should be reliable, fair and financially sustainable, and not overly reliant on local funding or limited by political pressures. Allowance for spending on education should be directly tied to the educational needs of the state's student population in order to adequately prepare students for success in the workforce.

- The current funding formula is sound. The main problem is that it is not funded.
- It is more efficient to return to the traditional practice whereby the statewide 20 mill levy is collected by local governments and distributed to school districts, rather than collected by local governments, sent to the State and then sent back to local school districts.

Taxes:

- A sound tax system is one where sales tax, property tax and income tax are balanced. Cutting state income taxes without providing offsetting revenues is shifting the burden for funding schools to local taxpayers and thereby further dis-equalizing Kansas' education system. This will continue to erode the quality of the education we provide for our students.

Key components for the school finance formula:

- The formula must adequately fund the base per pupil because per pupil funding is the primary source of funding for the regular classroom.
- The formula must maintain weightings for special populations in order to suitably address the wide array of students Kansas educates.
- The formula must provide the appropriate funding for any mandates required of school districts. Any additional unfunded mandates will force school districts to choose between providing core classroom services or meeting such mandates.
- The formula must consider the cost of educating today's students from year to year, with consideration to inflation.
- KPERS should not be calculated as a component of the base state aid per pupil.
- The formula must balance local effort with the state obligation to suitably fund education under the Kansas Constitution, and thereby balance increased local funding options with increased state equalization aid. It should also mediate reliance on local property taxes.
- The formula must link local effort with state equalization responsibilities and strike a balance between districts with low property valuations and those with high property values, as well as the excess costs required to educate special populations.
- The current funding formula for special education is the preferred formula for Kansas and should be fully funded at 92% of excess costs.
- Kindergarten must be fully funded.

Operations:

- Districts must be afforded flexibility in operational funds, including capital outlay, to allow each district to meet the unique needs of the community and its student population.
- School districts must be allowed to carry over funds in their school accounts from fiscal year to fiscal year. From a financial management perspective, districts should be allowed to hold funds in reserve for emergencies and other long term expenses and unforeseen situations.
- Sweeping of funds balances would be financially devastating to school districts.
- Districts must be afforded flexibility with capital outlay funds, which must be equalized. We support the concept that districts should have multi-year capital outlay plans.
- State aid payments to school districts must be timely.
- The costs to school districts associated with implementing of a statewide accounting and fiscal management system should be studied and, if adopted, fully funded.
- Topeka Public Schools depends on the service of retired teachers as substitute teachers in our classrooms. We support current law, which allows licensed employees to return to work after a break in service to the school district where they were previously employed, without a penalty.



Other issues of interest:

- Gifted education is categorized as special education in Kansas, therefore students are entitled by state law to an individualized education program. The written plan describes specialized educational programs the student will receive, and it is regularly reviewed and revised by a team that includes teachers, counselors, the child's parents and others. These children have special needs and are entitled to be taught at the level they are capable of learning.
- We support adoption of an expanded definition of "instruction" and repeal of the law setting a 65% classroom expenditure goal, which is arbitrary and difficult to uniformly calculate.
- The safety and security of students and personnel is a top priority for Topeka Unified School District 501 and is a basic foundation for the well-being of our community. A strong network of school and community supports is necessary to cultivate a healthy and productive learning environment that is proactive and responsive to the needs of each individual student. While adequate funding through the formula is crucial to support student performance, a network of community partners dedicated to identifying and responding to the health and welfare needs of our community is also required. We urge the Legislature to restore funding cuts that have deteriorated the safety net of these programs and to provide opportunities to restore and enhance public/private partnerships that help bridge the gap between community and school.
- Quality early childhood programs are vital to student success. The continuum of programs should be preserved, enhanced and funded.
- Career pathways and technical education should continue to be promoted, with an emphasis on public private partnerships that provide a continuum of exposure to possible career opportunities for students.
- Tuition tax credits, voucher systems, charter schools, or choice plans to aid private elementary or secondary schools are not subject to the same legal requirements and accountability standards as public school systems. The issue is not educational "choice" but using public funds to support schools that can discriminate in admission, provide sectarian religious instruction and "compete" under different rules than public schools.
- We support additional school days and the funding of mandatory summer school for primary students reading below grade level.
- We support the identification of and provision of services to special education students utilizing IDEA guidelines.
- School board elections should continue to be non-partisan and held on the first Tuesday in April of odd numbered years.

About Topeka Public Schools

Enrollment: 14,095 students Free & Reduced: 77%

Special Education: 20% ELL: 10%

Student Ethnicity:

White - 41%

Hispanic - 29%

African-American - 19%

Native American - 1%

Other - 10%