



House Education Committee Rep. Kelley, Chair

H.B. 2400 – Corporate Education Tax Credit Scholarship Program

*Presented by Diane Gjerstad
Wichita Public Schools
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Madame Chair and members of the committee:

We rise in opposition H.B. 2400 allowing tax credits for scholarship granting organizations, reducing the State General Fund up to ten million dollars, to award up to \$8000 tuition to private schools for special education students who waive their rights under IDEA.

The bill applies to students from poverty with an individual educational plan (IEP), a requirement for special education services to meet their academic needs. Would private schools be able to meet the educational needs of this group of students? A review of the Building Report Cards for schools in Sedgwick County finds:

- Four accredited private schools
 - Enrollment 200: poverty 44% and no special education students or ELL
 - Enrollment 27: no students in poverty and no special education or ELL
 - Enrollment 109: no students in poverty and no special education or ELL
 - Enrollment 98: no students in poverty and no special education or ELL
- Wichita Catholic Diocese
 - Enrollment 9419: poverty 23% and 2.7% special education; 4.2% ELL

Contrasted to the diversity of an urban community whose demographics are reflected in public schools:

- USD 259 Enrollment 49,888: poverty 75% and 13.3% special education; 20% ELL

Among all of the private accredited schools in Sedgwick County there are only 7 special education certified teachers employed. The State Report Card reveals only USD 259 provides services to the lowest functioning special education students, who are tested using an alternate state assessment.

Under this bill parents would waive the student's rights to special education services. These are students from poverty who have an IEP plan which is a personalized plan of customized educational services to meet the individual learning needs of the student. This bill ignores the student's educational disability. This bill provides no recourse for parents if the student is unable to learn in a private school – which may not have certified special education teachers. This bill does not require the private school to provide an appropriate educational program to overcome the educational barriers, which have been identified and documented, of the student.

The \$10m cost of this bill is at a time when the school finance formula and equalization state aid are underfunded resulting in property tax increases across the state. This year alone USD 259 equalization aid has been underfunded by \$10.5m – more than the amount this bill allows in corporate tax credits -- while Wichita taxpayers pay more.

Madame Chair, we oppose the establishment of a state funded educational system which works outside of the state and federal requirements, outside of the system for public accountability. This bill affords choice to the private schools who would continue to pick and choose which students they serve, not the parents. Our great system of public education for *everyone* has served our state well and should not be eroded.