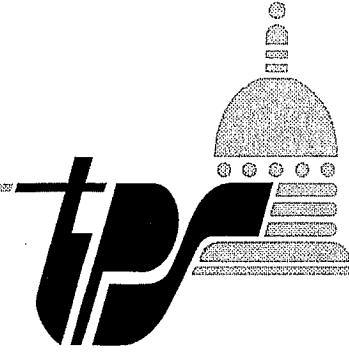


March 20, 2013
House Bill 2192



Dear House and Federal Affairs Committee:

My name is Pilar Mejía and I am a coach for teachers who work with English Language Learners in secondary schools in Topeka Public Schools. Today I am representing Topeka Public Schools as an opponent of House Bill No. 2192, which repeals in-state tuition.

I was born and raised in Cali, a beautiful city in southwest Colombia. There, I was fortunate to have been educated in bilingual schools from preschool through high school. Growing up in this context, and having lived in Spain, Italy, and the United States, has opened up opportunities for me, and has given me a broad view of the world. This is my ninth year working for Topeka Public Schools, and my fourteenth year in the United States. Having worked in different educational contexts has allowed me to view education from multiple perspectives, and to work with a wide variety of adults and children. Just like I have had wonderful opportunities in my lifetime due to my education, I would like to speak on behalf of several students who would greatly benefit from furthering theirs.

Let me help you see how this bill could impact our students in Topeka Public Schools.

- María is a very intelligent and responsible student at Topeka High School who has been in this country for a long time. Last year, she was in the Advancement Via Individual Determination Program, referred to as AVID. María met all the criteria to continue in the program and go to college. Right now, María's dream could be shattered if this bill passes.
- Julio, also from Topeka High School, is an exceptional artist who could develop his skills in a professional manner should he be given the chance to further his education. Yet, he is running out of time, and losing hope.
- Sandra is an outstanding student at Highland Park High School who struggles with the language, but who could successfully get started at a slower pace in a junior college.
- Lucía, another student who excels academically, would be the first one in her family to graduate high school and college. Currently, she is uncertain that she will.

These students, like many others in this growing population, have dreams and hopes that could end if Bill No. 2192 passed. Topeka Public Schools, in their Post-secondary to Career Vision for **ALL** students, believes in preparing the next generation of employees and taxpayers for Shawnee County, Kansas. Students that receive post-secondary education, whether at a technical school, a two-year institution or a four-year institution, will be the next generation of employees for Kansas; ones who would help revitalize communities. Let's not create barriers to our current students that are working hard toward graduation from our high schools by excluding those that may have been impacted by their parents' situations. When you take hope away from people, they're done!

Sincerely,

Pilar Mejía
Topeka Public Schools

Topelka Public Schools

Legislative Propositions

Kansas policymakers 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.

Any formula revision must take into consideration the Legislature's own 2006 study showing:

1. a direct link between urban poverty and low student achievement and a correlation between spending and student achievement; and
2. the additional challenge and financial burden of educating at risk students in urban settings.

Taxes:

- A sound tax system is one where sales tax, property tax, and income tax are balanced. Above all, cutting state taxes without providing offsetting revenues will, at best, shift the burden for funding schools to local taxpayers and thereby further disqualify Kansas' education system. At worst, it will erode the quality of the education we provide for our students.

State and Local Education Finance

The school finance formula must be for at least two years or more to allow our school district to plan, prioritize and forecast our spending into the future.

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 maintain weightings for special populations in order to suitably address the wide array of students Kansas educates.

- 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 consider the cost of educating today's students from year to year, with consideration to inflation.
- 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.
- Districts must be afforded flexibility in operational funds, including capital outlay, to allow each district to meet the unique needs of the community and it's student population.
- Kindergarten must be full day and funded in the formula consistent with grades 1-12.

Quality of Education

School safety is a top priority, therefore we recommend funding for the Kansas, Safe and Prepared School Program and for basic Incident command training for all school administrators and teachers. State grants for school safety would help ensure our schools are prepared for any emergencies.

Quality early childhood programs are vital to student success. The continuum of programs should be preserved and enhanced. Topelka Public Schools remains committed to a comprehensive P-12 educational system.

- 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.
- The Kansas State Board of Education must continue to be elected to determine educational policy for the state's primary and secondary schools as established in Article 6 of the Kansas Constitution.
- 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.
- Research does not support the practice of retention as a method of improving student achievement. We support funded mandatory summer school for primary students reading below grade level.

About Topelka Public Schools

Enrollment: 12,853 students, 1,145 teachers
 Special Education: 19%
 Student Achievement: 74%

Gender: 50% Male, 50% Female
 Ethnicity: 25% Hispanic, 25% African American, 20% White, 10% Asian, 10% Other

