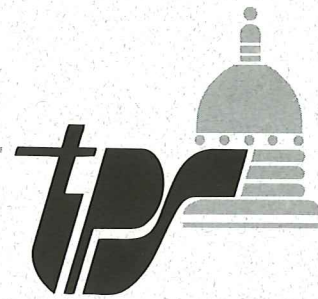


February 2, 2016

Re: HB 2457



For many years, the locally elected school boards of Topeka Public Schools have consistently opposed the use of public dollars and tax credits to fund private schools. This year, leadership from all five Shawnee County public school districts worked collaboratively to create **ONE UNITED VOICE**, our 2016 Shawnee County Legislative Positions. Our Legislative Positions were mutually created with the beliefs that Shawnee County students are our top priority, there are significant societal benefits gained by supporting exemplary public education, and all Kansas students deserve an adequate and equitable public education.

Our five districts serve the 28,590 students of Shawnee County. With one united voice, we join other Shawnee County school boards to oppose HB 2457. This bill as proposed, as well as the law passed last year creating the tax credit scholarship program for low income students, does not provide for the standards and accountability necessary to substantiate the use of public funds. In the best interest of Shawnee County students and families, we are committed to ensuring that any school that receives public funds must meet state and federal accountability standards and provide programs/services required of public schools.

Topeka Public Schools has strong ties and partnerships with our business community. These businesses are invested in our public schools, employ the parents and relatives of our students, and many times employ or provide job experiences to our students. Recent state level revenue and school finance decisions have benefitted businesses to the detriment of critical public services that those businesses rely on.

This bill would further deplete state revenues and funding for our schools by providing a monetary tax benefit for the education of select students in limited settings. The concept is especially troubling because the new publicly funded schools are not accountable for the public expenditures at the same level that schools currently are, creating a discrepancy that makes it impossible to measure and compare individual student performance as part of the tax credit scholarship program versus participation in the current publicly funded public schools. Private schools are not required to report on student success or financial operations.

It is important to also mention that this bill takes potential needed tax revenues and allows businesses to receive credit for supporting a secular and/or private school. We believe that separation of church and state is the foundation for our state and our country.

Federal, state and local leaders are elected to ensure that there are standards and measures in place to ensure accountability for expenditure of public funds. This bill simply subverts the public oversight and accountability requirements that have been implemented by this body to govern.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Dr. Julie Ford', is written over the typed name.

Dr. Julie Ford