

Oral Opponent Testimony, before House K-12 Education Budget Committee  
to  
HB 2218  
An Act concerning education; establishing the Sunflower Education Equity Act; providing  
education savings accounts for students.

Presented to the House K-12 Education Budget Committee  
Monday, February 6, 2023  
3:30 PM Room 546-S  
By Jim Karleskint, United School Administrators of Kansas

Chairwoman Williams, Members of the House K-12 Education Budget Committee

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with the committee today. The United School Administrators of Kansas opposes the intent of HB 2218.

ESAs are vouchers by another name. Rather than giving the taxpayer funds directly to the private school like traditional vouchers, the government deposits taxpayer funds into an account that parents can use to pay for private educational expenses. They fund tuition at private schools. Education Savings Accounts provide little to no accountability as to how funds are spent, often resulting in widespread waste fraud and abuse.

Some feel education savings accounts save taxpayer money, they do not save taxpayer money. In such programs, the public schools from which students leave for private schools are spread throughout a school district. The reduction is a few students from a public school, this does not decrease operating costs like building maintenance and transportation. But it does decrease the amount of money the public school has to spend. In some areas education savings accounts have resulted in significant deficits and tax increases.

Some also feel that education savings accounts improve academic achievement. These programs do not improve academic achievement. Numerous studies of ESA's/ voucher programs across the country show that these programs do not result in better test scores for students and student achievement.

There are many proven ways to improve public schools such as reducing class sizes, offering a well-rounded curriculum, and increasing parental engagement. Providing resources to public schools so students have inviting classrooms, well-trained teachers, and support services such as health care, nutrition, and after-school programs will ensure our children can compete in the global economy. ESA's do not fund any of these improvements in many cases makes it harder for public schools to implement improvements.

Public schools are subjected to federal, state, and local oversight and accountability measures. Public schools in Kansas must administer State Assessment Tests to track student achievement. Kansas public school districts must document how funds are spent, ensure they are teaching a curriculum that meets state standards, meet state teacher licensure standards, and report numerous amounts of data to the state on how students are performing. Many private schools fail to track data on student achievement and teacher quality.

Education Savings Accounts/Voucher Programs are Ripe for Fraud and Abuse. There is a long list of taxpayer-funded state ESA/voucher programs where funds have been misspent. In Florida, the Department of Education was able to substantiate allegations of fraud in 25 cases at schools that collectively received nearly \$50 million. Some of these ESA/voucher schools took millions in public funds for kids not even attending those schools. Another investigation of Florida's voucher programs found that voucher schools hired teachers without college degrees, held classes in aging strip malls, and falsified fire-safety and health records. One school that received millions of taxpayer dollars repeatedly violated program rules, including hiring staff with criminal convictions.

Another school, which received \$500,000 in vouchers in one year, was run by a convicted felon. In Arizona, it was found that parents misused more than \$700,000 in ESA funds on items such as beauty supplies and sports apparel. And even closer to home Oklahoma found half a million dollars of misspent education funding in a pandemic school-voucher program. The program was to help kids recover from school closures. The Governor gave \$8 million of pandemic relief funds to a third party that gave money directly to families with nearly no restrictions on how the funds could be spent. As a result, instead of buying educational services or supplies, the money was used to buy nearly 550 televisions totaling nearly \$200,000. People also bought Christmas trees, gaming consoles, electric fireplaces, outdoor grills, pressure washers, stereo equipment, coffee makers, and smart watches.

HB 2218 has many concerning points. Some of these are: Little to no public oversight of expenditure of ESA funds, little to no oversight for student achievement. The bill could lead to unregulated schools. The bill would allow ESA voucher accounts to remain active for at least 4 years after high school graduation. Would allow parents to receive funds for ESA's and the state's private school tuition program (double dipping).

It is for these reasons that United School Administrators of Kansas are opposed to HB 2218.

Jim Karleskint, PhD  
USA, Kansas