

Opposition of HB 2738

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I urge the K-12 Budget Committee to fully fund Special Education as stated in current law. The bill changes state law to “count” non-Sped funding as Special Ed funding. The result is no new SPED funding this year or ever. Any new Sped costs would be the responsibility of individual districts. Historic underfunding of special education and unanswered questions in HB 2738 threaten the success of all USD 409 Students as well as 2 private school systems to whom we provide special education services. No information has been provided how HB 2738 will impact our current education funding. Most importantly, how does this bill affect services to children with disabilities and/or giftedness?

Our mission at Atchison Public Schools is to *identify and remove all barriers to promote equal opportunities for success by all students*. Students and their families in our community come to us with different barriers, yet they all have a right to an equal opportunity for success. Federal and state law require that public schools provide the education and services necessary for that equal opportunity-**services beyond the scope of general education.**

25% of our students receive special education which is above the state average. **One in every three** students who enroll in our district has an IEP and parents regularly report moving to Atchison because of quality of our special education services. Currently, **65 students** who attend private schools within the school district boundaries receive special education services. **49** students are identified as Gifted, receiving services in Special Education.

By counting the general education funding that local school boards must currently transfer to special education as state provided “special education aid”, the proposed formula seems more calculated to guarantee paper compliance to the 92% funding of excess cost, rather than actually funding the true excess cost of providing special education services.

What is “excess cost” in USD 409?

Atchison Public Schools spent **\$3.85 million** on special education services in 2022-2023, receiving **\$2.44 million** in state and federal funds and transferring **\$1.4 million** from the general fund to cover the difference of the cost of required services. This diminishes our ability to provide competitive salaries and successful teacher recruitment. One contracted virtual School Psychologist costs the district **\$96 per hour**-more than the cost of the two onsite School Psychologists.

Beyond the dollar amount, “excess cost” of special education looks like:

A child who relies on an eye gaze device to communicate because of her medical condition.

A student with Autism who requires services from a Board Certified Behavioral Analyst and two registered behavioral technicians - all contracted from outside agencies.

A child with a disability mastering the majority of letter sounds and decreasing behavior incidents from 16 per day to twice per week.

No family hopes or dreams that their child is born with a disability. They do hope and dream that their child is successful. Fully funding special education allows **ALL** students to have an opportunity for success.