



**Oral Opponent Testimony on  
HB 2136, Expanding low-income scholarship voucher program  
House Education**

**By  
Shannon Kimball  
Government Relations Specialist**

**Kansas Association of School Boards  
skimball@kasb.org**

**February 5, 2025**

Chair Estes and Members of the Committee,

KASB appears today in opposition to HB 2136. Kansas public schools are the pride—and often the lifeblood—of their communities. KASB members recognize that strong public schools are essential to the futures of these communities and advocate for legislative policies that support “the vital role that our public schools play as community hubs and centers of community connection and activities.” Consequently, KASB’s members oppose diverting public tax dollars (no matter the vehicle) to entities that are not required to educate all children regardless of ability or need, and that are not held to any standards of academic progress or fiscal responsibility:

**Public Accountability for Public Funds**

To ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed, **all** schools and school programs and activities supported by public funds must serve **all** children on the same basis as public schools. We oppose programs including but not limited to vouchers, education savings accounts, trust funds, scholarships, and tuition tax credits because such programs divert public funding from public education to schools which are not required to serve **all** students, including those who are disadvantaged, disabled, or those with the greatest needs.

Kansas public schools are preparing students for college and careers, including students who have significant needs and disadvantages. Graduation rates for English language learners and students from low-income households have steadily and significantly increased since 2016. And, in 2024, a record number of high school students took post-secondary courses while in

high school and a record number of Kansas students took advanced placement courses *and* earned passing scores on the AP exams.

Moreover, Kansas public schools are essential to the future economic success of our state. Our public schools attract businesses to the urban centers represented by many legislators and are the primary employers in the less populated areas of the state represented by others. No doubt each member of this committee can share examples of great things happening in their constituent school districts.

Expanding the tax breaks given to businesses and others through the tuition tax credit scholarship is not the answer to continuing to improve student achievement in Kansas. It is solidly established by high-quality education research that voucher programs harm student academic achievement, and that the most effective and fiscally responsible way to improve student outcomes is to invest in our public schools.

Rural lawmakers know that in many of our smallest communities, parents and other local taxpayers fight hard to keep their public schools because if the school building closes, the community will wither and die. Urban and rural legislators can likely agree that one of Kansas' best strategies to stem outmigration is to preserve and strengthen the state's public schools.

Sadly, this bill does not help our Kansas communities continue to maintain and improve their local public schools, outcomes for Kansas students, and economic prospects for their communities. Although state law currently says tuition tax credit scholarships may be used only by low-income students in qualified schools, we are concerned that HB 2136:

- expands eligibility to non-low income students;
- does not require the student to have ever enrolled in a public school;
- significantly increases the tax write-off for donors;
- opens the door for the state to simply start paying the private school tuition of well-to-do families who already support their students' attendance at a private school without taxpayer dollars; and
- substantially increases the potential cost to taxpayers of this program, doubling the existing cap on tax credits that may be awarded.

Each of these concerns is further amplified by the recent introduction of SB 75, which would open the door wide for a wealth transfer of Kansas taxpayer dollars to high-income families already attending unregulated nonpublic schools in Kansas and even outside the state.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask the committee to express its continuing support of the 92% of Kansas students whose families choose and rely on Kansas public schools by voting no on HB 2136. Thank you.

*KASB is a non-profit service organization built on an abiding belief in Kansas public schools. We have put the needs of students and K-12 leaders first since 1917.*