

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Renee Erickson at 1:30 pm on Tuesday, January 28, 2025, in room 144-S of the Capitol.

All members were present

Committee staff present:

Cyndie Rexer, Kansas Legislative Committee Assistant
Julia Kofoid, Legislative Research Department
Matthew Willis, Legislative Research Department
Tamera Lawrence, Office of Revisor of Statutes

Conferees appearing before the Committee:

Emily Aragon, Student, Maranatha Christian Academy
Malinda Evans, Special Education Coordinator, Maranatha Christian Academy
Dr. Jamie Finkeldei, Associate Superintendent, Catholic Diocese of Wichita
James Franko, President, Kansas Policy Institute
Dr. Kimberlee Gill, Superintendent of Maranatha Christian Academy
Bart Kooiman, US Citizen, Kansas resident, small business owner
James Randall Miller, Home Educator, Miller Academy
Samuel Milner, Student, Maranatha Christian Academy
Dr. John Walker, Superintendent, Central Christian School, Hutchinson, KS
Rep. Mari-Lin Poskin, District 20
Leah Fliter, Assistant Executive Director of Advocacy, Kansas Association of School Boards
Lynn Rogers, KIFA Board Member
Laurel Burchfield, Advocacy Director, Mainstream Civic Engagement
Judith Deedy on behalf of Game On for Kansas Schools
Amy Hill, Blue Valley District Parent
Hilary Junk, Kansas Resident
Sarah MacKay, Parent
Mary F. Sinclair, Kansas PTA Advocacy Team
Dr. Lorenzo Rizzi, Associate Superintendent for Student Services, Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kansas

Others in attendance:

No list available

Request for bill introductions

Chairman Erickson introduced a bill regarding participation in school activities. With no objections the bill was accepted.

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Pending Referral, Hearing on SB75

Chairman Erickson opened hearing on **SB75** with instructions to the Conferees.

Tamera Lawrence, Assistant Revisor, Office of the Revisor of Statutes, gave an overview of the bill saying the bill would establish an education opportunity tax credit for dependent children not enrolled in public school. Students enrolled in a public school during any part of the tax year would not qualify for the tax credit. ([Attachment 1](#))

Proponent Oral Testimony:

Emily Aragon and Samuel Milner, students at Maranatha Christian Academy, believe every student should get a choice in their education, private or public, regardless of a family's financial status. Many parents would like the opportunity to pursue a private education offering but are constrained by their low to middle income status. A student should have access to the school that's the best fit for them. ([Attachment 2](#)) ([Attachment 3](#))

Malinda Evans, Special Education Coordinator, Maranatha Christian Academy, reported Maranatha educates students who have disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers. The success with students has even been noted by our constituent public school districts. Parents have a choice, and there is evidence that our private school is the Least Restrictive Environment for students. ([Attachment 4](#))

Dr. Jamie Finkeldei, Associate Superintendent, Catholic Diocese of Wichita, said this bill is commendable because it extends educational opportunities beyond income-based limitations and ensures all families have access to a broader range of options. ([Attachment 5](#))

James Franko, President, Kansas Policy Institute, simply stated there is widespread, bipartisan support that cuts across geographic regions for educational choice. He points out the stagnating overall achievement in Kansas schools and the staggering achievement gaps between low-income and non-low-income children and adds there are many reasons for these long-term trends, and they must be addressed. This bill would allow Kansans more access to schools that demonstrate significantly higher test scores, a highly individualized education, spiritual nurturing, and parent empowerment. ([Attachment 6](#))

Dr. Kimberlee Gill, Superintendent, Maranatha Christian Academy, stated opponents of this bill say passing this bill will hurt the public school sector, which is not true. This country has implemented educational freedom since inception, but with guiding laws. It is a bi-partisan issue, with educational freedom being realized in many blue states and Washington, D.C. ([Attachment 7](#))

Bart Kooiman, a Kansas resident and small business owner, remarked that Kansas, our government makes it easier for parents to end the life of their unborn child than to choose which school their child

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attends. Let us have taxpayer money follow the kids, not the institution. ([Attachment 8](#))

James Randall Miller, a home educator, told how homeschool families impact the economy differently than families with children in public schools. State and local governments benefit from not having to educate homeschooled children. Families must fund all costs for curriculum, equipment, field trips, and other extra-curricular activities. He said you have to look at the entire tax structure supporting education in our state and not just state income taxes when you consider the proposed legislation. ([Attachment 9](#))

Dr. John Walker, Superintendent of Schools for Central Christian School, stated they are held accountable to their accrediting agency, because with accreditation, the family and the student is given assurance their child will receive a quality education by the courses they take. ([Attachment 10](#))

Dr. Lorenzo Rizzi, Associate Superintendent for Student Services in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, said this legislation is not about undermining public education but about complementing it. School choice programs have proven in other states to elevate educational outcomes for all students, fostering innovation and healthy competition. Providing parents with educational options is not only a matter of fairness but also a strategic investment in the future of Kansas. ([Attachment 11](#))

Proponent Written Only are bundled together and are in alphabetical order. ([Attachment 12](#))

Opponent Oral Testimony:

Representative Mari-Lynn Poskin, Kansas House District 20, stated there isn't one shred of fiscal responsibility, government efficiency, or common sense Kansas values reflected in this bill and no amount of amending will fix that. ([Attachment 13](#))

Leah Fliter, Assistant Executive Director of Advocacy, Kansas Association of School Boards, said public dollars should support public schools 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. ([Attachment 14](#))

Laurel Burchfield, Advocacy Director, Mainstream, believes this bill will reduce state revenues which should be going towards our public schools, especially at a time when the state continues to fall short of its financial obligation to fund special education. ([Attachment 15](#))

Judith Deedy, on behalf of Game On for Kansas Schools, stated this bill shouldn't be called a tax credit because a taxpayer can receive much more in tax credit than they pay in taxes, and they receive the additional funds in a payment from the state. ([Attachment 16](#))

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Amy Hill, parent of Blue Valley students, said Kansas has some of the highest education standards in the nation and outstanding teachers who are challenging our kids with classroom learning that encourages critical thinking and hands on learning. ([Attachment 17](#))

Hilary Junk, Kansas Resident, said she has concerns about the bill's philosophy, logistics and impact. Choosing not to engage with a public service does not mean one is entitled to the monies that support the public good, incentives with no transparency or accountability is ripe for fraud and automatic renewal and expansion without data. The impact would be an increase in private school tuition, transference of tax burdens from rural to suburban areas and higher property taxes. ([Attachment 18](#))

Sarah MacKay, Parent of a Shawnee Mission School District student, stated funding two new education systems, private and homeschool, with these tax credits is not sustainable. ([Attachment 19](#))

Mary F Sinclair, PhD, Kansas PTA Advocacy Team, explained that this bill would be a new entitlement program, that eligibility does not equal access, the voucher impact on At-Risk students, dispelling the myth of a "Backpack Full of Cash," and rising to the challenge and beating the odds. ([Attachment 20](#))

Opponent Written Testimony:

Opponent Written A-C ([Attachment 21](#))

Opponent Written D-G ([Attachment 22](#))

Opponent Written H-K ([Attachment 23](#))

Opponent L-P ([Attachment 24](#))

Opponent R-W ([Attachment 25](#))

Discussion followed.

Chairman Erickson closed the hearing on **SB75**.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:25 pm.

The next meeting of the Senate Education Committee will be held January 29, 2025 at 1:30 pm in Room 144-S.

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Unless specifically noted, the individual remarks recorded herein have not been transcribed verbatim. Individual remarks as reported herein have not been submitted to the individuals appearing before the committee for editing or corrections.