

Proponent of Senate Bill #75
Senate Education Committee
Date of Hearing: 1/28/2025
Dr. John Walker
Superintendent of Central Christian School
Submitted: January 27, 2025

Madam Chair and members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Dr. John Walker. I serve as the Superintendent of Schools for Central Christian School in Hutchinson, KS. I also have the distinct pleasure of serving as the Kansas Representative for all Kansas Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) accredited schools. I am also blessed to serve on the Board of Directors for the Kansas Association for Independent and Religious Schools (KAIRS).

I respectfully offer testimony in support of SB 75 on behalf of my school, and as a member of these organizations.

I hope we can all agree that parents have the sovereign rights over their children. I hope we can all agree that parents want what is best for their kids. I hope we can all agree that parents generally know the needs of their children better than anyone else. I hope we can all agree that parents should be empowered to make decisions that they think are necessary to promote the flourishing of their children, their admonishment, their education, and their future.

Any good parent would do anything they could to ensure that their child is taught, nurtured, admonished, and challenged in ways appropriate with the type of people they hope their children become. This happens in both the public and private sector. However, parents are not currently fully empowered to make the best decision for their children due to financial constraints that may exist.

If we can all agree that parents know the needs of their children, and that parents are and should be their children's greatest advocates, then why would the State of Kansas be against school choice?

Not a year goes by that I don't have the opportunity to meet amazing parents. Parents who feel as if they are stuck with a school or system that does not align with their values, beliefs, or educational standards. Because of this, parents feel hamstrung in their ability to make any changes because of financial constraints. Many parents would like the opportunity to pursue a private education offering but are constrained by their low to middle income status.

It certainly isn't for a lack of trying – many of these parents are blue-collar employees, working more than full-time to make ends meet. They simply want a different option for school – or more options for schooling that better aligns with their desires as a parent.

Establishing the education opportunity tax credit as presented in Senate Bill 75 would better empower parents in Kansas to have true choice when it comes to schooling. Most of the parents I know would do anything they could to support their children towards flourishing. And because children flourish in different ways, in different environments, and with different people – we must all agree that a “one-size-fits-all” solution is no longer viable.

We must recognize the reality that not all students are the same. Not every family unit is the same. Opening more options for students and families to pursue the education that fits their morals, values, deeply held convictions, and thought should be a fundamental right of every parent.

School choice is not about the dismantling of public education. Rather, it is about strengthening it by ensuring that every family has the ability to choose the educational environment that works best for their child. It is about empowering parents with choice – with options – public, private, charter, magnet, homeschooling, micro-schooling, and more.

Finally, I respectfully wish to speak to the issue of accountability. As opponents have often pointed out that private schools have “no accountability”. This is patently false in most cases. To make you all aware of the other options that exist out there for accountability through the accreditation process. As a Christian school, we believe our very first step in accountability is that we are first accountable to the Lord. Second, we are accountable to a board of trustees. Third, we are accountable to the parents – because they have placed their trust in us to prepare their children academically with excellence. Fourth, we are held accountable to our accrediting agency, because with accreditation, the family and the student is given assurance that their child will receive a quality education by the courses they take.

On behalf of our school, and all other ACSI accredited schools – measures of accountability are in place. The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) is one of the largest Protestant accreditation agencies in the world. The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) is committed to Christian schools and educators believing that Christian schools contribute to the public good through effective teaching and learning, that is biblically sound, academically rigorous, socially engaged, and culturally relevant. ACSI is a Christian educational organization that advances excellence in Christian schools by enhancing the professional and personal development of Christian educators and providing vital support functions for Christian schools.

ACSI offers school accreditation, teacher and administrator certification, and legal/legislative ideas and support. They have their own publication organization that publishes a K-12 curriculum that is academically rigorous and biblically based. Over 5.5 million students worldwide connect to Christian education through ACSI’s efforts to strengthen Christian schools and help equip Christian educators. There are over 2,200 member schools in the United States, and more than 3,000 global and 160 international member schools. In addition, 70 colleges and universities also have accreditation with ACSI.

To be accredited through the Association of Christian Schools International, there are several indicators that you must meet before your initial accreditation approval. Once a school has been approved for accreditation, there are yearly monitoring reports that must be submitted that speak to a school's accreditation schedule, current school information (i.e. current enrollment, grade levels served, total number of board members, number of teachers, etc.), any additional campuses that may have been added, faculty and administration credentials, statement of financial practice, updates to our continuous school improvement plan, progress reports for major recommendations from the last accreditation visit, and what has been accomplished over the last year.

I have also attached a link for the ACSI Standards Manual for accreditation, which includes six domains that a school must meet for accreditation and re-accreditation.

<https://acsipdp.s3.amazonaws.com/Accreditation/ACSI+Inspire+Accreditation+Standards+Manual.pdf>

To sum up what I would like to say: there is indeed accountability for small private schools – through a nationally recognized accrediting body that keeps us accountable, ensures our viability, pushes us to excel academically, and plants spiritual roots to ensure there is no mission drift. With accountability to the Lord, the Board of Trustees, parents, and to an accreditation agency – there are more than adequate controls to ensure that schools provide a quality education for the students and families they serve.

Finally, as Kansans we must recognize that parents have the sovereign rights over their children. School choice will pass in Kansas someday, why would we delay this any longer? Why wait to provide more opportunities to more children? Why would we not want to empower Kansas families to provide the best education possible for their children?

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. John Walker
Superintendent
Central Christian School