



Testimony before the House Committee on K-12 Education Budget
in opposition to
House Bill 2410 – Creating the Kansas school equity and enhancement act
by
Judith Deedy and Erin Gould of **Game On for Kansas Schools**
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Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

[Game on for Kansas Schools](#) is a nonpartisan grassroots effort among Kansans who share a belief in high-quality public education as a right of all Kansas students. We advocate for Kansas public schools to ensure our teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members have the resources necessary to deliver quality education to all Kansas students. We inform communities across the state about issues and legislation affecting their students, and our membership extends statewide.

Creating a new school funding formula is an enormous task. We recognize and appreciate the serious effort being made by the members of this committee to create a solution that works for all Kansas children. We have four primary concerns with this bill; the overall funding amount, the Local Activities Budget, the inclusion of a tax credit scholarship program, and the lack of immediate full funding for all-day kindergarten.

First, we are glad to see this bill includes an increase in base and overall funding. However, we believe the funding proposed in this bill is inadequate. Many of our current legislators ran on a platform of strong support for public schools because they know Kansas citizens want excellent schools. While our Supreme Court recently identified a minimum level of funding needed to attain constitutional adequacy, we respectfully remind this committee that Kansas families want more than minimally adequate educations for our children. We understand the state's current fiscal crisis, and know tax and budget work is ongoing. We encourage this committee to assist in that effort – to plan for our state's fiscal and educational future – by requesting the actual amount needed to educate our children in the manner Kansan's expect, rather than what fits our current budget. If necessary, we'd support a phase-in approach to full funding. However, we encourage you to keep that time-period as short as possible.

Another concern raised by this bill is the introduction of the Local Activities Budget. We are troubled by this way of handling extracurricular activities. When our legislature adopted the Rose standards, it adopted a broad definition of education. The standards specifically include knowledge of “mental and physical wellness” and “sufficient grounding in the arts.” Participation in extracurricular activities can help students achieve these standards. Further, multiple studies have established the positive impact of extracurricular activities on students. Participation can also lead to the development of soft skills Kansas businesses leaders say Kansas students need. Generations of Kansans have learned valuable life skills and lessons outside the classroom through participation in extracurricular activities, and we don't think this is an appropriate time to de-emphasize them. Requiring districts to hold elections to access LAB funding will also cause them to incur the costs of having an election, even though many recently did so to raise their LOBs. We recommend the elimination of the Local Activity Budget, and the inclusion of extracurricular activities funding in the base aid amount.

We also oppose the tax credit scholarship program in this bill. As we have asserted in previous testimony opposing tax credit scholarships, we believe this is an end-run around the Kansas Constitution's prohibition on funding of religious schools. The vast majority of accredited private schools in Kansas are Catholic or Christian. Allowing the use of tax credit scholarships at these schools promotes the segregation of students based on religious beliefs. This program also decreases revenue to the State General Fund to subsidize religious education. Given our current fiscal difficulties and public school funding shortage, it is inappropriate to divert funds to non-public schools that can exclude children and do not have to provide all the services provided by Kansas public schools. Although this bill contains restrictions that limit the students and schools eligible for these scholarships, we have seen those restrictions stripped away in other states with similar programs. In fact, we've testified against 3 different attempted expansions of the tax credit scholarship program passed in 2014. We strongly oppose tax credit scholarships and believe this provision should be deleted from this bill.

Finally, we would like to see Kansas children attending full-day kindergarten counted as full students immediately. The reality is that large numbers of Kansas kindergartners are already attending full-day kindergarten with full-time teachers, and our state should acknowledge the academic benefits that come with full-day kindergarten attendance. Full funding for all-day kindergarten is already past due and should be included in a new finance formula.

As difficult as this process is, it represents an opportunity to give the children of Kansas an outstanding education and to fully invest in our state's most valuable resource – its children. Thank you for allowing us to share our perspective.