



Written Testimony: HB 2218 - Sunflower Education Equity Act (opponent)
House K-12 Education Budget Committee
February 6, 2023

By: Dr. Tonya Merrigan, Superintendent, USD 229 Blue Valley Schools

Madam Chairwoman and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments *opposing HB 2218*. USD 229 Blue Valley has a strong history of working with this committee and our community, as we mutually seek to enhance student learning opportunities in our state. It is our hope that we continue growing these relationships, no matter the issues or challenges confronting K-12 education and the students we serve.

Blue Valley has a total student population of more than 22,000 and **consistently ranks in the top tier of high-performing schools, both in the state and the nation.** (See Quick Facts at the end of testimony.) Our patrons, our board, and our teachers are committed to providing educational opportunities that *don't just meet performance standards, but, rather, exceed performance expectations and prepare our students for success far beyond their years in our district.*

The Blue Valley Board of Education has a long-held policy position that states:

[Blue Valley] opposes public funding of private schools, including offering public tax credits that decrease state revenue, that do not comply with the same standards and requirements of public school districts, including governance by an elected local school board.

Major School Finance Reform

HB 2218 proposes a momentous shift in education finance, policy and accountability, by directly diverting public education funds into savings accounts dedicated to private and home-school education settings. Because the changes represent such a significant shift in the way the Kansas Constitution contemplates public education funding be channeled and supervised, **we believe this legislation would be well-served by appointing an interim committee to further study and vet the various moving parts.**

Accountability and Oversight

The Blue Valley Board of Education sets high academic and aspirational goals for all students entrusted to our district. Parents and businesses in our district expect academic excellence from our schools and our Board appropriates resources necessary to achieve that.



Our district strives to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars and supports a transparent budget process that allows parents and others to provide input toward ensuring funds are used to support excellence in student learning.

Blue Valley's budget is audited annually by an external accounting firm to ensure integrity and compliance with generally accepted accounting practices. Further, the district is annually audited by KSDE to ensure compliance with state and federal laws.

HB 2218 proposes a substantial difference between how public and private schools are supervised and does not provide the same accountability in academic performance standards or in fiscal resource oversight as required of public education options.

Blue Valley is **committed to a transparent budget plan for how public funds are to be expended and of supervision by a locally-elected school board**. Blue Valley taxpayers expect nothing less than rigorous oversight and accountability for all public funds.

In closing, we want to reiterate our appreciation for the K-12 Education Budget Committee's commitment to improving student learning opportunities and achievement across our state. USD 229 shares that commitment and *has a vision of excellence in student performance and learning opportunities, so our students may have the strongest hope of future success throughout the globe*. We wish that for all students.

USD 229 Blue Valley Schools: Quick Facts

K-12 Student Enrollment	21,858	ACT District Composite Average*	23.6
Early Childhood—grade 12 Enrollment	22,412	ACT Statewide Average	19.8
Average Daily Attendance	91.7%	SAT District Average	1297
Graduation Rate	97.5%	SAT Statewide Average	1243
Teacher's with Master's Degree or Higher	74%	*with 92.3 % taking ACT	