



**Senate Federal & State Affairs Committee
Written Testimony on HB 2269 (Proponent)
Submitted by: Dr. Tonya Merrigan, Superintendent USD 229 Blue Valley Schools
March 22, 2023**

Chairman Thompson and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony **supporting HB 2269**. The Blue Valley district applauds this committee for its thoughtful consideration of legislation that will stem the tide of youth smoking and vaping that is growing exponentially in our schools.

Raising the age for purchase and possession of tobacco and vaping products, from 18- to 21-years of age, represents a significant step toward decreasing the number of young people becoming addicted to these products.

While this bill reflects great strides towards ending tobacco use in the State of Kansas and offers a robust T21 policy, the Blue Valley district recognizes the best way to protect youth from getting started using e-cigarettes, cigarettes or other tobacco products is to ban all flavors for all products.

The impact of vaping in our schools and on student learning cannot be overstated. It negatively impacts the educational process and has become a major distraction for students, teachers, and administrators. Addressing student use in our schools has proven a Yeoman's effort that has demanded:

- **Education resources.** It has become a drain on education resources, as teachers and administrators spend a significant amount of time monitoring and policing vaping in school. This is time and energy that could and should be spent elsewhere;
- **Policing.** The epidemic in our schools requires increased monitoring of halls and bathrooms, as well as monitoring devices and test kits to test the contents of confiscated vaping devices. It can also lead to the involvement of local law enforcement;
- **Student Discipline.** This issue has required schools to administer stiff punishments to deter student use. School suspensions have sky-rocketed.

We believe raising the age of possession and purchase will make a particular difference in our schools, as students who have attained the legal age of purchase at 18 often become suppliers of the products to younger students. While we understand this will not totally stem the tide in our schools, we do see it as an important tool in keeping these products out of our students' hands.

E-cigarettes have become the most popular tobacco product among our young people. Making them even more insidious is they deliver much higher levels of nicotine than regular cigarettes and most young people report being unaware the products always contain nicotine. Further, these products allow nicotine to be delivered at higher concentrations without the throat irritation caused by traditional cigarettes.

Research has long shown the adolescent brain to be uniquely vulnerable to the effects of nicotine and other addictive products. The tobacco industry has capitalized on that fact, understanding those who



become addicted in their youth are more likely to become life-long users of their products, thereby ensuring their bottom line for decades.

While we would prefer flavors to be banned from vaping devices, we see this legislation as a strong step toward curbing their use by students in the school setting. **We strongly urge passage of HB 2269.**

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	