

Legislative Priorities 2023 - Statements of Support for Our Schools

Overview

Leavenworth County Schools acknowledge and appreciate the service to our community by our elected officials, and for their willingness to engage in two-way communication with local school districts and boards of education to better understand issues with policy considerations that impact public schools.

We stand ready to advocate for legislative policies that advance locally agreed upon strategic objectives, and that prepare and position students for graduation and post-secondary success.

We appreciate your service, and are committed to working as collaboratively as possible on behalf of Leavenworth County students, families, educators, and community members.

Support of Public Education

Leavenworth County Schools rely upon dependable funding certainty as established and defined by the Kansas State Constitution. We support local control of public schools in Kansas, with oversight from local elected representatives by their respective school community.

Policies and legislation that would destabilize funding of public schools, and/or that would not require the same accreditation and enrollment requirements for funding considerations of non-public entities (ex. charter, private, home-based) should not be considered, as they would knowingly create divide between expectations of public schools and all other state-funded educational entities.

Support structure of locally elected school boards to provide oversight of district operations, management of curriculum and allowable learning resources, building and district needs assessments, and measurement of student outcomes, within state guidance and standards under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Education.

- Support that any entity or organization receiving public funds for education of students, operates within the same regulations and constraints as public schools.
- Support statewide innovations and incentives to address national teacher and administrator shortage issues that will incrementally impact students, school families, and taxpayers.
- Support legislative review of Open Enrollment considerations and costs to local school communities in advance of the 24-25 school year, state elected officials should work to consider and resolve implementation issues within the 2022 bill, specifically:

- Acknowledgement that current legislation creates unfunded, state-driven administrative burdens, with development requirements of grade level and building capacity assessments;
- All Kansas students should be accepted and enrolled within the same regulatory guidelines, if state funds are involved; and
- Understanding that current legislation creates a state-allowable transfer environment, where the costs of education will be funded by taxpayers in the receiving school district, including special education costs. These costs include required transportation and other additional services required by an Individual Education Plan (IEP), and that districts will be challenged to prepare for incoming students with limited advanced knowledge on what services will need to be accommodated.

Support of Student Mental Health & Social-Emotional Wellness

Student mental health and wellness continues to be a priority for Kansas school districts and is one of five state-required and measured outcomes. When a student is not mentally or socially equipped and supported to learn, they can be expected to realize diminished learning returns and potentially negatively impact the educational environment for others.

While core subjects (ex. reading, writing, math, social studies, science) remain the foundation of the classroom and grade level assessed standards, Kansans have communicated a unified desire that schools develop programming that address interpersonal skills, character development, and ability to work with others as good citizens and neighbors.

Mental health and wellness is closely tied to positive student outcomes, as well as maintaining a safe and secure learning environment:

- Support the authority of local boards of education to make decisions regarding the health and well-being of students and staff in alignment with their respective school community; and
- Support increased funding specifically aligned to increased access of affordable, high quality mental health and behavioral health services for students and families, including support for suicide prevention services and programs;
- Support flexibility of local school boards to implement policies, professional development, and programs to address unfunded state mandates (ex. Jason Flatt Act, Dyslexia, etc.); and
- Support KSHSAA policy and jurisdiction as it pertains to student participation in school-sponsored athletics and activities.

Support of State Funding Obligations

Suitable funding for public schools across the State of Kansas is a constitutional mandate and key to educating good citizens and a skilled workforce. In addition to

adhering to a reliable school finance formula, with inflationary increases factored in, we support the following positions that would positively impact Kansas students, families, and educators:

- Support the guidance of the Kansas Constitution, which ensures suitable provisions for the equitable and adequate finance of public education for all students in Kansas;
- Support reliable funding that provides every student the opportunity to be college and career ready through rigorous educational programming;
- Support efforts to keep our schools safe from gun violence, including financial support for threat assessment programs in schools, security upgrades, effective emergency planning assistance, and responsible firearm storage;
- Support permanent implementation of high-density at-risk funding for both school districts and individual school buildings, in order to provide necessary support for schools with significant populations of at-risk students. (Note: existing high density at-risk formula component expires at the end of the 2023-24 school year and must be renewed during the 2023 legislative session, making this consideration a high priority);
- Support fully funding local, state, and federal mandates;
- Support greater opportunities for communities to utilize operational and capital funds at the local level, with full equalization;
- Support policies and actions to recruit and retain educators and support staff including fully funding KPERS;
- Support property tax appraisal procedures that ensure adequate property tax revenue collection at the local and state level;
- Support special education services and state funding at the required 92% of excess costs - Leavenworth County school districts pay for all required education services for our students, but are not receiving full funding of the statutory requirement, resulting in shifted funding from other areas of need, which could be passed on as savings to local taxpayers in the form of reduced mill levies;
- Support reimbursement to districts for transportation services of all students living more than 1 mile from their assigned attendance center/school;
- Support funding at-risk programs and services that support students in poverty and/or those struggling academically; and
- Support investing in early childhood and school readiness programs and services to meet the cognitive and social needs of young children.

Retention of Qualified Educational Workforce

Positive educational outcomes for students rely heavily on a skilled, experienced, and motivated teaching workforce. Retention of qualified educators should be a shared statewide objective of Kansas legislators and school districts.

- Support efforts to recruit and retain high-quality professionals into the education workforce, including flexibility of licensure reciprocity with other states and programs that incent and recognize education professionals;
- Support legislative establishment of funding minimums for licensed teachers, and/or state-funded retention incentives; and
- Support waivers for out-of-state qualified applicants, and Kansas educators, willing to remain employed by Kansas schools.

Support for Rigorous Academic Standards for All Students

- Support rigorous academic standards to prepare students to meet or exceed the Rose Standards in preparation for success in a globally- competitive workforce.
- Support funding for early learning programs to recognize and address academic and social needs as quickly as possible for all kids, particularly children at-risk; and
- Support funding for a state assessment system that provides meaningful feedback to students and families, tracking their growth and progress toward college and career readiness.