

Pull up a cozy chair of status quo. Pour a tall glass of low academic performance and stale innovation. Throw in resistance to accountability, ignore declining achievement data and then add an annual dose of distracting “underfunding our schools” rhetoric to take public and parental eyes off poor student performance. This shouldn’t be the plan for Kansas kids.

Teachers, parents, and community members across our State and Nation know there’s something broken with education. Status quo is not the answer. A system languishing with over [70%](#) of all students not proficient in math gives credence to the outcry for change. Let’s take an honest look at what we can do collectively to improve. Let’s acknowledge that not all kids are the same. Not all kids can learn in a traditional environment – whether it be in a public or private school. It’s a challenging, changing world with new pressures for kids. Let’s open the doors of opportunity to all kids in Kansas by funding students not systems.

Recently, according to the Nation’s Report Card through the U.S. Department of Education, Kansas 8th graders ranked 42nd in reading. Who could possibly be okay with status quo? Next year, Kansas is scheduled to provide over a 5% increase in funding – will that solve the problem? How long will it take our kids to become proficient in math and reading?

We have only [9% of our at-risk high school students](#) in Kansas who are proficient in math. Only [14% are proficient in English Language Arts](#). Is that good enough? Why aren’t opponents of student-centered funding talking about our students failing in traditional schools?

Let’s go a step further – funding. We are constantly hearing from school associations and union groups that Kansas has underfunded our public schools, but the facts bear this to be false. Kansas has increased total K-12 funding by 135.5% (per Kansas Legislative Research Department using Kansas Department of Education public data) per pupil in the past two decades while the Midwest CPI-U index increased by just over 68%. This means that Kansas has exceeded the cost of inflation per pupil in the past twenty years.

What Kansas is proposing with education savings accounts (ESAs that promote education freedom) breaks the binds of status quo and puts the student at the very center of the debate. This is a student-centered movement that is sweeping our nation because parents realize that in many cases – our kids need more.

ESAs provide so much more than traditional school options. ESAs provide unique flexibility for parents including options for microschoools, on-line courses, college courses, therapies, tutoring, and materials. It’s the first innovative approach that trusts parents to direct the education for their child. ESAs buck status quo.

Kansas has a public interest in educating every child, regardless of location. If the goal is to have proficient graduates who can read, write and do math – we shouldn’t be arguing over where the child is educated, but rather how we can ensure every kid has a chance for success.

As for fears of offensive materials being taught, I'd challenge those who focus on divisive arguments to consider the testimony provided by a public school teacher in the K-12 Education Committee who stated it was her desire to teach "critical race theory, liberal theory, atheism, and socialism." If a parent disagrees with these ideals, what are the options? With these views shared in some public schools, should the Legislature ban curricula or close public schools? No, that wouldn't be necessary if parents had choice. Education freedom gives parents the final say – not the State.

Let's not give way to shallow thinking that undermines trust in parents who know their children best. Let's not succumb to fear which protects status quo. Let's promote education freedom which makes kids priority #1. This student-centered movement supports the motto that "Kansas is open for business" and "open to families." Let's free the children!

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