



SMAC PTA LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

January 20, 2025

The 2025 Kansas legislative session started last week. We will be watching with some apprehension as the overall election results across the state were not particularly favorable for public education.

Protect Kansas Public Schools

This legislative session it will be important for SMSD patrons to:

- Become informed on the issues impacting public education
- Inform others about public education issues — talk to your friends
- Engage in the legislative process by taking action when needed

Watch for SMAC PTA Legislative Updates and Action Alerts. We try to make it easy for you to use your voice in support of kids in public schools. Follow SMAC PTA on [Facebook](#) and on [Instagram](#).

Concerns for the 2025 legislative session

Below are some of the issues we believe could have a negative impact on our public schools that serve 90% of Kansas kids:

- Expansion of voucher programs
- Unsustainable tax policy
- Continued underfunding of Special Education (SPED)
- Changes to the school finance formula
- State Board of Education election results

Expansion of Voucher Programs

Vouchers (aka School Choice, Educational Freedom, Education Savings Accounts, Tax Credit Scholarships, and so on) divert public tax dollars to private schools that lack public oversight and are allowed to discriminate in their admissions. Voucher programs reduce the resources available to our public schools that accept and educate all children.

Other states that have implemented large-scale voucher programs are finding the [majority of participants have never attended a public school](#), resulting in new expenses for the state and taxpayers who are now funding multiple education systems—public and private.

We don't know exactly what form a newly proposed voucher program might take, but in Kansas where special education is currently underfunded and where it has taken [multiple court cases](#) to force the legislature to constitutionally fund public education, shifting scarce resources to private schools could harm the majority of Kansas kids.

Unsustainable Tax Policy

When evaluating proposed changes to state tax policy, it's important to consider how much revenue will be lost, who the tax cuts will benefit, and whether the reduction in state general funds will be sustainable without making cuts to important state services like public education.

For example, under the Brownback tax experiment that followed the 2008 recession, [school funding was significantly reduced](#). Over a four-year period, SMSD had to cut [\\$25 million from the budget](#) by:

- Increasing class sizes
- Closing three schools
- Removing specials
- Cutting hundreds of staff positions—teachers, coaches, librarians, custodians, nurses, and social workers

Tax cuts can have long lasting effects. It took more than a decade (and a court case) for general education funding levels to return to 2009 levels, adjusted for inflation. It wasn't until the 2023-2024 school year that the full phase-in of those restored general education funds was complete.

Last year, after a number of unsustainable tax cut proposals were put forth, a [bipartisan majority passed a set of fiscally responsible tax cuts](#) benefiting all Kansans. This year, leadership seems intent on more tax cuts, including [reducing the corporate tax rate to zero](#).

Continued Underfunding of Special Education

Although general education funds have been fully restored as required under the Gannon court case, special education (SPED) has been underfunded since 2011. When Gannon was filed, special education was fully funded at the mandated 92% of excess costs, thus SPED was not included in the lawsuit.

The growing shortfall in SPED funding has been eroding the restoration of general education funds as districts must move money out of their operating budgets to cover mandated SPED services. Those operating funds could otherwise be used to enhance the education of all kids.

Despite plans put forth last year by the State Board of Education, a Special Education Task Force, and the Governor to phase-in the full funding of SPED over a five-year period, leadership only agreed to an amount equal to one year of the phase in. Considering the November election results and the disbanding of the Special Education Task Force, it is unclear whether an adequate increase in SPED funding will be approved this year.

Changes to the School Finance Formula

After the [Kansas Supreme Court ruled in 2017 \(Gannon\) that Kansas schools were unconstitutionally funded](#), the legislature ultimately came up with the current school finance formula that the courts found to be constitutionally adequate and equitable. However, that school finance formula is set to expire in 2027.

An Education Funding Task Force has been established that includes a number of legislators with anti-public education voting records, creating a concern that significant changes to the formula could be proposed versus simply renewing the formula that has been adjudicated by the courts.

State Board of Education Election Results

The November election resulted in an ideological shift on the State Board of Education towards a majority that embraces certain anti-public education policies, leading to the possibility that we could see some of the following from our State Board of Education:

- Support for vouchers
- Lack of support for fully funding special education
- Refusal of federal education funds
- Introducing religion in public schools

These concerns are amplified as we are seeing some of the above happening in other states across the country.

In Summary — Support Kansas kids by being informed and engaged

SMAC PTA will be watching both the state legislature and the State Board of Education to help SMSD patrons stay informed and engaged while following the legislative priorities of both the [Kansas PTA](#) and [SMSD](#).

We need Kansans to use their voices to help maintain our strong public schools that support our kids and communities. We must let our elected officials know that Kansans are paying attention.