



School choice, not school funding, will fix education system

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If you've been in Kansas very long, you have probably noticed one of the most heated topics in the state legislature is education funding. The controversy stems from a sentence in [the Kansas Constitution](#) stating that “the legislature shall make suitable provision for finance of the educational interests of the state.”

While this sounds good in theory, it has led to decades of education funding battles between the legislature and the supreme court, with funding reform and court decisions [going back decades](#). The legislature has been going through the cycle of passing education funding bills only to have them struck down by the supreme court saying they aren't good enough. This was the case last year when the [court ruled a funding bill](#) wasn't adequate, yet they didn't provide a specific dollar amount that would be acceptable. It seems that many people, including our supreme court, think the solution to this education dilemma is to throw more money at our schools in an effort to improve them.

This has led to educational gridlock in Kansas, where we want to provide high-quality education but still keep our spending under control. Unfortunately, the idea of solving all the problems by increasing funding doesn't actually work. If we want to improve our schools without raising taxes or going into debt, then we should take a serious look at school choice and allow competition between schools to increase quality while lowering costs.

University student leaders along with Student Advisory Committee will submit a motion for the Kansas Supreme Court to reconsider excluding higher education from the school funding debate.

School funding isn't the determining factor in students' academic success. [In data from the U.S. Department of Education](#), compiled by the Cato Institute, a free-market think tank, it can be seen that since 1970, the national average funding for K-12 schools has nearly tripled in inflation-adjusted cost. Over this same period, the outcomes in reading, math and science have stayed virtually unchanged. Furthermore, this standard seems to hold true even in extreme cases. According to NPR, the state of New Jersey [dramatically increased funding in many of its poorest](#)

schools in the 1990s, even to the point where some of them had more money than the previously wealthiest districts. Today, many of those schools are still spending 2.5 times the national average, yet their outcomes have not significantly changed.

For example, the Camden, New Jersey, school district spends around \$23,000 per student per year, yet roughly a third of their seniors do not graduate high school within four years, and 90 percent are not meeting standards of proficiency in mathematics or reading. This all shows that funding is not the issue in our nation's public schools. Schools really can do more with less, we just need to give them the tools and incentive to do so.

One way this can happen is through policy known as school choice. The basic idea is that in the current system, most students are locked into attending their local public school. They may have a private school near them, but it is often too expensive for lower- and middle-class parents to send their kids to. In this system, public schools are guaranteed a monopoly of the students in their district and parents who lack the resources to relocate are forced to keep their student in the local school, regardless of the school's quality. School choice opens up the system by providing public funding that follows each student.

Parents are allowed to pick from all schools near them and determine which school their child should attend. If a school in one part of town is doing poorly, students can be enrolled in the better one nearby. The key facet is that the public funding dollars follow the student. This introduces an aspect of competition to the school system in which schools that teach better naturally attract more students, and schools that are failing due to bad teachers or administration are forced to adapt and change for the better or risk losing their funding.

This would help everyone, as kids who move to better schools will see immediate benefits, and those who remain in their original schools will see efforts made to retain students by improving aspects of their educational system. School choice puts the accountability both on the school and the parents. Schools are incentivized to improve, and parents are encouraged to keep up with how the schools are performing and take action when needed.

This is preferable because students should have the right to attend a quality school. In an extreme example, we can look at the William Penn School District near Philadelphia. According to NPR, one of the district's schools was not insulated, and some students would run to class in an attempt to secure a “good blanket” provided by the teacher. If those students had the option of attending a nearby school instead, they would have had better learning outcomes.

As long as we are providing public schooling, we should strive to make it as high quality as possible. However, the best way of doing this isn't to increase funding of our school system. Increased funding does nothing but burden the tax payer, while not significantly affecting academic outcomes. If we truly want to supply our youth with a valuable education at an affordable cost, we should increase school choice and empower parents, and students, with better and more accountable schools.