

Funding a Quality Public Education

Full Funding of the Excess Costs of Special Education: Congress has long promised to fund special education and never has. Likewise, the Legislature has promised to reimburse 92% of the excess costs of special education to local school districts. While there are many reasons explaining why the state has struggled to meet the 92%, **KNEA supports** every effort must be made to meet that obligation.

Continuing Commitment to Fulfilling the Gannon Promise: The Legislature has adopted a school finance plan that has been accepted by the Kansas Supreme Court as meeting the challenge of the Gannon school finance lawsuit. The plan is a phased in program and the Court still holds jurisdiction in the event that the Legislature were to reverse course. **KNEA supports** the full implementation of the school finance plan passed in response to the Gannon lawsuit and accepted by the Court.

Opposition to Vouchers/Tuition Tax Credits: **KNEA opposes** any effort to direct state funds to private schools, private religious schools, or non-accredited private schools.

Additional Funding for Technology and Professional Development: The COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to control the spread of the virus exposed challenges to the educational community. Universal access to high-speed broadband connectivity and the availability of devices both were problems as schools moved to online instruction. Additionally, educators were challenged by the shift to online learning - they were prepared for face-to-face instruction, not remote learning. We believe that the pandemic has created a new normal for life and learning. In order to be prepared for future challenges, **KNEA supports** state efforts to expand high-speed broadband connectivity across the state. **KNEA further supports** funding specifically provide students with devices that can be used for remote learning. **KNEA also supports** funding for professional development for educators on managing technology and remote learning.

KPERS: The KPERS defined benefit retirement system is a critical part of any effort to recruit and retain quality educators. **KNEA supports** efforts to ensure that the employer contributions to KPERS - paid by the state - are fully funded to meet actuarial demands. **KNEA opposes** any effort to dismantle the defined benefit system in favor of a defined contribution system.

Higher Education Funding: Funding for post-secondary education in Kansas has faced cuts and freezes for too long. Post-secondary institutions have been forced to raise tuition and fees in order to maintain programs. The result has been to price potential students out of college and to saddle others with crippling debt. Both will be drains on the Kansas economy. **KNEA supports** efforts to increase funding for post-secondary education in an effort to make opportunities accessible to more and affordable for all.

The Educator Voice

Collective Bargaining: The Professional Negotiations Act (PNA) ensures that teachers, through a locally chosen representative organization, have the ability to shape decisions on compensation, hours and amounts of work, and working conditions. **KNEA supports** the PNA and seeks support for an effort to strengthen it with the addition of a binding decision following impasse and mediation. **KNEA supports** the establishment of collective bargaining rights for Education Support Professionals. **KNEA further supports** returning retired employees- who have returned to work- to the collective bargaining agreement.

Due Process: In 2014, the Kansas Legislature stripped teachers of due process protections. While teachers still have the opportunity to challenge terminations in court, the fact that school boards do not list reasons for non-renewal makes it essentially impossible to challenge a district decision as arbitrary and capricious. **KNEA supports** the restoration of due process rights as they existed prior to 2014. **KNEA further supports** a mandate that school districts must list the specific reason for non-renewal on any notice.

School Safety: For students to learn and teachers to teach, it is imperative that the learning environment be safe in all ways. **KNEA supports** efforts to keep schools clean and sanitary, to keep them safe from the possibility of armed intruders, and to ensure that negative behaviors including bullying and abuse are effectively dealt with. **KNEA supports** funding for school nurse and custodial staffing as well as the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and disinfectants. **KNEA also supports** programs to prevent bullying, watching for and reporting suspected abuse, and support for mental health programs. **KNEA further supports** policies that establish schools as weapon-free zones and grant local school districts the ability to control access to buildings.

Educator Licensure: To ensure excellence in instruction, Kansas must demand that all educators are well-trained and meet high standards for licensure. **KNEA supports** pre-service training that includes rigorous subject matter preparation as well as extensive pedagogical preparation. Teacher training must also include extensive field experiences. **KNEA further supports** new teacher induction and mentoring programs and continuing education through teacher-determined and teacher-led professional development experiences. **KNEA opposes** shortcuts to licensure that ignore completion of an accredited teacher preparation program.

Join KPAC Now!
www.knea.org | www.underthedomeks.org



Kansas National Education Association

Legislative Agenda 2021-2022



Kansas NEA Legislative Agenda 2021 - 2022 Sessions

The KNEA Legislative Agenda is developed by examining current issues facing the state of Kansas and, in particular, public schools in Kansas. The Legislative Agenda is drafted by the KNEA Lobby Team and then reviewed and amended by the members of the Kansas Political Action Committee (KPAC). KPAC sends their recommended Legislative Agenda to the KNEA Board of Directors that reviews, amends, and adopts the final document.

Positions taken by KNEA are congruent with the core values of the association and with resolutions adopted by the membership at the annual KNEA Representative Assembly.

While the position statements in this document are intended to strengthen the quality of life in Kansas and our public schools, our resolutions are not limited to these statements. We will and must take positions when policies are proposed that support or oppose our resolutions.

Kansas NEA members also believe that quality of life issues are important to both economic development and the well-being of Kansas citizens. We support policies that provide for quality infrastructure including our roads and highways; we support a social service safety net that provides for our seniors, those with disabilities, and those in need of a helping hand.

While our resolutions are too numerous to review within this document, our core values are listed below.

Equal Opportunity: We believe public education is the gateway to opportunity. All students have the human and civil right to a quality public education that develops their potential, independence, and character.

A Just Society: We believe public education is vital to building respect for the worth, dignity, and equality of every individual in our diverse society.

Democracy: We believe public education is the cornerstone of our republic. Public education provides individuals with the skills to be involved, informed, and engaged in our representative democracy.

Professionalism: We believe that the expertise and judgment of education professionals are critical to student success. We maintain the highest professional standards and we expect the status, compensation, and respect due all professionals.

Partnership: We believe partnerships with parents, families, communities and other stakeholders are essential to quality public education and student success.

Collective Action: We believe individuals are strengthened when they work together for the common good. As education professionals, we improve both our professional status and the quality of public education when we unite and advocate collectively.

Support and Respect for all Kansans

Medicaid Expansion: Kansas is one of a small minority of states that has not expanded Medicaid. As a result some 150,000 working poor Kansans have no access to health care. Never has this been more troubling than in the COVID-19 pandemic. Lack of health insurance puts low-income families at greater risk of homelessness and being forced to choose between medical care and rent or food for a family. Children cannot learn under such stress. Medicaid expansion is critical to supporting families. **KNEA supports** KanCare (Medicaid) expansion under the Affordable Care Act.

Post-Secondary Scholarship Aid/Student Loan Forgiveness: The cost of post-secondary education has grown tremendously and been exacerbated by reductions in state funding. Too many graduate with staggering debt and many others are simply priced out of higher education. Higher education is positively correlated to higher earnings and economic benefits to the state. **KNEA supports** higher state investment in higher education to control tuition costs and the funding of post-secondary scholarship programs that allow low-income Kansans to take advantage of post-secondary educational opportunities. **KNEA also supports** the establishment of student loan forgiveness programs for high need areas including teaching.

Foster Care: The Foster Care system in Kansas was challenged due to budget cuts and staffing reductions at the Department for Children and Families (DCF) prior to 2017. It has not yet fully recovered. **KNEA supports** funding for the DCF to hire additional staff to monitor and support children in the Foster Care system. **KNEA also supports** continuation of the Foster Child Report Card that is intended to monitor and track the educational attainment of children in the system.

Mental Health Parity: Mental health issues are critical challenges to learning and success in all aspects of life. While federal law requires mental health parity in insurance plans, true parity remains elusive. As we face increasing mental health challenges including addiction, substance abuse, and suicide, it is imperative that true parity be secured. **KNEA supports** efforts to mandate true mental health parity in insurance plans. **KNEA also supports** mental health support programs in public schools.

Racial and Social Justice: Events in the summer of 2020 have brought the issue of systemic racism front and center in national thinking. The scourge of racism continues to challenge educational achievement and quality of life for persons of color. Further, the marginalization of LGBTQ individuals and misogynistic treatment of women limits their success. **KNEA supports** equal rights and equity of opportunity to all persons regardless of race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or ethnicity. **KNEA supports programs** that celebrate diversity and honor the achievements of all Kansans.

Voting Rights: A strong representative democracy can only be achieved when every eligible citizen has easy access to voting. **KNEA supports** advance voting and vote-by-mail provisions that are open to all citizens. **KNEA further supports** efforts to open polling locations in all communities that allow easy access for all to the polls. **KNEA opposes** all efforts to suppress voter registration and access to the polls.

Support and Respect for all Kansans

Social Service Safety Net: There is a strong correlation between poverty and lack of achievement in education. **KNEA supports** efforts to combat the effects of poverty including school breakfast and lunch programs, nutrition programs including SNAP and WIC, unemployment benefits, workers compensation benefits, support programs for those with physical and/or development disabilities, and an increase in the minimum wage that will ensure no full time worker lives in poverty. **KNEA opposes** artificial tests that are intended to deny or limit access to benefits.

Tobacco and Tobacco Products: The use of tobacco and tobacco products including vaping products pose serious health risks both through use of such products and through second-hand exposure. **KNEA supports** policies that will discourage and reduce the use of these products and in particular that will restrict access to these products by young people. **KNEA supports** an increase in the age for purchase or possession of tobacco and vaping products to 21 years. **KNEA further supports** tobacco and vaping free schools.

Fiscal Responsibility and Stability

Progressive Tax Policies: Tax policy must be fair and transparent to individuals and businesses. **KNEA supports** a progressive tax system that ensures that taxation as a percentage of income does not fall more heavily on low income individuals. **KNEA further supports** a state tax system that is balanced across income, property, and sales taxes. Consideration of changes to tax policy should consider the impact of the change on low income Kansans and on the impact to the state budget.

Sales Tax Reform: Kansas has the second highest food sales tax in the nation, a haphazard system of granting sales tax exemptions, and does not impose a sales tax on services. **KNEA supports** changes to the food sales tax either by restoring a refundable tax credit targeted to low income individuals or lowering the rate overall. **KNEA supports** the establishment of standards under which sales tax exemptions would be granted and the subsequent repeal of those that don't meet those standards.

Transparency in Economic Development and Tax Credit Programs: While tax incentives for economic development can be beneficial, they are only helpful when they are transparent and evaluated for success. **KNEA supports** regular review of all corporate and business tax incentives with the intent of ensuring a return on investment. **KNEA further supports** claw back provisions that will restore revenue to the budget when job goals are not met. **KNEA also supports** reporting of tax incentives as expenditures from the state budget.