



A nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of business leaders committed to improving education in Kansas and Missouri.

2026 Kansas Legislative Session Review

EDUCATION POLICY WINS

EVERY. STUDENT. PREPARED

About This Report

This report highlights key education policy wins from the 2026 Kansas Legislative Session, grounded in Aligned's core principles: innovation, efficiency, transparency, accountability, and a student-first approach.

We evaluate policy through the lens of what best supports student outcomes, strengthens the education-to-workforce pipeline, and ensures systems are working effectively for both students and employers. The policies included in this report reflect those priorities.

This is not a comprehensive list of all education legislation passed during the session. Instead, it focuses specifically on the bills Aligned prioritized, tracked, and supported throughout the legislative process.

These represent the policies we believe will have the *greatest impact on improving student success* and strengthening Kansas' long-term workforce and economic future.



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Bell-to-Bell Cell Phone Policy ([HB 2299](#))

Category: School Environment / Student Focus

Overview

Kansas [joined more than 37 other states](#) to reduce distractions in the classroom by limiting student use of personal electronic devices during the school day. This effort was a priority for both the Legislature and the Governor, who worked to pass a cell phone policy for K–12 schools. The law applies to devices such as cell phones, smartwatches, earbuds, and similar technology, and requires school districts to adopt and enforce policies that ensure devices are turned off and stored during instructional time.

This policy moved through the legislative process with several revisions and ongoing debate, particularly around whether and how or if it should apply beyond public schools. The intent is simple: when students are less distracted, they are more present in the classroom. This policy is designed to support stronger focus, better engagement, and more meaningful interaction between students and teachers. Schools may allow exceptions for medical needs, safety situations, or specific educational purposes. Kansas is now being [recognized nationally for this approach, earning an A rating](#) on a national report card for its bell-to-bell cell phone policy.

Why it Matters: Students receive over 200 notifications per day on average, creating constant interruptions that make sustained focus in the classroom nearly impossible. ([Common Sense Media, Constant Companion Report](#)).

What's Changing

1. Devices must be turned off and stored during the school day
2. School districts must adopt and enforce clear device policies
3. Exceptions are allowed for health, safety, or approved instructional use
4. Schools must ensure students have appropriate ways to communicate with families when needed

What This Means for Students

Students will spend more of the school day focused on learning instead of being pulled away by notifications, social media, or texting. This is [expected](#) to improve attention, increase participation, and create a more consistent learning environment across classrooms. It also supports stronger peer interaction and classroom culture by encouraging students to be more engaged in the moment.





At-Risk Student Accountability and Reporting ([HB 2482](#))

Category: Accountability / Student Outcomes

Overview

Kansas is strengthening how the state tracks and reports student performance, with a clearer focus on outcomes for all students, including those [considered at-risk](#). This law requires the state to produce [more consistent and transparent reports](#) on student achievement over time, including trends in learning gains and learning loss.

It also ensures that academic performance data is easier to understand by standardizing how results are reported and by including comparisons across years, student groups, and different measures of success. In addition, the state will review and report on the [types of interventions](#) schools are using and how effective those efforts are in improving student outcomes. The intent is to move beyond one-time snapshots of performance and instead provide a clearer, long-term view of how students are progressing.

Why it Matters: 60% of Kansas students are performing below grade level across core subjects ([Kansas State Department of Education](#)).

What's Changing

1. The state will publish clearer and more consistent reports on student achievement
2. Data will show *trends over time*, including learning gains and learning loss
3. Reporting will include breakdowns by student groups
4. Schools and the state must review and report on the effectiveness of academic interventions
5. Greater focus on long-term student outcomes, not just single-year performance

What This Means for Students

Students, especially those who need additional support, will benefit from a stronger focus on whether interventions are actually helping them improve. Schools and policymakers will have better information to identify where students are falling behind and what strategies are working to help them catch up. Over time, this should lead to more targeted support, fewer students slipping through the cracks, and a clearer understanding of what drives academic success.





Federal Funds Transparency Requirement ([HB 2618](#))

Category: Accountability / Transparency

Overview

Kansas is increasing transparency around how federal education dollars are used by requiring clearer reporting on how those funds are spent. School districts [receive significant federal funding](#) each year support students, especially those with additional needs. This law ensures that information about those funds is more accessible, consistent, and understandable to policymakers and the public.

The goal is to provide a clearer picture of *where* [federal dollars](#) are going and *how* they are supporting student outcomes. By improving reporting, the state can better evaluate what is working, identify gaps, and make more informed decisions moving forward.

Why it Matters: Kansas schools receive over \$1.14 billion in federal education funding annually, yet there has historically been limited visibility into how those dollars impact student outcomes ([U.S Census Data](#)).

What's Changing

1. School districts must provide clearer reporting on how federal education funds are used
2. Stronger ability to evaluate the effectiveness of federally funded programs
3. Increased transparency for policymakers and the public
4. Better alignment between funding decisions and student outcomes

What This Means for Students

When funding is more transparent, it becomes easier to ensure resources are reaching the students who need them most. This can lead to greater insight and accountability for federal funding in Kansas schools. Over time, clearer data on spending can help drive improvements in how schools invest in student success, especially for students who rely on additional supports.





Federal Scholarship Tax Credit Opt-In ([SB 361](#))

Category: School Choice / Access

Overview

Kansas is opting into a [new federal tax credit](#) that encourages individuals to donate to scholarship granting organizations. These organizations provide scholarships to students, helping them access educational options that may not otherwise be financially possible. The law allows taxpayers to claim up to \$1,700 in dollar-for-dollar federal tax credits for contributions to nonprofit Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs).

By [participating](#) in this federal program, Kansas makes it easier for scholarship organizations to attract private donations. The law also ensures that the state follows federal guidelines without adding additional regulations, which helps streamline the process and maximize participation.

[Kansas has already had a similar program](#) in place at the *state level* since 2014, [supporting scholarships for eligible students](#). This new federal option builds upon that foundation by expanding the opportunity for additional private investment in scholarships. The goal is to expand access to educational opportunities by increasing the amount of scholarship funding available to students and families.

Why it Matters: This policy expands opportunities for students by increasing access to scholarships that help families choose the learning environment that best fits their needs.

What's Changing

1. Kansas is participating in a new federal tax credit program for scholarship donations
2. Increased incentives for individuals to contribute to SGOs
3. Potential growth in available scholarship funding for students
4. State implementation will follow federal rules without adding additional barriers

What This Means for Students

More students may have access to scholarships that help cover the cost of attending a school that best fits their needs, as well as access to tutoring and other support services. This can open additional options for families and reduce financial barriers that limit choice. For students who benefit from these scholarships, it can mean access to different learning environments, more flexibility, and opportunities that better align with their goals.





Foster Care School Choice and Record Transfer ([HB 2320](#))

Category: School Choice / Access

Overview

HB 2320 strengthens educational stability for children in the custody of the Kansas Department for Children and Families by helping ensure that school does not become another disruption when a foster care placement changes. The bill requires DCF to notify affected school districts within two business days when a child's placement changes across district lines or across a school boundary within the same district. Once notified, the school holding the student's records must transfer them as soon as possible, but no later than two business days after receiving notice. The bill also makes clear that schools cannot deny or delay enrollment simply because records have not yet arrived. HB 2320 also gives students in DCF custody more flexibility by allowing them to attend any Kansas school district or remain enrolled in their school of origin when appropriate. This helps students maintain relationships with teachers, peers, and support services during an already unstable time.

Why it Matters: So far in 2026, [Kansas has an average of 5,529 children](#) in out-of-home placement each month, showing why school stability and timely record transfers are critical for students in foster care.

What's Changing

DCF must notify affected school districts within two business days when a child's placement changes. School records must be transferred within two business days after the district receives notice. Schools cannot deny or delay enrollment because records have not yet arrived. Children in DCF custody may attend any school district in Kansas. Foster care students may remain enrolled in and continue attending their school of origin. DCF and school districts must coordinate transportation when remaining in the school of origin is determined to be in the child's best interest.

What This Means for Students

Students in foster care will have greater stability during placement changes. Instead of being forced into a new school immediately or waiting on paperwork before enrolling, students can stay connected to their school of origin or enroll more quickly in a new school when needed. This helps reduce learning loss, maintain important relationships, and ensure students continue receiving academic and support services without unnecessary delays.





Education Pathways Bundle ([HB 2485](#))

Category: *Workforce / Postsecondary Pathways / Literacy*

Overview

Kansas advanced a comprehensive set of policies aimed at strengthening the full education-to-workforce pipeline. This bundle brings together efforts across early literacy, high school career readiness, postsecondary affordability, and workforce alignment.

Specifically, this package addresses how students learn to read in the early grades, how they build real-world skills and earn credentials in high school, and how they access affordable education and training after graduation. It also focuses on aligning K–12 education, higher education, and reflects a broader focus workforce needs so students are better prepared for life after high school. Together, these policies move Kansas toward a more connected system where students are supported at every stage. From building strong literacy foundations to creating clearer, more affordable pathways into careers, the goal is to ensure every student has a realistic, achievable next step.

Topics included in the Bill:

1. **Concurrent Enrollment:** Sets requirements for agreements between school districts and postsecondary institutions when college courses are taught in high schools.
2. **Workforce Training:** Creates a process for approving short-term workforce training programs for federal Workforce Pell Grant eligibility.
3. **Career Readiness:** Continues access to ACT, Pre-ACT, and ACT WorkKeys assessments and allows certain career readiness credentials to count toward technical degree credit.
4. **Early Literacy:** Expands the Every Child Can Read Act and strengthens requirements around literacy screening, parent communication, intervention, and reporting.
5. **Kansas Blueprint for Literacy:** Updates science of reading requirements, educator training expectations, reading specialist requirements, and individual literacy plans for high-risk K-3 students.
6. **Teacher Preparation:** Requires stronger literacy coursework, practicums, assessments, and accountability for educator preparation programs.
7. **Kansas Promise Scholarship:** Limits scholarship use for remedial coursework, including remedial hours within corequisite courses.
8. **State Financial Aid:** Gives the State Board of Regents authority to negotiate repayment obligations and restricts additional aid for students with unresolved repayment obligations.



Aligned Priority Policies Within the Bundle



Workforce Pell Expansion

Category: Workforce / Postsecondary Pathways

Overview

[Kansas](#) is expanding access to short-term training programs by aligning with [federal Workforce Pell efforts](#), which allow Pell Grants to be used for high-quality, short-term credential programs. These programs are typically tied to in-demand industries such as healthcare, manufacturing, and skilled trades, and can be completed in a matter of weeks or months rather than years.

Kansas has [already](#) been investing in short-term training through its community and technical colleges, building out programs designed to meet workforce needs. However, many of these programs have not historically been eligible for federal financial aid. Expanding Pell eligibility helps scale these efforts by bringing additional federal funding into the system, lowering costs for students, and making these pathways more accessible. At the same time, it strengthens the connection between education and the workforce by prioritizing programs that lead directly to employment, helping more students quickly gain the skills needed to enter or advance in high-demand careers.

Why it Matters: Nearly 60% of jobs in Kansas require education or training beyond high school, but **not necessarily a four-year degree**, highlighting the need for short-term, workforce-aligned pathways ([Kansas Department of Labor](#)).

What's Changing

1. Expanded access to Pell Grant funding for short-term, high-quality training programs
2. More opportunities to earn industry-recognized credentials quickly
3. Stronger alignment between education programs and workforce needs
4. Increased access to affordable pathways into high-demand careers

What This Means for Students

[Students](#) will have more affordable options to gain job-ready skills in a shorter amount of time. This is especially valuable for students who need to enter the workforce quickly or are looking to upskill without pursuing a traditional two- or four-year degree. It also creates more flexibility for adult learners and nontraditional students who may be balancing work, family, and education.





Kansas Promise Scholarship

Category: Postsecondary / Workforce Pathways

Overview

Kansas updated the [Promise Scholarship program](#) to better focus funding on courses that directly lead to a degree or credential. The bill clarifies that scholarship dollars cannot be used for [remedial coursework](#) taken alongside college-level classes.

This change is intended to ensure the program supports meaningful progress toward completion and keeps the focus on helping students move efficiently through their education and into the workforce.

Why it Matters: In Kansas, only about 36% of adults hold a bachelor's degree or higher, making career-aligned credential pathways critical to meeting workforce needs ([U.S. Census Bureau](#)).

What's Changing

1. Scholarship funds cannot be used for remedial coursework within corequisite classes
2. Greater focus on credit-bearing courses that lead to completion
3. Improved efficiency in how scholarship dollars are used

What This Means for Students

Students using the Promise Scholarship will see funding directed toward courses that count toward their degree or credential. This helps students stay on track, make faster progress, and use their scholarship more effectively.





ACT WorkKeys Expansion

Category: Workforce / Career Readiness

Overview

Kansas continues its investment in [ACT WorkKeys](#), ensuring students have access to a statewide career readiness assessment that measures foundational workplace skills. Through this program, students can earn a [National Career Readiness Certificate](#) that is recognized by employers. This policy supports stronger connections between education and workforce needs by giving students a way to demonstrate job readiness before graduation.

Why it Matters: In Kansas, **only about 46% of high school graduates enroll in a four-year college immediately after graduation**, meaning the majority of students need strong, alternative pathways into the workforce or technical training ([Kansas Board of Regents, 2025 Enrollment Report](#)).

What's Changing

1. Continued statewide access to ACT WorkKeys
2. Ongoing opportunity to earn a National Career Readiness Certificate
3. Stronger connection between student skills and employer expectations

What This Means for Students

Students have the opportunity to earn a credential that signals to employers they are prepared for the workforce. This can strengthen job prospects, especially for students entering the workforce directly after high school or pursuing technical training.





Kansas Blueprint for Literacy Implementation

Category: Early Literacy / K–12 Education

Overview

Kansas is advancing the implementation of the [Blueprint for Literacy](#) to strengthen how students learn to read in the early grades through clearer requirements and statewide alignment. The policy ([SB517](#)) requires the use of evidence-based reading instruction grounded in the science of reading, strengthens teacher preparation and training, and establishes a more structured system of support and accountability for literacy outcomes. It also sets measurable statewide goals for student proficiency and educator training, while requiring schools to implement consistent screening, intervention, and reporting practices.

The goal is to ensure more students are reading at grade level by the end of third grade, a critical milestone for long-term academic success.

Why it Matters: Only 28% of Kansas 4th graders are proficient in reading, meaning more than 7 in 10 students are not on track. ([NAEP, 2024](#))

What's Changing

1. Required use of science of reading and prohibition of discredited instructional methods
2. Statewide literacy goals tied to student outcomes and teacher training benchmarks
3. Individual literacy plans and at least 90 minutes per week of targeted intervention for K–3 students who are behind
4. Requirement for reading specialists in elementary schools
5. Expanded teacher training, including literacy practicums and ongoing professional learning
6. Stronger accountability through annual reporting, data tracking, and legislative oversight
7. Development of a comprehensive statewide literacy implementation plan

What This Means for Students

Students will receive more consistent, research-based reading instruction aligned across classrooms, schools, and teacher preparation programs. Students who fall behind will be identified earlier through statewide screening and supported through individualized literacy plans, targeted interventions, and additional instructional time. This approach is designed to ensure students build a strong reading foundation that supports success across all subjects.





Childcare Tax Credit ([SB 82](#))

Overview

Kansas is expanding tax incentives to increase access to child care by significantly increasing the value of [employer-based tax credits](#) and broadening how they can be used. The policy allows employers and community partners to receive up to 75% of eligible child care expenses, with higher incentives tied to supporting providers serving subsidized families.

Credits can now be used for a wider range of activities, including starting or expanding child care programs, supporting existing providers, building or operating facilities, and helping employees access care. The policy raises annual credit caps and, beginning in tax year 2027, allows unused credits to be carried forward for up to three years. The goal is to increase child care capacity, strengthen the provider workforce, and reduce barriers for working families.

Why it Matters: Kansas loses an estimated \$2.2–\$3.3 billion annually due to limited child care access. ([Bipartisan Policy Center](#))

What's Changing

1. Up to 75% tax credit for eligible child care investments
2. Expanded uses (operations, facilities, employee support)
3. Higher incentives for supporting subsidized families
4. Increased annual cap (up to \$100,000)
5. Excess credit may be carried over for up to three years to offset tax liability

What This Means for Families & Students

Families may see more available child care options as employers and providers expand services. For working parents, this can help reduce one of the biggest barriers to employment by improving access and affordability.



Looking Ahead

The 2026 Kansas Legislative Session advanced several important policies aimed at strengthening education, improving transparency, and better connecting students to future opportunities.

Together, these policy wins reflect a continued focus on what matters most: making sure students are prepared for success in school, work, and life. From early literacy and classroom focus to workforce credentials, postsecondary affordability, accountability, and child care access, each policy included in this report plays a role in building a stronger education-to-workforce pipeline for Kansas.

Aligned will continue to monitor implementation, share updates with partners, and work alongside policymakers, educators, business leaders, and community stakeholders to ensure these changes lead to meaningful outcomes for students and families.

As Kansas moves from policy passage to implementation, the work ahead will require continued collaboration, clear data, and a shared commitment to student success.

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