

Dear Madam Chair and members of the committee:

I am Lara Bors, and today I am speaking in several different capacities: as a representative of the Garden City Public Schools Unified School District No. 457 Board of Education, as a small business owner, as a spouse of a former sixth-grade teacher, and as a mother of two elementary-age sons.

There are many provisions of the bill with which I disagree, but my testimony today will focus on college and career standards in math and English Language Arts.

As a member of the USD 457 Board of Education, but more importantly as a parent, I believe that the Kansas College and Career Ready Standards are good for students in Garden City. The world in which my children are growing up expects that they are able to analyze information to make informed decisions, work collaboratively with others, and exhibit the ability to be innovative and creative in their ability to solve problems. The former education standards are not adequate to meet the higher expectations demanded by an ever-changing society. In contrast, the explicit aim of the new standards is to prepare students for success in college and careers.

Preparing students for a successful future means that our schools need to have higher expectations for all students and provide the support for students to meet those higher expectations. The Kansas College and Career Ready Standards will do just that. They include more opportunities for students to be self-directed and learn to take a position while justifying their answers. Unlike the former standards, there is a significant focus on writing, which leads to better problem-solving and deeper thinking.

Another benefit of College and Career Ready Standards is the change in focus from all literature to a balance between literature and informational texts. This will help those students who find it difficult to read classic literature and relate to it, but would thrive through reading informational texts. It does not take literature out of the classroom but gives teachers another tool.

As I mentioned, I have two elementary-age sons. One is in third grade, and one is in fourth grade. The third-grader has known nothing but the College and Career Ready Standards. The fourth-grader began last year. At the beginning of last school year, there was a definite difference between the academic vocabulary of my third-grader and my fourth-grader. My third-grader, in even general conversation, was using the sentence stems that he had been taught to prove his points at home. My fourth-grader caught up quickly, but it was incredible to see the difference between the two standards that they had grown up in.

I have also been impressed with the math standards. As I joke to my colleagues, there is a reason I went to law school – math. I have been able to see my fourth-grader excel under the College and Career Ready Standards and USD 457's curriculum. While my third-grader at times has issues, I have found myself able to help him with his homework, despite my own challenges with math. I have been able to use our curriculum and the various methods that he is being taught to assist him in finding the correct solution. Not being limited to only one "right" way of solving the problem has helped both of my sons do well under the College and Career Ready standards. I understand that some parents have concerns with these standards or the curriculum being implemented in their local school districts; however, as I have seen our current curriculum implemented over the last year and a half, the teachers and students have begun to thrive. With experience of a new curriculum comes a level of comfort that all will need to make these standards and their curriculum effective for their own school district.

As a school board member, I am also concerned with the teachers in our district. Not only are the standards good for students, they are also good for teachers. The standards allow for Garden City to

determine locally what is taught and how the curriculum is delivered. In the past, teachers have been forced to cover content with little depth in order to fit everything in that appeared on the assessments. By contrast, the new standards give educators more time to focus on depth of understanding. As a result, they allow local districts to develop curricula to foster deeper thinking and metacognition.

The district conducts Board-faculty meetings at each of our schools throughout the year. During these meetings, up to three Board members have an opportunity to hear directly from our more than 600 teachers. At each one that I have attended or have received feedback from, there has been little to no criticism of the College and Career Ready Standards by our teachers; in fact, there has been virtually universal support for these standards. If anything, there appears to be a fear from our teachers of reverting to the former manner in which they educated. At one meeting, one of our faculty members said that he was excited that instead of teaching 26 miles wide and an inch deep, he could teach a foot wide and six feet deep. At a second meeting, I asked the faculty if we were doing the right thing implementing College and Career Ready Standards, one elementary teacher said, "If we didn't think this was the right thing for our kids, we'd be kicking in your door."

As a small business owner, I need employees who can think critically, read at a high level, and be able to effectively communicate orally and in writing with others. Unfortunately, under the former standards, it has been difficult to find individuals who have all of those abilities. This is an issue throughout the community.

Creating standards has always been a collaborative process. The former standards were the result of input from teachers from across the state. Critics have said that the new standards were not developed with input from Kansas or educators. I know this to be untrue. Kansas educators had input on this; among the many was the Director of Elementary Education in Garden City, who served on the state level committee providing feedback on the development of the standards. House Bill 2292 would declare null and void the very standards that involved a lot of time and hard work on the part of educators across Kansas.

If this bill becomes law and the College and Career Ready Standards are declared null and void and we revert back to the former standards, you will do significant harm to the educational system. You will have tied the hands of our teachers and limited their ability to teach. You will have decreased our children's chances to compete favorably with their counterparts in a global economy that values critical thinking skills. I urge you to read the standards; is there anything in these standards that you do not want your children or grandchildren to learn? As for my family, I know these are skills I want my children to have.