

Monday March 9, 2015

Good Afternoon,

I appear today to speak about HB 2378, a bill to establish a legislature award for teaching excellence program. My testimony today will document support for the current Kansas Teacher of the Year award program, but also encourage dialogue among interested parties to enhance this program. HB 2378 seems to place much value on providing a monetary award to recognized teachers of excellence. The current Kansas Teacher of the Year award program places much value on honoring the teaching profession, building leadership skills among recognized teachers, and providing service back to the school districts and teacher education programs in Kansas.

Since 1955, Kansas has honored the best of the teaching profession. The Kansas Teacher of the Year program has grown to be recognized as the premiere teacher recognition celebration for our state. Why is this? The primary reason is because the Kansas Teacher of the Year program has a very unique benefit to all recognized teachers. Each year approximately 60-80 Kansas teachers have the opportunity to participate in the program. The KTOY team typically travels across the state of Kansas and provides training and professional learning programs at the teacher colleges and at school districts. Team members speak at a wide range of conferences, workshops and gatherings to advocate for Kansas public education and the teaching profession.

The Team provides a service to both educate future teacher and encourage them in their career choice. The year I was in service (2009), the Team visited 28 colleges and universities. We spent a day at Kansas State University provided professional development during the House Creativity Lecture Series. As Teacher of the Year, I served by conducting all day professional learning at 12 districts and also was able to kick off the start of the school year at various districts in the state. These days, in addition to the countless engagements at Academic Banquets, The Governor's Banquet, PTA Conventions, KASSP Conference, Learning Forward, KU Conference, KEEN, are all examples where the KTOY is scheduled every year to speak and is a service provided by the program. These appearances are at no cost to any district or organization during the teacher's year of service. The cost of the travel and food is funded through the Hubbard Foundation. This Foundation was started by Senator Nancy Kassebaum to help fund the year of service for the Kansas Teacher of the Year. Corporate sponsors include Hertz Rent-a-Car and Security Benefit among many others that help move the program forward. The professional growth that takes place during this year cannot be replicated. The Team is professionally, and many times personally, changed forever.

The program has been successful in district's participation across the state. In the 4 congressional districts, we have an average of around 120 teachers nominated each year. The program has a rich history as it began in 1955. Since then we have had one National Teacher of the Year and six National Finalists! Even those teachers not recognized as State Finalists, are still part of teams that visit each other's districts to learn and share

from each other. Each district teacher gets to also be part of KEEN; which allows for more professional growth and learning at the Fall and Summer KEEN conferences.

As part of the program at KSDE, The Teacher of the Year also gets to participate in the National State Teachers of the Year Program. This program is organized and ran by The Council of Chief State School Officers. National Teacher average over 150 events each year. Television, radio, and the print media readily utilize National Teachers to represent the voice of education. The National Teacher is often called upon to represent American educators to audiences in other nations. National Teachers are frequently requested to sit on national and state commissions and policy advising bodies. As part of the program, all state teachers of the year travel to various learning opportunities throughout the year. During my year, we traveled to Dallas for the Opening Learning Session, to Washington DC where we had the opportunity to plan, learn, visit the National Science Foundation, be a part of the Smithsonian Mobile Institute, and meet the President; Nashville to participate in the National Governor's Association Summer Meeting; and New Jersey to learn from Pearson. The most priceless learning out of being part of the National Program was to learn from teachers all over the United States. They are now part of my virtual Professional Learning Community.

What concerns me most about SB 2378, is the lack of service and professional learning that comes with this recognition, it eliminates current effective administration, and creates instability of funding putting the continuity of the program at risk! I propose that we mold the two together and make the Kansas Teacher of the Year program even stronger! The financial resources and monetary award the legislature is willing to commit could be of great use in even more professional learning and growth for teachers nominated. I am not clear on why anyone would want to remove the service and learning component of the program and make it simply an award; as it is currently so much more! The current program adapts every year to the needs of districts and teachers in our state. I see this bill as another way to grow the program if we join forces. I really think if we could just sit down and have an honest discussion about the goals and mission of this very important program, we could find a solution that meets both of our intents for Excellence in Education.

Sincerely,
Cynthia J. Couchman, NBCT '06, Adolescent and Young Adulthood Mathematics
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