

**Testimony before House Education Committee
HB 2378 – Teaching Excellence Program
Presented by Mike O’Neal, Kansas Chamber CEO
In Support**

March 11, 2015

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee

On behalf of The Kansas Chamber, thank you for the opportunity to appear in support of HB 2378, establishing the Kansas Legislature Award for Teaching Excellence Program.

The Kansas Chamber, as you know, develops a Legislative Agenda each year based on input from our members from all across the state. The Agenda, including its Education section, was unanimously adopted by our nearly 50 member Board of Directors last December.

As reflected in our Legislative Agenda: **“The Kansas Chamber supports increasing the quality of education for tomorrow’s workforce and the efficient use of tax dollars through policies that:**

Support efforts to attract and retain the best and brightest teachers for the benefit of our Kansas children through a system that rewards excellence in teaching and protects against retention and promotion of underperforming teachers.”

As the most significant consumers of the ultimate educational product of our state, our members vigorously support the legislative declaration contained in HB 2378 “that providing Kansas children with a quality education through effective teaching is one of the core functions of state government and is vitally important to the workforce development needs and future economic success of our state.”

We have not done enough to recognize the truly exceptional teachers we have in Kansas and the hard work and sacrifices they make on behalf of their students. Ironically, financial rewards and recognition have been controversial. It shouldn’t be that way. Why would we hold our best teachers down out of fear that those who were not recognized will feel bad or envious? Why not challenge all teachers to aspire to be a teaching excellence award winner? Just as we are challenging school districts to adopt best practices to make efficient use of tax dollars, we should be encouraging our teachers to recognize and emulate the practices of our best teachers.



“...to continually strive to improve the economic climate for the benefit of every business and citizen and to safeguard our system of free, competitive enterprise”.

Predictably there will be debate by some over the scope of eligible candidates in the program, the dollars awarded and who is on the selection committee. This bill strikes the right balance. Since it is our teachers who are on the front line and have the greatest influence over whether our students meets the standards we have set, the program should be for them and maybe we will reach a point someday where teaching is financially rewarding enough that our best and brightest will be motivated to stay in the classroom and not be tempted to chase a higher paying non-instructional position or a career not connected with education. We know that for many it's not about the money, but in our view, our best teachers are underpaid and often go under-appreciated. It's time for us to recognize excellence in this very tangible way. Then we can move on to a discussion of recognizing exceptional teachers with exceptional salaries.