

House Education Committee
Testimony on House Bill 2504
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H.B. No. 2504 – An act concerning realignment of school districts.

I am a superintendent and elementary principal representing Skyline Schools and the Schools for Quality Education. I am providing this testimony in opposition to HB 2504; a bill calling for the realignment of Kansas school districts.

If HB 2504 were to become law it would strip away local control of school districts. The wisdom and reasoning of our forefathers when the Kansas constitution was drafted is still applicable today. Local board of education members who have been voted into office by the district patrons are able to have a pulse on the district and make decisions that meet the unique needs of the patrons of the district. By realigning districts and adopting a “one-size-fits-all” approach to educating our youth we will lose the value of the insight that the “real, live pulse” provides as decisions are made on behalf of the children of the district.

My opposition to this bill also rests in the fact that very little, if any, consideration is being given to the impact that “realignment” would have on children and families. Mitch Holmes notes in his February 1 Legislative Update, *“The supporters of the bill assert that no schools will be closed, and no one will lose their mascot. While this assertion may be true in the near future, we have historically observed that a consolidation of administration and school boards has eventually led to the closing of ‘attendance centers’, resulting in transporting students away from their hometown.”* Senator Holmes is most likely accurate in his speculation as to how this bill will impact local school districts. When rural schools close, the lives of the children and their families will change along with the dynamics of the entire community. In the last two weeks the media has brought attention to the alarming news that one small Kansas community is losing its grocery store, the ripple effect of HB 2504 would undoubtedly include a series of similar events.

By the nature of their size, rural schools are able to empower a culture where relationships thrive. When relationships thrive because of the tight connection within the school and between the school and families; the education of the children benefits. I find it interesting that while this committee considers a bill that de-emphasizes the importance of relationships in the educational process, another committee is advocating for mandatory suicide training for educators. While I would advocate for this type of training, such efforts would pale in comparison to the difference that is made when strong, positive relationships exist among students, teachers, staff and families. A key factor in promoting the social, emotional health of our young people is connection. You cannot beat rural schools when it comes to connection. This connection is part of the reason why small, rural schools tend to sport a higher graduation rate than large school districts. In rural schools, even the superintendent is a link in that connection piece. In my situation, I know the vast majority of the students in my district, I know where they live and I know their story; that component of educational expertise has tremendous value.

I urge you, for the sake of the children of Kansas and the future of our state, stop HB2405 in its tracks. Thank you for giving consideration to my comments.

Sincerely,

Becca Flowers