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#### **Kansas PTA**

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#### **Testimony to House Committee on Education**

Honorable Chair, Representative Ron Highland, DVM, PhD

Sue Mollenkamp, Committee Assistant, 785-296-7310

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Hearing, 1:30 pm Location: 112-N, Wed, Feb 3, 2016

#### **Testimony Kansas PTA**

#### **Opposed to [HB2504](#) – State mandated District Realignment and Consolidations**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding HB2504 – school district realignment and consolidation. The proposed state mandated elimination of K12 leadership by roughly half is out of alignment with the primary mission of the PTA and raises several concerns, particularly in rural Kansas communities.

**1. District realignment to cut costs without regard to the impact on student learning is contrary to the primary mission of the PTA.** PTA strives to invest in public education to the level at which our school districts have suitable resources, which means enough to provide every Kansas child equitable opportunity to achieve the state education standards for career and college readiness. Routine cost benefit analyses can identify the districts most efficient and effective at helping all students achieve state standards. Results of such cost benefit analyses can be used to determine suitable levels of resource requirements and to identify effective practices. However, HB2504 is driven by the push for spending reductions from ‘cost centers’ such as K12 public schools via “lawmakers struggling to find hundreds of millions of dollars” ([CJonline, Jan 2016](#)), with little if any consideration for the accessibility and quality of the education provided in the newly realigned and block grant funded districts.

[PTA mission and purpose](#) have remained the same since our inception over 100 years ago, focused on facilitating every child’s potential and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Kansas PTA will support efforts to preserve the Kansas Constitutional infrastructure for education ... retaining the primary responsibility of ... the education governance structure (State Board of Education, Kansas Department of Education, education scholars and practitioners; [KS PTA Legislative Priority 3](#)).

**2. Mandate disregards long tradition of local control ([Kansas Constitution, Article 6](#)) and of input from educators.** Kansas public school leaders have a long tradition of voluntarily consolidating and implementing cooperative agreements to achieve economies of scales, in an effort to maximize efficiency of local budgets. The number of Kansas public school districts were voluntarily consolidated down to 5,000 in 1950s from the peak of nearly 10,000 districts following statehood and then again voluntarily consolidated to under 300 by 2000s ([Celia Llopis-Jepsen, 2015, 2016](#); [Schrock, 2011](#)). Of the two non-partisan, external evaluators hired by the state to study the issue, the University of

Minnesota (1958) and Augenblick and Myers (2002), the more recent of these studies set the target number of districts for Kansas between 284 and 255, far more than the 132 imposed by HB2504.

In other words, public education leaders have repeatedly reported that meaningful savings from realignment and consolidation have already been realized. Superintendents, school board members, principals, teachers from across the state have spent the past two summers reporting to Special K12 Committees and Commissions only to have their concerns and reports excluded from the list of final recommendations ([K12 Efficiency, 2014](#); [K12 Student Success, 2015](#)). Public school staff have been doing more with less classroom dollars since the 2008 Great Recession and then again following the 2011 changes to state tax policy eliminating income tax, and thereby eliminating 50% of the dedicated revenue stream for public education. Of the few times Kansas has historically issued consolidation guidelines, the driving force behind the decisions were to provide for equitable and quality public education for Kansas youth, contrary to the underlying premise of the proposed bill which seeks to reduce state cost centers, with little if any explicit regard for either quality or equity across the affected communities ([Celia Llopis-Jepsen, 2015](#)).

**3. The questionable savings in conjunction with massive disruption** to student learning and district personnel implicated by this proposed bill would have on schools across the state is a considerable deterrent. The [fiscal note](#) for HB2504 summarizes the impact of the mandated realignment and consolidation as “cannot estimate the amount.” Mandating this degree of operational upheaval without a clear, evidenced-based cost-benefit analysis gives us no proof of either efficiencies or reduction in costs. Mandates do not allow for the wide and varied differences and challenges in these individual counties and districts. Educators have indicated that the local costs associated with the implementation of this top-down proposal could likely far outstrip speculated savings. School Board President of Buhler USD 313 “thinks the bill would save little money” ([Hutchnews, Jan 2016](#)). Superintendent Novack of Stanton County USD 452 noted her colleagues often wear many hats including school principal, instructional leader, assessment chairman, budget and curriculum coordination, and so on. Additional FTE would need to be added to district payrolls to fulfill these duties currently being covered by superintendents. The logic and legality of identifying, gathering, auctioning off district property was questioned by state and local educators, “As for the idea that school properties financed by local bond issues through the years could go to the state, Novack labeled that ‘offensive’.” Superintendent Reed of Fairfield USD 310 raised additional caution about fair and informed representation, such that “Rural territories [would have a] small voice on a centralized school board. Would it have only one seat on the board?”

On behalf of the parents, teachers, and patrons of the Kansas PTA, we urge this committee to rethink this intrusion into local control. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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#### ***THE PTA POSITION***

*Kansas PTA is a [nonpartisan](#) association that promotes the welfare of children and youth. The PTA does not endorse any candidate or political party. Rather, we advocate for policies and legislation that affect Kansas youth in alignment with our legislative platform and priorities.*