



House Elections Committee

Rep. Kahrs, Chair

H.B. 2185 Elections; polling places; unified school districts

Presented by Diane Gjerstad

Wichita Public Schools

Feb. 4, 2014

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the bill which would require school districts to accommodate polling in a school upon request of the election commissioner, with 60 days notice, and schedule teacher training the day of the election when a school is used for polling.

School districts are in the education business. Districts are organized to maximize student outcomes working within the constraints of time, state and federal mandates and budgets. The bill would allow an election officer the ability to unilaterally change the school facility use and calendar, without agreement or even consultation of the locally elected Board of Education.

The school calendar is constructed to optimize learning time for students, high quality professional development for faculty, instructional requirements and assessment schedules. In-service days are placed at the end or beginning of the week because experience proves when days off are placed mid week, some students will stretch the weekend into a longer holiday and miss school. In-coming Education Commissioner Randy Watson, recently identified student attendance as one of the best predictors of student success. Unfortunately chronic absenteeism (over ten percent) continues to be a factor for some. Furthermore, at the high school level families are encouraged to coordinate college visits with Friday or Monday in-services. This schedule allows families extended time to visit colleges without missing class. However this bill will would give the election officer the ability to change the school calendar and in-service schedule without regard to the educational impact on schools.

The primary election falls during enrollment for some districts. The bill's proponent stated a preference for polling in high school gyms, often where enrollment is held. Some school buildings, especially elementary schools, may not have adequate space to accommodate separate locations for both enrollment and polling. The decision whether to use schools as polling locations should not be the exclusive right of the election officer not charged with the education of our students.

The Sedgwick County election officer made the decision over ten years ago to move polling sites away from schools. We still oppose the bill because it allows another governmental body to dictate use of a school facility and alter the school calendar one-sidedly, without collaboration or agreement of the elected Board of Education charged with the education of their students.