

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Steve Abrams at 1:30 pm on Tuesday, January 26, 2016, 144-S of the Capitol.

All members were present

Committee staff present:

Steven Wu, Legislative Research Department
Jason Long, Office of Revisor of Statutes
Lauren Douglass, Legislative Research Department
Erna Fabert, Kansas Legislative Committee Assistant

Conferees appearing before the Committee:

Senator Greg Smith
Andy Brown, Headquarters, Inc., National Suicide Prevention
Allison Doss
Betty Brennan
Helen Rentz
Mark Desetti, Kansas National Education Association (KNEA)
Cathy Housh
Amy Hutchens
Joe Karlin
G.A. Buie, Executive Director, United School Administrators (USA/Kansas), also
representing Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB)
Scott Gordon, General Counsel, Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE)

Others in attendance:

[See Attached List](#)

Possible bill introductions

Chairperson Abrams asked if there were any new bills to be introduced. There were none.

Hearing on: SB323 — Creating the Jason Flatt act; requiring suicide prevention training for school district personnel.

Chairperson Abrams opened the hearing on **SB323**. He set forth the rules for conferee testimony and then introduced Revisor Long, who gave a brief summary of the bill. ([Attachment 1](#))

The chairperson then called the sponsor of the bill Greg Smith to the podium who briefly relayed to the Committee his reasons for sponsoring and supporting this legislation. ([Attachment 2](#))

Andrew Brown then testified in support, stating that federal funding for the Kansas Youth Suicide

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Prevention Program is ending soon and the Jason Flatt Act would be a very effective component in keeping suicide prevention training sustained into the future to assure effectiveness and to save the lives of youth. ([Attachment 3](#))

Oral testimony in support was also provided by Allison Doss who emphasized that student lives might be saved if suicide awareness tools are given to teachers who spend a great deal of time with the students each day. ([Attachment 4](#))

Betty Brennan then testified in support by stating that teachers don't feel they are equipped to handle a mental health emergency and this bill would help give them ways to detect children in need. ([Attachment 5](#))

Helen Rentz testified in support, stating that since suicide is the second leading cause of death in youth, mental health awareness needs to be increased in schools and society in general. ([Attachment 6](#))

Mark Desetti stated that KNEA is fully in support of the legislation, but he did relate concerns about possible teacher liability issues and unfunded mandates. ([Attachment 7](#))

Cathy Housh spoke in support, providing statistics on teen suicides and reductions in rates for states that have adopted the Jason Flatt Act. She reiterated that knowing the signs of suicide can save student lives. ([Attachment 8](#))

Amy Hutchens spoke in support, drawing attention to a suicide awareness program implemented at Children's Mercy Hospital after several deaths by suicide and believes a similar approach needs to be implemented in Kansas schools. ([Attachment 9](#))

Joe Karlin spoke in support as he feels this bill will improve the quality of teens' lives and reduce teen suicides through education and awareness of depression, mental wellness, and suicide prevention as more youth die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza and chronic lung disease, combined. ([Attachment 10](#))

Chairperson Abrams indicated that all the proponents listed had testified and asked if there was further testimony in support.

Deb Peterson who had initially submitted written testimony came to the podium and presented oral testimony, stating that after her son's suicide she had difficulty engaging school personnel about the issue, which caused great distress for the remaining family members. She feels this legislation would help school staff communicate better with students and families about the issue of suicide. ([Attachment 11](#))

Written proponent testimony was also provided by the following individuals:

Unless specifically noted, the individual remarks recorded herein have not been transcribed verbatim. Individual remarks as reported herein have not been submitted to the individuals appearing before the committee for editing or corrections.

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Kiersten Adkins ([Attachment 12](#))
Rick Cagan ([Attachment 13](#))
Catherine Creed ([Attachment 14](#))
Gretchen and Ardie Davis ([Attachment 15](#))
Marcia Epstein ([Attachment 16](#))
Clark Flatt, Father to Jason Flatt ([Attachment 17](#))
Judith Hyde ([Attachment 18](#))
Teresa M. Kelly ([Attachment 19](#))
Barb Mares Nelson ([Attachment 20](#))
Dave Rehnblom ([Attachment 21](#))
Kim Romary ([Attachment 22](#))
Susan Sanders ([Attachment 23](#))
Karen Smart ([Attachment 24](#))
Colin Thomasset ([Attachment 25](#))
Dana Twidwell ([Attachment 26](#))

Chairperson Abrams thanked all the proponents for their testimony and for courageously speaking out on the issue of suicide. He also offered condolences on behalf of the Senate Education Committee members to all those present who have lost children to suicide.

The chairperson asked if there were any conferees who wished to testify in opposition. There were none.

G. A. Buie then presented neutral testimony stating that USA/Kansas and KASB support the KSDE working with school district mental health specialists to craft protocol to support mental health awareness training for all staff members, which would include suicide prevention, but believes that rather than mandated training each school district should be allowed to design crisis plans utilizing resources within their districts. ([Attachment 27](#))

Scott Gordon presented neutral testimony stating that the KSDE supports adding provisions of the Jason Flatt Act to the current school accreditation regulations rather than teacher licensure and would require all school employees to receive training, rather than just licensed teachers and principals. ([Attachment 28](#))

Senator Schmidt asked if the KSDE has anything in writing pledging support from the Jason Flatt Foundation if these changes are implemented. Mr. Gordon responded that he will get the notification requested and provide it to the Committee.

Senator Hensley then asked Revisor Long if he could draft an amendment codifying what the KSDE is proposing. Discussion then followed on possible liability for teachers and whether this issue could also be covered in an amendment when the bill is acted upon.

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The chairperson reminded members that written neutral testimony has also been electronically provided by Attorney General Derek Schmidt. ([Attachment 29](#))

Chairperson Abrams then reminded the conferees and guests that this was a hearing only and the next step will be further discussion and possible final action at a future date where guests can observe but all discussion is done by committee members only. He then closed the hearing on **SB323**.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:32 pm.

The next meeting of the Senate Education Committee will be a joint meeting with the House Education Committee on Wednesday, January 27, 2016 at 1:30 pm in Room 112-N of the Capitol.