

Senate Ethics and Elections Committee

Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 171

Testimony Re: Spring Local Elections

Esteemed Legislators,

My name is Deb Zila and I am currently serving as the President of the Shawnee Mission Board of Education. I have the permission of my fellow board members to speak on their behalf today regarding the issue of the removal of Local Spring Elections to a November and partisan election. We ask that you do NOT move Local April Elections to November! Even more emphatically, we ask that you absolutely do not make this local election a partisan issue!

Long before I ever thought of running for a school board position, I looked forward to the April elections in our area every two years. I knew this election was devoid of political party focus, and that these candidates had a truly local focus on our city government and our school district. Though voter turnout may be less than a November, politically-charged, State and Federal election, those that exercise their voting right at the April polls, in my experience, seem to know the issues and the candidates on the ballot and are informed voters.

As a school board member, there are many reasons why moving these local elections to November is an extremely flawed plan. Not the least of these reasons is that if new board members are seated in January, the current school year is half over! They will have had no input on budgetary planning nor time to acclimate themselves prior to the beginning of school in August, when the role of a board member greatly increases momentum. I would parallel that dilemma to having our new Legislators take office in mid-February when half of the session is over and you are expected to catch up! Having new board members seated July 1, when school districts begin their fiscal year, would always make much better sense!

Working on behalf of K-12 Education as a member of a local school board is a calling and a passion! Our goal, without exception, is to provide the absolutely best education, opportunities and outcomes for the children in our school district. We want them to leave our schools with the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in the next chapter of their lives, whatever they choose to do. The bottom line for us ALWAYS comes down to asking ourselves the question, "Are we doing the very best we can for the kids in our district?" Period. We do not ever consider party platforms or partisan philosophies, only what is best for our students.

I am not sure that I know the party affiliation of my fellow board members, and it is not necessary that I do, because we are not there to be a Democrat or a Republican

representative. We place our names on the ballot to run for a local school board to be an advocate for children. It is an unpaid, volunteer position without many perks. Our job is to partner with our Superintendent to share a vision, which must be open to the ever-evolving educational trends and also monitor student outcomes. This requires a selfless drive to continually challenge the vision for what education should be for our kids. Board members also have the responsibility of overseeing that the school district's resources are used in the most efficient way possible, which we take extremely seriously. No one wants dollars spent in the classroom more than board members. The position of being a local school board member is not a stepping-stone to higher elected offices, nor should it become such a position. Those that serve on local school boards care deeply about the children who live within their town or district, the schools those children attend, and providing them with the best possible educational opportunities and outcomes. We are invested in the future of our schools, not in seeking to use our position as a springboard to a higher office. A school board member's entire focus should continually be on a quality education for our students, not on their own aspirations. I have been told repeatedly that this shift to partisanship would help create a path to higher office for those interested in politics. Because we champion the welfare and success of kids, we firmly believe politics has no place on school boards.

There is NO reason to move these local elections to November. To make this local election partisan is imprudent and potentially damaging to the future of K-12 Education in Kansas. We would ask that you reconsider this shift in elections for our local, non-partisan offices. Thank you for your time and your willingness to carefully consider this issue!

The Shawnee Mission School District Board.

Jan Heavens
Donna Byrfield

Deb Zita
Gandy Neighlon

Sara Goodman
Patty Mch
Craig K. Denny