



Chairperson Estes and Members of the Committee,

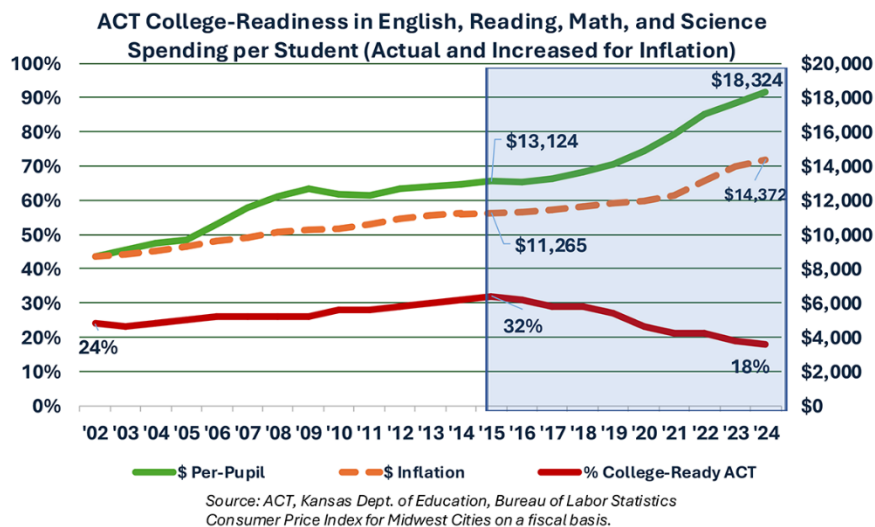
We are pleased to provide testimony supporting SB 47 based on input from many Kansas school board members we support through our Kansas School Board Resource Center (KSBRC).

AJ Crabill, a nationally recognized school board trainer, correctly says, “Student outcomes can’t change until adult behaviors change.” That is the issue before you today.

Many school districts have adopted policies designed to insulate school bureaucracies from having to change and prevent individual elected board members from exploring change needed to improve student outcomes. Most administrators and board members want students to do better, but not if it means they must change any of their behaviors.

Allowing school board members to get a discussion item on a board agenda, visit schools when they are open, and have a published school district email address is all related to improving student outcomes that have fallen precipitously.

The 2015 ACT results showed that 32% of Kansas graduates were college-ready in English, Reading, Math, and Science. College readiness has steadily declined since then, to just 18% last year.

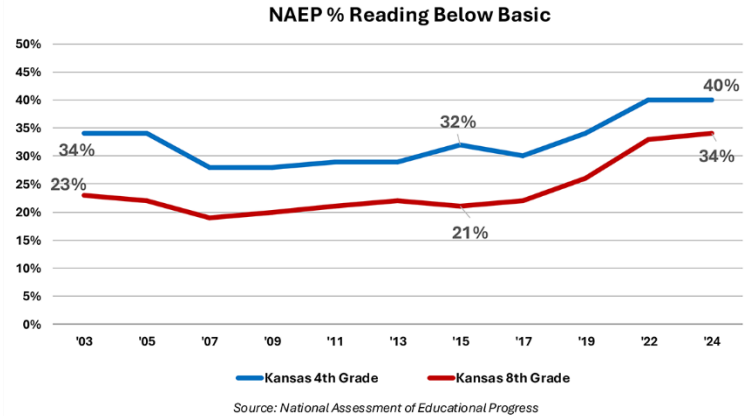


Similar declines also exist in the state assessment results for 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students.

Nearly half are below grade level in math, and only 22% are proficient. ELA results are also low, with one-third below grade level and only 28% proficient.

The 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results are also disturbing, with more students below grade level in reading than are proficient (28% and 25%, respectively).

You might think administrators and the state school board association would be sounding alarms about poor outcomes and encouraging board members to be more involved, but it's quite the opposite. They oppose SB 47 because they don't want school board members involved.



SB 47 addresses some of the most common concerns expressed by local school board members. The most startling feedback received involves school administrators forbidding local school board members from coming onto school grounds during school or activity hours, either not at all or not without being “chaperoned.”

Current law, K.S.A. 72-1416, clearly states that local school boards have control of the school district, including all school buildings. Unfortunately, many school boards adopted a policy recommended by the Kansas Association of School Boards that cedes control to the majority of the board.

Local boards are not elected as a slate. Each elected school board member has an equal stake in the success of their district. KASB would limit a board member’s interactions to venues like the grocery store or church. (see exchange highlighted below) Why is that?

The public should be able to email board members, but some districts object. The reasons have dubious merit. The following exchange occurred during the hearing on SB 49 in the Senate Education Committee while discussing the importance of the local school board participating in the building needs assessment before building the budget.

*“Sen. Shane: By directing school boards to take greater authority and involvement in this process, does that not actually ask for more local control by having locally elected officials have a deeper role in this process?”*

*Leah Fliter, KASB: Our position is they are already taking a very deep role in this process through their budget work, through their listening sessions with the site councils, through their conversations, you know, their conversations at the grocery store or after church... ..you know people bend your ear about achievement all the time when you’re a school board member. So, we feel that is in place. There is no need to require school board member Shane to go into the elementary school and do their needs assessment. That’s our position.*

*Senator Shane: Would it not be better for school board members to have a direct—maybe even sometimes a private—interaction with the school employees, to try to ensure that no stone is left unturned, or that—you know, sometimes when folks get put into a meeting room with administrators, and other folks around them, they don't feel as free to say the things that are on their mind, or what they see as a need in their classroom. Do you think that private conversations facilitate more honest conversations as a staff member?*

*Ms. Fliter: Well, you know, I would say, based on my interactions with folks as a former school board member, there are a lot of opportunities to give that private feedback—that people can email you directly, they can call you, you know your name and your address and your phone are usually, you know, your home phone number and home address are usually on the district's website. I also, you know, we teach in our leadership training that, you know, a single board member really is just a single board member. ...You act on behalf of the board only when you are a member of one of the seven. It's inappropriate. It can be very intimidating for me to walk into Senator Pettey's classroom..."*

(During the hearing, Senator Pettey stated that she would not have wanted a board member observing her classroom, but another former teacher would have welcomed the interest.)

Contrary to Ms. Fliter's statement, board members' personal email and phone are not on many district websites; there would be no need for this proposal if that were true. It doesn't matter whether the email is personal or district-issued, but only that it appears on the district website.

These decisions should be made based on what is in students' best interests, not what the adults may prefer, and the benefit of the doubt should always go to students.

The rationale offered for opposing SB 47 is baseless:

- There is no evidence that publishing a board member's email address has created any security issues in the districts that do so.
- Allowing an elected board member to visit a school creates no new security issues compared to allowing district employees to move about school property.
- Permitting a board member to add a single discussion item to a board meeting agenda will ensure that important issues to voters are not silenced and will not derail a board meeting.

State assessment results indicate that more than 332,000 students in Kansas cannot read proficiently.<sup>1</sup> Everyone, especially legislators and school board members, should urgently move to identify and remove the barriers standing in their way.

We encourage you to recommend SB 47 favorably for passage, and we thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> 72% of students not in Levels 3 or 4 applied to FY 2025 estimated FTE enrollment of 461,236.