

Dear Representatives,

My name is Kirsten Workman and I'm from Lansing, KS. I am a current board of education member, but I offer my testimony which is not representative of the entire board.

To say that education is important to me is putting it lightly. I urge you to pass SB 47 because I believe accountability and transparency are critically necessary in order for Kansas students to get the education they deserve.

My husband and I have three children. Our experience with the public school system spans nearly 20 years, stretches from pre-k through 12th grade, and across five states. Our daughters have experienced a diverse range of school settings ranging from a nationally-recognized, Blue Ribbon school, to DoDDs schools, to Fort Leavenworth's unique USD 207, to various alternative placement settings for students with special needs, to a Title 1 district predominantly comprised of at-risk students living in poverty.

Kansas public schools have the nicest facilities of any district we've ever seen, but I'm sad to say the learning outcomes my children have experienced here are the worst. This was the main reason I chose to give up a full-time faculty position at a university in order to homeschool—because if I send my child to a Kansas public school, the odds she will graduate college-ready, or even *grade level* in *any* subject are simply not in her favor. I believe you already know this to be true for all students.

I love my community, I care about public education, and I think *every* child deserves the best education our community can offer. When it became apparent to me that public education was in trouble, I stepped up to do something about it. I was elected to my local board of education and have served just over a year now.

I never imagined the uphill battle in store for those seeking to bring transparency and accountability to public education and in turn, better academic outcomes for students. While we may disagree on the causes of the education crisis we're experiencing or what the solutions should be, I believe we can all agree that the free exchange of ideas and information as well as the public's access to their elected representatives are basic requirements for a free society, let alone a successful school district.

So, that free exchange of ideas and access to our representatives are where we must begin. The truth is, engaging with parents, teachers, and other members of the community who reach out to the board with concerns or complaints is strongly and actively discouraged. When I offered my testimony on this important legislation last year, some of the representatives present didn't believe there are districts who refuse to post the contact information of board members. I hope you've looked into it since then and have identified those districts. I know at least one. Their constituents deserve better.

As you know, school boards meet once a month in open session, and current law requires that the superintendent and board president set the agenda for every board meeting. Two people, only one of whom is elected, decide what the board will address each month. The keeper of the agenda holds most of the power, and good leaders exercise restraint with that power and facilitate discussion. Poor leaders rely on that parliamentary power to control outcomes. Control the content of speech in an open meeting and you control not only everything the organization does, but how its actions are perceived and interpreted by the public.

You may imagine that, as an elected school board member, I have not been *actively prevented* from discussing things in open session that our community needs to hear, but I assure you I most certainly have...several times. Not only have agenda items been refused, executive session has been refused as well. Our board president once refused to add an executive session to the agenda for a special meeting called by three board members, thereby silencing the board from discussing the issue the meeting was called for to begin with because we were legally prevented from doing so in open session. All of this censorship is done under the guise of preserving parliamentary procedures and preventing "long" meetings. What it really serves to do is to squash district accountability and silence the minority, thereby eliminating the expectation or need for collaboration between board members, which severely impairs the board's effectiveness. And who pays the price for a lack accountability and collaboration from the adults running the district? Students do, every single time.

Right now, our board has chosen to limit each board member to adding only a single agenda topic each month. Regardless of what's going on in the district, I get one topic. I frequently find myself having to choose between addressing academic performance or school safety. Conversely, the superintendent and board president may add as many items as they like. Sometimes, they even forget to add my chosen agenda item.

Please pass this legislation. Academic achievement will not improve without strong leadership from school board members creating and contributing to a culture of accountability. Students deserve better, citizens have the right to know the contact information of those elected to represent them, and those elected officials must have the right to represent the interests of their constituents unimpeded by arbitrary rules or the autocratic whims of a few.

Thank you,
Kirsten Workman