

Kathy Bond  
Current school Board Member

SB 47 Proponent Testimony  
Removing Communication Barriers for Kansas School Boards  
Senate Education Committee  
[Kathybond2021@gmail.com](mailto:Kathybond2021@gmail.com)  
316-516-81099

March 7, 2025

Written only

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of SB 47.

*Point #1 (B) ask questions or otherwise engage in discussion with any member of the public addressing the board at a school board meeting.*

A board policy prohibits open communication and dialogue between parents, teachers, students, and community members at board meetings, preventing a board member from engaging in meaningful dialogue to improve student achievement or address other concerns. I have been a school board member for a little over three years and in that time, I have heard many public comment at our board meetings. School Board meetings with intentional deliberation and discussion between the school board and community members are more likely to have higher community engagement, seen in a greater willingness to attend school board meetings in the future and **result in an increased trust in school officials**. Deliberation is defined as a two-way discussion between community members and the school board, with officials directly responding to community comments and concerns. My experience and engagement within my district tell me, changing the format of school board meetings could boost trust and engagement.

*Point #2 (c) The board shall have authority to prescribe courses of study for each year of the school program and to adopt rules and regulations for teaching in the school district and general government thereof, and to approve and adopt suitable textbooks and study material for use therein subject to the plans, methods, rules and regulations of the state board of education.*

This bill, if passed, would give the board the governance to choose the course of curriculum each school year which would enable the learning of basic reading, writing, and arithmetic, raising student outcome. Currently, our educators do not follow a uniform of curriculum building to building and our student outcomes continue to decline.

I encourage you to recommend SB 47 positively for passage and remove communication barriers preventing alliance and open and honest conversations school board members need to have to improve student outcomes.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kathy Bond

☐ Ward Cassidy

Chairperson Estes and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 47.

For the past two years, I have been engaging directly with Kansas School Board members through a series of workshops, conferences, emails, and phone calls. The changes in SB 47 are all driven by complaints we receive from many board members who say current practices prevent them from identifying changes needed to improve disappointingly low student proficiency levels.

For example, the 2024 state assessment shows only about one-in-four students can read and do math proficiently. The ACT results last year found only 18% of Kansas graduates were college-ready in English, Reading, Math, and Science.

Board members want to have their email addresses available to the public, rather than attempts to reach them going through the district office. Some board members whose addresses are published even say they don't always receive emails that go through district servers.

There are far too many school board members that have been struggling to have their constituents' voices heard. Getting items on a board agenda should not be restricted. An example would be in Hays, Kansas. They are building a new school with a plan for a common washroom, for both sexes, with individual stalls shielded from the floor to the ceiling. When the public became aware, they asked their board representative to get the proposal on the agenda for discussion. **It was not allowed.** Not discussing the problem, in public, is very unfair to students and parents. If that is what most of the board wants, they should be required to vote and go on record. The push back on the individual board member for even suggesting a vote was undeserved.

SB 47 addresses many of the concerns voiced by Kansas School board members. Board members not being allowed to visit schools makes no sense. There has never been a safety issue with board members visiting schools. Board members always voice that they want to be involved. The only way education can improve is by allowing dedicated board members to do their job.

Ward Cassidy

There are many very good building administrators but there are also many that don't want to be challenged. As you all know the most successful school districts are the ones that all work together – the board, superintendent, staff, and students are all included in helping to determine what is best for student achievement. SB 47 would enable this type of teamwork in school districts.

Harnessing school board members from being a true representative of those who elected them is the American way, and it certainly is not leading to greater outcomes.

We know that some board members and administrators oppose these common sense changes, but shouldn't decisions be made based on what is best for students?

Board member participation and involvement requested in SB 47 will lead to better student outcomes!

Thank you for considering this testimony, and please recommend SB 47 favorably for passage.

**SB 47 Proponent Testimony in person**  
**Removing Communication Barriers for Kansas School Boards**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
**Tracy Frederick, Ph.D. – Dir. of Engagement/Strategy**  
**February 11, 2025**



Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

We appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of SB 47.

The Kansas School Board Resource Center is a non-profit organization that provides student-focused training, guidance, and other services to state and local school board members free of charge.

Many school board members tell us that some current school board policies create barriers to communication between parents, students, community members, and school board members, preventing collaborative processes to improve student outcomes. Recent data shows that one-third of students in Kansas public schools are below grade level, and one-third are not proficient in math and reading. SB 47 overrides these existing school board policies, preventing the open student-focused communication and collaboration that is needed to improve outcomes:

- Some districts refuse to publish direct email contact information for school board members on district websites, which prevents communication with parents, teachers, and community members who support school board members in their efforts to improve student outcomes.
- Preventing school board members from introducing agenda items into new business at school board meetings.
- Preventing school board members from engaging with parents, teachers, and community members during the public comment period of a school board meeting.
- Prohibiting school board members from visiting schools and other district property without permission or being chaperoned.

According to the 2023 survey from the Kansas Association of School Boards, of the 252 respondents, they cite as approximately 85% of the unique school districts in Kansas, 23% of those districts do not provide any contact information for school board members, and 30% do not provide direct contact to school board members. Hundreds of parents, teachers, and community members are unable to communicate their concerns or support for initiatives that improve student outcomes. Open communication with their elected representatives charged with improving student outcomes is critical to achieving this goal.

Many school boards have a policy that cedes control of the agenda to the board president or superintendent, preventing them from bringing concerns to the board about student outcomes and other needs. When school board members have asked for agenda items concerning student achievement scores to be added, they are often dismissed by the superintendent and board president during agenda-setting meetings. Several school board members have addressed declining student achievement scores in a public board meeting but were dismissed and publicly humiliated merely because it was a new agenda item. Board meetings often consist of reports that have nothing to do with academic achievement, and when board members try to do the right thing, they are dismissed because of policy restrictions.

**SB 47 – removing communication barriers for school board members**

**Senate Education Committee**

Page 1 of 2

February 11, 2025

Another board policy prohibits open communication and dialogue between parents, teachers, students, and community members at board meetings, preventing a board member from engaging in meaningful dialogue to improve student achievement or address other concerns.

At a recent district community listening session designed to improve student outcomes, community members, teachers, and parents were overwhelmingly positive about the opportunity to engage in questions and answers about improving student outcomes. The opportunity to talk with the community about this problem was invaluable to the board. Board members, parents, community members, and teachers left the meetings feeling more hopeful about the educational future of their districts and built a collaborative approach to their student achievement problem.

Board policy also prohibits school board members from accessing schools and other district property without the superintendent's permission and often requires being chaperoned. We know from facilitating talks between teachers and board members that teachers are eager to talk with school board members and enthusiastically invite school board members into their classrooms to observe at any opportunity. They are eager to show them evidence of what they are doing and what they need to improve their students' reading, writing, and math skills.

One other change in SB 47 would fix a different communication issue. Current state law says, "The board of education of any school district or the board of trustees of any community junior college is hereby authorized to appropriate money out of its general fund to pay the annual dues in the Kansas Association of School Boards for membership in a not-for-profit organization that provides guidance, resources, and other services to member school districts."

Specifying the name of a single service provider leads some people to think districts may only work with KASB. Eliminating KASB from the statute does not prevent school boards from spending money to utilize their services; it merely clarifies that school districts may work with any entity that provides such services.

For the record, the Kansas School Board Resource Center does not charge for its services and, therefore, has no financial interest in proposing this change.

We encourage you to recommend SB 47 favorably for passage and remove communication barriers preventing collaboration and open and honest conversations school board members need to have to improve student outcomes.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jaime Kissinger  
Precinct Committeewomen 526  
[Kissinger526@gmail.com](mailto:Kissinger526@gmail.com)  
SB47  
Proponent written testimony  
Date of hearing: March 11, 2025

March 6, 2025

Chairperson Estes, & members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 47.

This bill enhances transparency, public engagement, and accountability in school board governance by requiring school boards to publish members' names and email addresses on district websites and maintain a public database through the state department of education.

The bill also allows board members to add items to meeting agendas, ask questions, and engage with the public during meetings. It mandates a public comment period at every regular board meeting and grants board members access to school properties during school hours and community activities.

Additionally, it authorizes payment of dues to nonprofits that support school districts with guidance and resources. SB 47 strengthens the relationship between school boards and their communities, ensuring more open and responsive governance.

I strongly support this bill and encourage its passage.

Respectfully submitted,

Jaime Kissinger-precinct committeewomen 526

**Testimony before Senate Education Committee**  
**SB 47 – Rights of local school board members**  
**Mike O’Neal on behalf of Kansas Policy Institute**  
[mike@onealconsultingks.com](mailto:mike@onealconsultingks.com)

**Feb. 11, 2025**

**Written only testimony in SUPPORT**

Madam Chair and members of the Committee

SB 47 is a product of numerous interactions with local school board members frustrated with impediments to their ability to represent their constituents and do their part in improving their local schools. Many of these interactions have come thanks to the Kansas School Board Resource Center, an organization created to address a void that currently exists for local school board members seeking information and advice on a myriad of topics.

It has been said that when you see one school district, you’ve seen one school district. The experiences of local school board members vary widely across the state. Many districts function well with regard to recognizing the proper role of boards and the school administrations that serve them. We have great former administrators in the legislative ranks and Education Committees generally only get to hear from the better ones.

But many district administrations, and even some local boards themselves, push back on individual board members seeking to maximize their ability to understand, participate and impact decisions they feel will have a positive effect on student outcomes and their communities as a whole. Many local board members report being made to feel unwelcome.

Art. 6, §5 of the Kansas Constitution makes it clear that *“[l]ocal public schools under the general supervision of the state board of education shall be maintained, developed and operated by locally elected boards.”* The Kansas Constitution places the authority to operate local schools with the locally elected boards, not school administrators, no matter how good they are. The latter serve at the pleasure of the local boards.

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. SB 47 contains language approved by this Committee last session that makes it clear that local board members may access school facilities. How else can local school board members be expected to make informed decisions based on their own observations and interactions? 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?

The public should be able to e-mail board members, but some districts object. The reasons have dubious merit. During the hearing on SB 49, the following exchange took place. The committee was 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 insure 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...”*

KASB claims to speak for all member boards, but we know for a fact that not all districts are transparent when it comes to making it convenient to reach their locally elected board members. That said, though, the KASB is apparently ok with making access to e-mail addresses for school board members available in ALL districts. Except, note what they said with regard to the Fiscal Note on this bill:

*“The Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB) indicates that the bill may require school districts to incur additional administrative costs;*



*however, KASB cannot estimate these additional costs. Additional security upgrades and cybersecurity services, as well as additional insurance, may be necessary as a result of allowing additional individuals in schools and attendance centers, as well as sharing board member email addresses.”*

Does this sound like an organization dedicated to serving all local school board members, or just the ones who agree with them? Having a local school board member visit a school would be a security threat? Really?

The Fiscal Note goes on to reflect the balance of KASB’s comments:

*For membership dues made to not-for-profit organizations, school districts and community colleges may experience additional expenditures; however any additional expenditures for these dues would be optional.”*

There should be options available to local boards. The current law singles out one group. The option would be there to join more than one organization or choose a single organization.

STATE OF KANSAS  
SENATE CHAMBER

STATE CAPITOL  
TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612  
(785) 296-7368  
DOUG.SHANE@SENATE.KS.GOV



6014 W. 295TH STREET  
LOUISBURG, KANSAS 66053  
(913) 963-6640

**DOUG SHANE**  
37TH DISTRICT

SB 47

School Board Member Rights and Responsibilities

Proponent – Oral In-Person

March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Madam Chair Estes and Esteemed Committee Members,

My name is Senator Doug Shane from District 37 and I am a proponent of Senate Bill 47. This bill takes important strides to recognize the dignity of each individual school board member on a board of education, as well as ensure that boards of education are transparent to the public.

It is unfortunate that our State finds itself in the circumstances where a bill like SB 47 is necessary, but I can speak about its importance with firsthand experience and knowledge. For brevity, I will speak only to aspects of this bill that have seemed to cause some amount of controversy and opposition.

**Adding Agenda Items**

The bill would authorize any member of a local school board to add one item of discussion to the agenda per school board meeting. Opponents of this bill have likened a board of education meeting to legislative committee meetings, pointing to the fact that no individual member of a committee can compel the committee chair to add an agenda item. It should be noted there are significant differences between a legislative committee and board of education. Most obvious, a board of education is an administrative body whose role and function is quite different from the legislature.

One might wonder why the ability to add a discussion item is important. For most boards of education, the Superintendent and the Board President are solely responsible for determining what will be on the school board's meeting agenda. Some districts have policies that allow for a board member to request an agenda item be added but there is no guarantee. For many board members who find themselves in the minority, they are controlled by the tyranny of the majority and the board president. This leads to suppression of alternate ideas, gives insurmountable blockade power to the Superintendent or the President to avoid issues, and disregards the individual contributions a board of education member might make for their community. SB 47, as amended, simply gives each board member the ability to add

STATE OF KANSAS  
SENATE CHAMBER

STATE CAPITOL  
TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612  
(785) 296-7368  
DOUG.SHANE@SENATE.KS.GOV



6014 W. 295TH STREET  
LOUISBURG, KANSAS 66053  
(913) 963-6640

**DOUG SHANE**  
37TH DISTRICT

one item to the agenda at a meeting to help ensure they can fully represent their citizens and issues important to them.

### **Public Comment**

SB 47 would allow school board members to ask questions or engage in discussion with members of the public who are addressing the school board during a school board meeting, in addition to requiring time for public comments at each regularly scheduled local board of education meeting. The public comment period is a vital part of community engagement and often serves as the only time the public feels they can be heard by the board. There are multiple districts who have elected to stop the public comment period because they find it burdensome or inconvenient. While unfortunate, that is not a suitable reason to eliminate public comment altogether. Requiring public comments helps to ensure the board hears the interests of the public and is given the opportunity to obtain information that otherwise may be omitted.

In addition, there are times when interaction with a member of the public addressing the board is warranted and appropriate, such as asking clarifying questions that may help the board determine if it would be appropriate to add an item to the agenda. School boards should not have policies in place that prohibit a duly elected board of education member from speaking to a member of the public who is addressing the board.

Opponents of this bill will say that this will introduce chaos and loss of decorum in the school board meetings. There is nothing in this bill that restricts and school district from having controls in place to help maintain decorum in public comment periods and to control their meeting. For this reason, the provisions do not create undue burden on school boards and should be seen as beneficial to the general public.

### **Board Member Property Access**

One might wonder why a bill to allow school board members access to any school buildings and attendance centers during school hours or during school or community activities on the property would be needed. It is important to note that current law grants the school board control of these properties. Would you be surprised to learn that some districts have prohibited sitting board members from entering school district buildings? This is completely unacceptable, even if on a limited basis.

STATE OF KANSAS  
SENATE CHAMBER

STATE CAPITOL  
TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612  
(785) 296-7368  
DOUG.SHANE@SENATE.KS.GOV



6014 W. 295TH STREET  
LOUISBURG, KANSAS 66053  
(913) 963-6640

**DOUG SHANE**  
37TH DISTRICT

Opponents of the bill will say that this provision creates too much risk for the schools. Nothing in this bill prohibits the school district from putting controls in place and requiring school board members to schedule time to be in a school building.

**Conclusions**

I ask you to think about the importance of each individual voice is in this legislature. Now contemplate the importance of each individual board member on a board of education. These leaders were elected by the community to have a vital role and voice in public education leadership. It is critical that we help ensure each board member has their individual dignity and authority respected, and that boards of education be transparent to the public. Please vote SB 47 out of committee favorably.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'DS' with a large flourish.

Doug Shane

Kansas Senator, District 37