

## Senate Education Committee

### Testimony on SB 278

Presented by Jacque Feist, Principal  
Dodge City High School USD 443

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Good afternoon, my name is Jacque Feist and I am the principal at Dodge City High School USD 443 and Past-President of USA|Kansas. As the high school principal, I am ultimately responsible for the education, supervision and management of 1,737 students (74% at-risk, 72% minority, 32% second language learners and 14% special education).

I am here today in opposition of SB 278, a bill concerning policies against bullying in schools. First, I would like to be extremely clear: administrators are committed to ensuring a safe education environment – one that is conducive to student learning and growth.

In order to create and maintain a safe and orderly school environment, we have established policies and procedures to address incidents such as harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying (attached). We have worked with students, parents, staff, teachers and administrators to ensure that everyone is familiar with the district's policies and expectations regarding student safety. All administrators – in Dodge City and throughout the state – take each allegation of harassment, intimidation and/or bullying seriously and investigate accordingly.

As a principal, I am particularly concerned that SB 278 creates additional timelines and processes that are unrealistic and do little to address the issue of bullying. The expedited timelines and additional paperwork requirements will impede our ability to investigate thoroughly, get to the root cause of the issue(s) and work with all parties to prevent future incidents.

SB 278 also overlooks the fact that school district personnel can only intervene in situations where an incident has occurred at the school. We cannot intervene in off-campus situations that are not school-sanctioned events or if the situation off-campus does not create a disruption at school. This is especially important when we work with parents to address situations that arise.

Administrators work with all parties when an incident is reported. Students and parents can become hostile or difficult to work with a situation arises, often times because they are frustrated and have a hard time communicating concerns and issues – all the more reason to work with them individually and privately. In private, we can counsel parents and students to seek counseling, share resources and strategies for dealing with difficult situations and, if necessary, encourage them to seek assistance from law enforcement.

Our goal, however, is to reduce (and prevent) incidents of harassment, intimidation and/or bullying through character education programs in our buildings. At Dodge City High School we

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have spent a great deal of time working with our students through programs like Rachel's Challenge (a national initiative) and our own Hero's Program. Through these programs, our students develop a greater sense of awareness and understanding and are better equipped to help their peers when they see harassment, intimidation and/or bullying actions occur both in and out of our school building. This type of positive peer pressure is just as powerful as the negative types of peer pressure all students deal with during their high school experience.

In closing, please know that administrators take student safety very seriously. While we will work diligently to eliminate harassment, intimidation and/or bullying in our schools; we also recognize there will be incidences that require our attention. Those incidences will range from minor student disagreements to situations that have seriously escalated and require professional intervention. When these situations arise, I can assure you that we will take them very seriously and investigate each allegation according to the policies and procedures outlined for such incidents.

## Dodge City High School USD 433

### **Policies and Procedures to Address Incidents such as Harassment, Intimidation, and/or Bullying** (excerpt)

For the purposes of this policy, harassment, intimidation and/or bullying include any intentional written, electronic, verbal, or physical act, when such act:

1. Physically harms a student, school employee, or patron, or damages the student's, school employee's, or patron's property; or
2. Has the effect of substantially interfering with a student's education; or
3. Is severe, persistent, or pervasive, creating an intimidating or threatening environment; or
4. Has the effect of substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the classroom or school.

“Intentional” refers to the individual's choice to engage in the act rather than the ultimate impact of the action(s).

Harassment, intimidation or bullying can take many forms including, but not limited to: slurs, rumors, jokes, innuendo's, demeaning comments, drawing cartoons, pranks, gestures, physical attacks, threats, or other written, electronic, oral, or physical actions.

This policy is not intended to prohibit expression of religious, philosophical, or political views, provided that the expression does not substantially disrupt the education environment. Many behaviors that do not rise to the level of harassment, intimidation, or bullying may still be prohibited by other district policies or building, classroom, or program rules.

Corrective disciplinary action, counseling, and/or referral to other school district and community resources, including law enforcement, may be used to address and correct the behavior of the perpetrator(s) and mitigate any impact on the victim(s).

False reports or retaliation for harassment, intimidation, or bullying also constitutes violations of this policy.