

Testimony for the Senate Education Committee
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Submitted by
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Regarding Senate Bill #278

'Butch' from the "Little Rascals" series aired first during the 1950's on television, used to be the vision that came to my mind when I heard the word bully. Six decades later, that has changed. Bullies come in all shapes, sizes, ages, nationalities and genders. That isn't the only difference. Bullies are not just on the playground anymore. They can be in the classroom, college campus, factory, hospital, and even in the capital building. Bullying takes on many forms: physical, emotional, verbal, as well as texts, emails, facebook, twitter, and other social network that I am not educated enough about to explain.

General Concerns

As a school counselor, I have dealt with many issues regarding bullying. Prior to being a high school counselor, I was a Pre-school - 12 counselor for 8 years. "Bullying incidences ranged from shoving at the water fountain, to incidences that required calling law enforcement officials. It is not a surprise that these incidences would be handled differently. That brings me to my first point regarding Senate Bill #278. Some incidences as suggested by Senate Bill 278 of bullying can be witnessed, reported, investigated, and handled in less time than it would take to file a formal report. Such legislation I know is not intended to impede handling any level of bullying, but I am afraid it would have that potential.

Recent research based data regarding bullying identifies the victim, the bully, and the by-stander and suggest appropriate action for each individual. Anonymous reporting can lead to speculation and more incidences of bullying. I understand the thought process regarding anonymity, but it can impede successful resolutions of bullying incidences.

Our school district bullying policy was developed through discussions with parents, students, community members, teachers, other school employees and addresses all other subsections of New Section 1. Additionally, as a compliant school district in the state of Kansas, we answer yes to the questions of the annual building report that address bullying. Consequences for school districts not in compliance are implemented.

Senate Bill # 278 appears to be logistically impossible to implement. The language is cumbersome and burdensome. Time would be spent documenting procedure that could better be spent addressing the bullying. Many things addressed in this bill are already being implemented without a statute requiring it. Taking the control away from the local district and expecting the Commissioner of Education to formulate a one plan to address the needs of Dodge City High School as well as Kiowa County High School is an unreasonable expectation.

Concluding Remarks

School districts have and will continue to address bullying both from the preventive and punitive aspect. It cannot be eliminated. Just because it continues to exist, does not mean policies in place have failed. We cannot expect to eradicate something by making it against the law.

My prayer on my way to school every morning is that I do no harm to any child, that God directs me in my actions with students, parents, faculty, and staff, and that all can see God's hand in my actions. I sometime fall short of that standard I have set for myself as we all make mistakes. However my goal in every case, is for the best interest of the child. The student as well as the parent may not agree with me, but my motivation continues to be the best long term interest of the child.

Legislation needs to reflect some faith in its schools. Faith in its administration, faculty, staff, and communities. Recognizing that we have the capability at the local level to develop an implement appropriate bullying policies is one way to reflect that faith.

Citizens are screaming for less government involvement in our lives, not just in Kansas but across the nation. Let Kansas lead the charge in recognizing the quality of citizens throughout our state by allowing local districts to develop and implement effective bullying without additional legislation.

While I am in the neighborhood.....

I would like to address the teacher evaluation piece of Governor Brownback's educational plan. The following is a letter Darin Headrick, Kiowa County High School Superintendent, sent to our house member, Kyle Hoffman.

I am writing because I am troubled by Governor Brownback's education plan which includes the publicity of staff evaluations. First of all, I will start with a little bit of common ground. I am not opposed to an open dialogue about ways to improve the quality of teachers that stand in front of Kansas students everyday. As a district level administrator, I wouldn't be doing my job if we weren't constantly involved in the process of improving our school system. And if we are to improve, there can and should be discussions about change. However, I firmly believe that the changes Governor Brownback is proposing are not in the best interests of students, schools, communities, or teachers.

For a Republican Governor who preaches "smaller government", this seems hypocritical to me. Our system is already set up to evaluate teachers. They are evaluated by administrators, who report to the local Board of Education, who is ultimately responsible for hiring and firing. For a governor who insists that smaller government and less oversight makes for a better system, this idea seems backwards. When that system ceases to work and our school is no longer a successful school with high percentages of students meeting and exceeding Kansas' educational standards, then I might see a

need for changing how we evaluate teachers. I do not think that making teacher evaluations public domain will ever be something I can support. Teaching, like many other professions, is a skill that gets better with experiences, practice, and mentoring. An administrator's job is to help teachers get better. In order to do that, there has to be trust between administrator and teacher. This system of making evaluations public would destroy a positive atmosphere of trust between mentor and teacher.

In general, I think this proposal is a slap in the face to local boards of education, administrators, and all school staff members, most of whom show up every day, wanting nothing but the best for their students. They come prepared to school with lessons, activities, projects, field trips, and the energy it takes to do the most important job in Kansas. I am proud of my school. I am proud of the students, staff, parents, and board of education. We do our jobs and we do them very well each and every day--and our students' academic performance indicates that. We just ask that the fine folks we elected in Topeka will fund our school and do their job. We shouldn't expect less or have to settle for less.

Respectfully,

Darin Headrick Proud Superintendent
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