

HB 2085

OPPOSITION TESTIMONY

House Committee on Commerce, Labor, and Economic Development

Submitted by Tom Brungardt, Member USD 475 Board of Education.

One of the things I appreciate as a member of the Geary County USD 475 Board of Education is the professional relationship we enjoy with the Junction City Education Association, a profession employees' organization as defined in this bill. This bill seeks to sever part of that relationship by drastically altering the negotiations between the Board and the Association.

Most people that I know do not enjoy negotiations. Those negotiations may be for a car, a house, or the terms of employment. They aren't necessarily pleasant because they are stressful. But that does not mean the relationship and the negotiations are not valuable.

This bill will take a step towards destroying the relationship by altering the very nature of the professional negotiations that have been carried on successfully since the 1970's.

HB 2085 will limit the scope of negotiations to a very narrow list of items, going so far as to say that even if both parties agree, they may not stray beyond that prescribed list. Regardless of how beneficial both parties may find it to negotiate on a particular subject, they will be forbidden to do so.

Specifically prohibited is the ability to bargain the length and number of teaching periods. As a former high school teacher, nothing screams terms and conditions of employment than the number and length of teaching periods. It goes to the very heart of what it means to be a professional, because it speaks to the level of service teachers are able to provide. You might ask, why would a Board of Education force upon teachers a class load so onerous as to be beyond their professional capabilities. I don't know why, but Boards would definitely do that.

The bill removes the right of exclusive representation. I cannot imagine a more chaotic situation than to say to a Board and administrators, "go ahead, bargain with as many groups as you want. Bargain individual contracts with as many individuals as you want." I don't know how it would work.

I imagine there is a belief by some that this is needed in order to allow Boards to negotiate individual contracts with differentiated pay for hard to fill positions. But this bill is not needed for that purpose. The negotiated agreement between my Board and the Association already recognizes it. For example, long ago it was recognized that school psychologists were hard to find. They are paid more than others on the salary schedule. That's been true for decades.

Finally let me end with this. I don't view Boards of Education and the administrators who advise them as the font of all wisdom. When it comes to matters concerning the classroom, the teachers are the expert, not the administrators. Case in point: Our Board sought for years to change the number of

class periods offered at Junction City High School from seven to eight. For years the teachers said that it was a bad idea, not just for the teachers, but it was for students as well.

Last year, the teachers were worn down, and now our high school requires students to be enrolled in eight classes a semester. It remains a bad idea. No one on the Board side of the negotiating table ever said it was a good idea academically. It was only done to “save money.” But it has resulted in both students and teachers being overloaded. I know of teachers who had over 200 students on their class rolls in the first semester. I’m talking about regular classroom teachers.

The teachers were right. Do not take away from them the ability to say so.