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ASSOCIATION



OF  
SCHOOL  
BOARDS

1420 Arrowhead Road | Topeka, Kansas | 66604-4024  
785-273-3600 | 800-432-2471 | 785-273-7580 FAX  
www.kasb.org

Testimony before the  
**Senate Committee on Education**  
on  
**SB 176 – Innovative School Districts**

by  
**Mark Tallman, Associate Executive Director for Advocacy**  
Kansas Association of School Boards

**February 20, 2013**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **SB 176**. KASB appears as a strong supporter of this bill. Although we did not develop this specific proposal, we believe it fits closely with the goals we have set forth in our *First in Education, the Kansas Way* plan in three specific ways.

First, the *First in Education* plan supports the development, over time, of a system to ensure all students graduating from high school meet a higher standard than currently required. The state should set basic standards, but allow local districts flexibility in determining specific standards. We believe the standard should include a demonstration of employability skills and preparation for post-secondary education (baccalaureate degree, career-technical college certification, associate's degree, industry credential, etc.) based on the career interests of the student. We then set statewide goals for student completion targets.

**SB 176** addresses this goal by allowing up to 10 school districts to be granted freedom from most state laws and regulations in exchange for focusing on improvement in the "completion percentage" of high school graduates, as measured by military service, completion of a postsecondary degree certificate program or degree program. These districts would be able to develop specific goals or standards in these areas. Other districts would be able to learn from their experience.

Second, the *First in Education* plan supports giving local school boards more flexibility in developing programs and operations. **SB 176** allows participating districts to be exempt from most state laws and regulations. We believe this would be a major incentive for district participation. We also realize this would be a significant change, and will create considerable concern. We urge you to consider the following:

- A maximum of 10 districts would be allowed this authority under the bill. The first two districts seeking to become innovative districts would have to be approved unanimously by the Governor and chairs of the House and Senate Education Committees, and the next districts by a coalition of other innovative districts – and all districts would also have to be approved by the State Board of Education.
- These districts would continue to follow state laws and regulations until and unless the local board of education, accountable to local voters, parents, staff and community interests, decided otherwise.

**Senate Education Committee**

Date 2-20-13

Attachment 1-1

- The exemption authority provided to innovative districts would be a maximum of five years unless renewed. If the district does not demonstrate improvement, it would lose the exemption.
- If a district decides it is necessary to operate outside of traditional laws and regulations to achieve higher educational outcomes, it will have to demonstrate that its decision was successful, or lose that ability at the end of the five year authorization. If so, the state will be able to evaluate the desirability of continuing such requirements and regulations.
- If districts are able to demonstrate higher achievement *without* exemptions, or if districts *with* such exemptions fail to perform at a higher level, it will provide evidence that state requirements are not significant impediments.

The third element of our *First in Education* plan addressed by this bill is that innovation should be promoted within the public school system so that successful initiatives can be replicated, rather than authorizing and funding charter schools or private school vouchers or scholarships outside the public education system. We recognize there is strong Legislative interest in promoting innovations and options for students and families. We believe **SB 176** promotes that goal "the Kansas way:" by giving local elected leaders more freedom to operating while continuing to serve all students, and remaining accountable to both local voters and state oversight.

We recognize there may be portions of this bill that might need to be clarified or amended to create broader support. If so, KASB is eager to help develop the best possible legislation to advance the concepts it proposes.

Thank you for your consideration.