

Date: March 5, 2015
House Committee on Education
Attn: Representative Ron Highland and Committee Members
Testimony in opposition of HB 2345

I am the superintendent of Hutchinson Public Schools, USD 308, located in Reno County. I am submitting information regarding how HB 2345 will negatively impact my district's board members, board candidates and those in other communities.

Hutchinson is the 21st largest school district in Kansas. Even with this large population, only one of my current board members would still be eligible for boardsmanship under HB2345. Six board members would be disqualified from serving! With public education being one of the largest employers in our state, and with local boards attempting to patronize local businesses when economically prudent, many persons serving as board members will encounter a conflict through family relationships or other substantial interest as defined under this legislation. The information below indicates how our board members would be ineligible under HB2345:

Jeff Nichols, 16 years as board member – works for the city, to whom we pay utility bills
Mary Lynn Baker, 5 years as board member – works for the city, to whom we pay utility bills
Sarah Blake, 8 years as board member – works for Dillon Nature Center, with whom we contract for educational services
Mike Mendoza, 8 years as a board member – wife is a teacher
Kent Hilst, 4 years as a board member – brother is a teacher and he works as an accountant for a car dealership that has won bids for district vehicle purchases in the past
Tad Dower, 2 years as a board member – wife is a school secretary

At least three of our current board candidates have a conflict under HB 2345 because of services purchased through their employer.

Furthermore, board members have the responsibility to recuse themselves from voting whenever a conflict of interest does arise. In my four years as superintendent, I have never seen a board member fail to recuse him or herself from a vote when there has been a conflict of interest. Board members are judged in the court of public opinion for their actions, and would be voted out of their positions if they did not act ethically when conducting school business.

Local voters should decide who serves on boards of education, not legislators in Topeka.

This legislation is far too broad. Because my husband and I are both educators, my sister and step-son who are board members or board candidates respectively, would not be able to serve in their communities, which are located hours from where my husband and I work. They live in smaller communities where finding individuals eligible under this legislation would likely be even more difficult than it is in Hutchinson.

Avoiding conflicts of interest are important, but ultimately, this must be left up to the individual and the voters to decide. How would the legislature itself function if such conflict of interest restrictions were placed upon your work? I urge you to oppose HB2345 and instead allow local voters to continue to control these issues.

Submitted by: Dr. Shelly Kiblinger Date: 3-2-15
Dr. Shelly Kiblinger, Superintendent of USD 308-Hutchinson