

March 9, 2015

Dr. Ruth Gharst Waggoner
12525 Walmer
Overland Park, KS 66209

To Whom It May Concern,

I apologize that I cannot be in attendance, but I did want my voice to be heard in regards to House Bill No. 2378. While I applaud any legislation that seeks to recognize outstanding teachers, I am greatly disappointed to hear that this would take the place of the Kansas Teacher of the Year Program. As a former Kansas Teacher of the Year, I am well aware of the scope of influence this program has. It is a quality program that is admired by others across the United States. While I was Kansas Teacher of the Year, I had numerous opportunities to interact with other state teachers of the year. In our discussions, comparisons were made, and our program in Kansas outshined the scope, process, and recognition of those in other states. The quality of the Kansas Teacher of the Year Program can also be estimated by the number of national finalists from Kansas. In the past 15 years, Kansas has had five national finalists. I know of no other state that can boast those numbers.

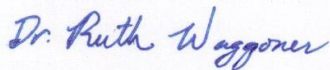
Within this program, every district has the opportunity to submit one elementary and one secondary candidate. These teachers are recognized at one of four regional banquets held each September. Two elementary and two secondary teachers are recognized as semi-finalists. One elementary and one secondary teacher are recognized as finalists. All of the teachers have the opportunity to interact in site visits to other districts. This provides additional recognition, professional development, and connections with other outstanding teachers. As a current principal, I have had two teachers in my building who were district finalists involved in the above process. I have seen them grow and gain confidence from those experiences even though they were not one of the finalists in the top three. The current Kansas Teacher of the Year Program goes way beyond the recognition of those elite top finalists from each congressional district. It recognizes and provides opportunity for growth in outstanding teachers from all districts in Kansas, regardless whether those districts are large or small.

I was recognized numerous times during my tenure as a teacher. I was a recipient of a fellowship sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation, "The Challenge of the Unknown." I was selected by NASA to receive the Honors Teacher Award and, I piloted NASA's NEWEST Program. I was a Presidential Award

Winner for Excellence in Mathematics Teaching and a National Board Certified Teacher. I was selected to receive an Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship. While all of these offered recognition and activities that stimulated professional growth, none compared to the experiences provided through the Kansas Teacher of the Year Program. I grew more as a teacher during that time than during any other time in my career. I was able to serve as an ambassador for education and truly make a positive difference in various facets of education in my state. I cannot stress enough the value of this program.

I hope you will reconsider this legislation. The Kansas Teacher of the Year Program is an outstanding program that has been years in the making. It is a vehicle that has garnered the admiration and respect of those throughout the United States. It recognizes and provides numerous opportunities for the top teachers in the state, but it also delivers so much more. It would be a travesty if it were taken from the teachers of this state.

Sincerely,



Dr. Ruth Waggoner

Principal, Heatherstone Elementary

2003 Kansas Teacher of the Year