



Testimony before the
House Committee on Education

on
HB 2504 - School District Realignment

by
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **HB 2504**. We appear in opposition to this bill for the following reasons.

KASB opposes mandatory consolidation of school districts by the state, but supports incentives for voluntary consolidation and cooperation.

Over the past 50 years, we believe most Kansans - certainly those with school-aged children - define their community as their school district. There is growing concerns in this state and the nation about the need to strengthen community bonds. This bill eliminates those current communities in many parts of the state. There are times when school districts should consider consolidation of programs, schools and resources.

We believe those decisions should be made locally, with state assistance, not state control. In fact, since 2000, the number of Kansas school districts dropped from 304 to 286, districts participates in special education cooperatives, service center programs and other interlocal agreements, and many districts already share programs and staff.

Second, this bill attempts to micromanage how districts use their personnel. The state would dictate how many administrative and supervisory positions “realigned” districts could have, regardless of the actual needs of the districts based on unique circumstances.

Third, while the bill does not address what would happen to local boards, it clearly states that Kansas State Board of Education would be responsible for “re-aligning” districts in such a manner that if current boards continued to exist, they would have no district to “maintain, develop and operate” under the Kansas Constitution. Under current law, the superintendent is responsible for implementing policies set by the school boards, which are in turn responsible to the voters. We cannot conceive how a superintendent could serve multiple boards that might have conflicting expectations. (Currently, superintendents may serve on more than one board, but those are based on local agreements.)

Under the principle of one person, one vote, boards to oversee new districts would have to be based on population, which means less populated areas would have less representation when decisions about maintaining buildings and programs are made - which is why many districts fear they would lose their schools, regardless of the intention of the bill.

All of this might make sense if there was evidence of larger administrative units resulting in better educational outcomes. In fact, KASB's review of data indicates states with smaller class sizes (more teachers), smaller schools (more buildings and principals) and smaller districts (more superintendents and school boards serving smaller communities) have better results than states with larger schools and district size.

Finally, we would suggest this bill would create significant disruptions in existing contractual relations among districts, interlocal agreements and cooperatives, and employees - for no obvious benefit.

If the people of Kansas really want consolidation and/or fewer administrative personnel, they have every ability to do so through the existing political process at the local level.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to respond to questions.

KASB's Summary of the Bill:

- Requires State Board to oversee redesign of districts by July 1, 2017; take effect one year later.
 - Every county with 10,000 or fewer students to be a single district; over 10,000 districts must have at least 1,500.
 - Apparently based on public school district students who are resident of the county.
 - Boundaries generally follow county lines - exceptions:
 - Voluntary consolidations to reach threshold by July 1, 2017
 - State Board may take into account efficiency, not divide cities or townships
 - Boundary of districts in over 10,000 counties, redrawn if necessary to reach 1,500
 - Innovative districts may not be divided or disorganized; may have territory added
- Bond debt will remain with territory that originally approved; so part of a new district may be taxed for previous bond issues
- "The number of school administration and supervisory service employees employed by a realigned school district shall not exceed 120 percent of the number of school administration and supervisory service employees of the school district with the largest enrollment in the prior year." (Not defined)
- Districts must inventory real property and vehicles for central office; all excess property not required for new central office goes to the state to be sold.
- No provision of process of determining new school board.