

Testimony for Sub HB 171

For consideration by the House Standing Committee on Elections

March 11, 2015, Topeka, Kansas

Respectfully submitted by Steve Roberts, Member, Kansas State Board of Education

My testimony does not represent the opinion of the state board on which I am privileged to serve. My testimony reflects only my opinions as a professional educator, a professional engineer, and a Kansan taxpayer.

It is my honor to submit testimony in favor of moving local elections to the fall. I have a rather unique position to gauge the political landscape as the only board member to have run in 2012 (successfully) as a member of the Republican Party and to have run (unsuccessfully) in 2008 as an independent with no party affiliation. Moving the elections to the fall would mean that the folks who run our schools would have to answer to more of the citizenry. This is my principal reason for supporting the move to fall elections for local races.

For decades entrenched interests running our schools have too often ensured that their hand-picked advocates run for the local elections. Our very important local boards of education should be more diverse. When our proper system of checks-and-balances works in our great country, citizens serve as the fourth branch of government, a co-equal branch to the three branches of government we typically teach to our children. Indeed, We The People serve on juries and have the right of recall for some judges; We The People elect all members of the legislature and have the right to recall those who wander to the extremes, as well as the right to petition our lawmakers for a redress of grievances; We The People elect certain members of the executive branch, and we serve on boards and bodies, panels and task forces, to bring to bear the concerns of the people. We The People typically do not turn out well for elections, but the turnout for spring elections is woeful, pitiful, often less than ten percent of the electorate, and continues to guarantee that our school system that fails roughly a third of our children continues to sputter along. We keep doing the same things to our poor kids, and they continue to suffer for it.

Our schools merit some fundamental changes, and our Kansas Legislature has done some very good things in the last couple of sessions. Chiefly among those: allowing technical expertise into secondary schools without the requirement of matriculation at a college of education, and the creation of Innovative Districts to permit some public districts to get out from underneath the stranglehold of the myriad laws that stifle creativity and prevent genuine innovation and reform in our schools. These reforms are long overdue, and they are met with constant refusal by those who are part of the entrenched machinery we call education. I wholeheartedly support fall elections for local government.