

Senate Committee on Ethics and Elections

In opposition to
SB 171-Elections; municipalities and special districts; spring to fall; other changes.

By
Mrs. LeEtta Felter, School Board President Olathe USD 233
Mr. Rick Schier, School Board Vice President Olathe USD 233

Feb. 11, 2015

Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 171. This bill would move the election date for all local elections from April of odd-numbered years to November of odd-numbered years. It would also have board members take office in January, rather than July.

The Olathe Board of Education believes it is important to develop and communicate its legislative positions so that lawmakers understand the needs of the school district. These positions are reviewed and adopted each year and form the basis of our communication efforts during the legislative session. Under 'State Issues' we have prioritized the issue of school board elections. Our official position states, "The Board believes public engagement in school district governance is best served by electing local board member in non-partisan April elections, rather than the November general elections."

Furthermore, we adopted the attached resolution on February 5, 2015, which reaffirms our opposition to changes proposed in this bill. The resolution notes that increasing voter participation can be increased without disrupting the current election cycle or excluding employees of the military or federal executive branch from participation in school board governance.

The current system works very well for our district. Board terms coincide with both our fiscal year and the school calendar year. The timing also allows new board members adequate time for orientation before the start of their term, which is critical in a large district with over 29,000 students, 4,400 employees, over 50 schools, and a complex budget.

Thank you for considering the position of Olathe District Schools.

OLATHE PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT, UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 233 BOARD RESOLUTION 2015

Kansas State Legislative Actions Relating to School Board Elections

A RESOLUTION by the Board of Education of the Olathe Public Schools, Unified School District No. 233, Johnson County, Kansas, regarding the Kansas State Legislature's proposed bills to alter the process for electing public board of education members in Kansas.

WHEREAS, the Founding Fathers of the State of Kansas provided in Article 6 of the State's Constitution for the establishment and maintenance of public schools; and

WHEREAS, the people of Kansas approved by popular vote an amendment in 1966 endowing locally-elected boards of education with the sole responsibility of maintaining, developing and operating local public schools; and

WHEREAS, all children in Kansas deserve access to a public education absent of potentially divisive partisanship; and

WHEREAS, moving local public school board elections to November of even-numbered years would reduce focus on school board candidates as they compete for attention with all other candidates for every federal, state and local office; and

WHEREAS, moving school board elections from the spring to fall would impair a school district's efficient operation based on a fiscal year of July 1 to June 30; and

WHEREAS, moving school board elections from the spring to fall would potentially create a "lame duck" board, thereby impeding discussions of administrator evaluations, contract extensions, teacher evaluations, teacher negotiations and budget preparation; and

WHEREAS, partisan elections would bar federal executive branch and military employees from running for office and serving their communities by holding local office; and

WHEREAS, current options in voting plans allow local districts to determine the best plan to ensure representation from all parts of the district; and

WHEREAS, the current election cycle for electing local public education board members has and will continue to serve the children of Kansas well, as demonstrated by the fact that Kansas ranks among the top states in educational outcome for successful students while spending below the national average per pupil; and

WHEREAS, increasing voter participation can be accomplished without disrupting the current election cycle.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we as a Locally-Elected Board of Education call upon the Kansas State Legislature to pass no law changing the election cycle for local boards of education; and

FURTHERMORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we as a Locally-Elected Board of Education call upon the Kansas State Legislature to pass no law changing the nonpartisan status of local board of education elections.

ADOPTED by the Olathe Public School District Board of Education on this date, 5th, of this month, February, of this year, 2015.