



**KANSAS ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL BOARDS**

Serving Educational Leaders, Inspiring Student Success

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Testimony before the
Senate Committee on Ethics and Elections
on
SB 171 - Local Elections

by

Mark Tallman, Associate Executive Director/Advocacy

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on **SB 171**. KASB opposes changing local school board elections. We have listed the sections of the bill applying to school boards and our comments.

Section 4 (Page 3): Requires all school districts make “suitable” school buildings available for polling places at the request of a county election officer for the county in which all or any portion of the school district is located.

The county election officer shall give not less than 60 days’ notice to the superintendent of the school district of the need to use one or more school buildings as polling places for any primary or general election.

All unified school districts shall schedule an in-service training day for teachers when school is in session on the date of any primary or general election.

KASB believes how and when school buildings are used, and certainly when districts must hold teacher training days, are issues best resolved at the local level.

- However, if this provision is included, we recommend amending the second paragraph to require at least one year notice to set the annual calendar for students, parents and teachers.
- We recommend deleting the third paragraph and allowing each each district to determine whether to hold a teacher training day, which often must be coordinated with other schools and in many cases, other districts holding joint activities.

Section 34 (Page 32): Moves school board general elections from the first Tuesday in April of odd-numbered years to the Tuesday after the first Monday in November of even-numbered years; moves school board primary from five weeks before the general election to the first Tuesday in August of even-numbered years.

Section 42 (Page 36): Provides that school board members shall take office the second Monday in January following the November election, rather than July 1.

KASB opposes moving school board elections to November of even-numbered years.

- School board candidates and issues would receive less attention if competing with federal, state, county and judicial elections on the same, lengthy ballot.
- Higher voter participation in these elections would be offset by “drop-off” in voting on lower ballot elections.
- School board members should continue to take office July 1, after a Spring election, with the start of a new school year and budget year, rather than assuming office in the middle of the academic and fiscal year.

Section 36 (Page 33): Makes school board elections partisan. Candidates would have to run by political party, including a party primary if necessary.

KASB opposes making school board elections partisan.

- Partisan elections could make school board elections and governing more divisive. There is no evidence Kansas wants more partisanship in local governance.
- Partisan elections would bar federal executive branch and military employees from running for office and serving their communities by holding local office.
- School governance should be based on coming together to solve problems and improve education.
- Political parties are free to recruit, identify and support candidates who align with their beliefs, even if candidates do not run on a party line.

Section 53 (Page 42) Allows not more than two persons to be appointed as election judges or clerks who are at least 16 years old but under age 18 if they have a letter of recommendation from a school teacher, counselor or administrator.

KASB would support this provision.

In conclusion, KASB believes the current system works well.

- Opinion polls show local governance currently has the highest trust of any level of government. A Gallup poll found Kansans have among the highest levels of satisfaction with their schools in the nation.
- Kansas schools ranks among the top states in student achievement while spending at the national average; evidence of efficient and effective use of public resources under the current non-partisan system.
- There are other ways to increase voter turnout, such as mail ballot elections, Saturday voting, moving Spring elections several weeks later, and local efforts to educate voters.

Thank you for your consideration.