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Opponent Testimony

HB 2466 – Enacting the promoting advancement in computing knowledge act

Presented to the House Education Committee

Tuesday, January 25, 2022

By

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Kansas State Board of Education

Presenters: Dr. Brad Neuenswander, Deputy Commissioner, Division of Learning Services,
Dr. Scott Smith, Director, Career Standards and Assessment Services

Chairman Huebert, Vice-Chairman Thomas, and Ranking Minority Member Stogsdill and members of the House Education Committee:

As part of the State Board’s vision for Kansas education a lot of work has been done in the last three years regarding computer science. The State Board has, in the last three years, established updated computer standards, PreK-12; reinstated the dormant “computer science” licensure endorsement; and allowed Computer Science to be considered fulfillment of a math or science graduation requirement at the local board of education’s discretion. We continually work with our business leaders and computer science organizations to update rapidly evolving subject matter. We have two main concerns, both which stem from Section 5 of the bill regarding the mandates. We do support the intent of the remainder of the bill and believe it will help advance everyone’s cause.

While, in general, we applaud much of the intention of HB 2466, we believe it to be inadequate to meet the needs of students as they prepare for a future in which technology is fully embedded in their daily lives, not the auxiliary add-on that it has been for many of us adults. We are concerned that this bill limits, rather than broadens student participation in technology-focused courses related to a students’ Individual Plan of Study. According to two of our fellow board members who have experience with career pathways and software

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engineering, the limit is problematic because in the past few years, there have been several computer-related courses added to pathways which are updated regularly to meet business needs. Further, a well-known computer-related organization has, in the past few months, moved from recognizing a few courses as “computer science” to recognizing 22 courses. Business members who help us develop IT pathways tell us that Kansas businesses want a wide range of computer education courses and not just “computer science” which is essentially coding. By listing in statute only one area of computer education as a requirement, the flexibility needed by school districts to address local business needs and student interests is severely limited.

The definition of “computer science” in this bill fits only one specific course that is currently taught in Kansas schools, Advanced Placement Computer Science, which aims to measure the student’s aptitude and award potential college credit for their work. It is worth noting that AP (Advanced Placement) classes are designed as college prep classes and are followed by a rigorous test. Not every Kansas student is on a college track, per their own personal goals as set in their Individual Plan of Study or IPS. The Kansas State Board of Education recognizes the value of supporting a variety of avenues to postsecondary success, as each student is unique and their postsecondary and career goals are varied.

We very much appreciate the proposed appropriations which are designed to incentivize more individuals to hold an endorsement enabling them to teach the course identified in the bill. Based on information regarding appropriations for similar funding efforts in other states, we; however, do have concerns that it will garner all of the results desired.

In addressing the computer science course requirement for graduation, we wish to first note your recognition that some students would struggle with the requirements to pass a college level course in order to be a high school graduate. There are, however, always some students, who do not have an IEP or a 504 Plan, whose struggles with such a course could also cause them to not graduate from high school while another computer course would not only meet their career needs but would be one in which they could excel.

As we have in the past, we oppose having the Legislature place in statute course requirements for high school graduation because we fervently believe that the State Board of Education should remain the entity which makes the final decision regarding graduation requirements

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because, with staff assistance, we are able to assess the positive and negative aspects which may surround such a recommendation. We do welcome the input of fellow elected and non-elected constituents so we will consider the identified section to be a suggestion of a course of study the bill's sponsor believes should be considered for inclusion in the list of courses required for high school graduation.

Currently, a Special Task Force of which the Chair of this committee is a member, is studying graduation requirements. Passing this legislation undermines the work many Kansans are performing at this moment to update graduation requirements holistically for the first time in decades. We urge the Chair to submit this idea to the task force so it may be considered. If the bill is worked, may we suggest replacing Section 5 with a report of progress by the date suggested in the bill with an understanding that needed revisions are generally the natural course of action.

Thank you for allowing us to share some kudos, some thoughts for improvement, and some concerns regarding HB 2466.