

KACCT

Kansas Association of Community College Trustees

Kansas Community College Testimony on SB 273 and Request for Amendment

Thank you for the opportunity today to testify on SB 273 and request an amendment to include community colleges and each locally elected board of community colleges trustees be treated in similar fashion to boards of education as currently written in the bill. Locally elected community college trustees serve the same functions as locally elected school board members. Through the current pandemic there have been times when confusion has occurred around where community colleges fall on certain items. Often policy is addressed with Universities or with the K-12 system. As the Association Director this often left me trying to seek and provide clarity to each college and their board about what was happening and where we fall within the law.

Providing a statutory framework for the responsibilities of the locally elected boards of trustees in determining how their colleges will function in a future emergency situation is critical. Kansas community colleges are both intertwined with the K-12 systems, local businesses, and are the backbone of many communities. During the current emergency, our colleges were frequently asked by people at both the state and local levels to provide equipment, personnel, space, and assistance in dealing with the disaster. Inclusion in this bill would provide the statutory clarity needed to ensure each Board understood their powers, responsibilities, and a reporting structure should closure or change in operations be needed in the future due to a public health emergency.

In the spring, Kansas Community Colleges adapted and persevered to provide quality education both online and face-to-face. Technical education classes for essential worker occupations continued at many campuses throughout the stay-at-home period in groups of under 10 students and using social distancing, good hygiene, and other best practices to keep students and faculty safe. Additionally, Kansas Community Colleges transformed some of their fabrication labs into Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) production facilities to produce masks, face shields, and “ear savers” to aid first responders. Kansas Community Colleges also provided on loan, 20+ ventilators to the Kansas Emergency Operations Center (KDEM) for distribution to health care facilities across the state. At the request of the Kansas Department of Insurance, Community Colleges also opened their training facilities to aid in the licensure testing for insurance agents across the state to ensure the essential function of insurance was not impeded because of lack of testing facilities. Multiple Kansas Community Colleges are or were partnering with KDEM and KDHE to provide housing and food service for first responders, COVID-19 victims, and families who need housing and food during this emergency specifically in the locations of COVID-19 out-breaks in Ford, Finney, and Seward Counties.

As one can see, Kansas Community Colleges have gone way outside the scope of normal operations to aid their communities and the state of Kansas while continuing to provide the vital education and workforce training needed by Kansas companies. We also worked closely with the Kansas Board of Nursing and KDADS to ensure we could teach out students who lost their ability to complete clinical hours and to ensure maximum flexibility for allied health students needing clinical completion. However, these activities occurred in an environment that was anything but usual. As full re-opening occurred throughout the summer the Kansas Jayhawk Athletic Conference made the decision to move all fall athletics (except cross country) to spring to protect our students, but also the college faculty, staff, and the communities in which the colleges are located. Each Community College worked with their local health department and followed their guidance for all things which are COVID-19 related. The following aspects of re-opening, process, and procedure varies greatly in different counties across the state. The statutory clarity around the local Boards of Trustees powers to make decisions would aid in future emergencies greatly. There are many lessons to be learned from our current emergency and the need for role definition and statutory clarity is perhaps the most important as we try to quickly respond to future disasters.

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