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Director of Government Relations & Legislative Affairs
Oral Testimony – Proponent
Senate Committee on Education
Senate Bill 532
March 7, 2024

Chairperson Baumgardner, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 532.

KNEA has several resolutions dealing with teaching and learning issues.

One of our resolutions on reading states:

Kansas NEA believes reading instruction and early intervention is best beginning in primary grades and continuing through the secondary level.

*KNEA further believes it should be delivered by professional educators highly trained in evidence-based practices and the **science of reading** to support development of phonemic awareness, decoding, and word recognition skills necessary to support development of reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.*

KNEA further believes that learning-from-text reading instruction and early intervention are essential to the comprehension of all disciplines and should therefore be integrated into the instruction of middle, junior, and senior high school content areas.

Kansas NEA is focused on student outcomes and success. Literacy is a key component of the educational journey of the student. SB 532, though not a perfect bill, has several components that Kansas NEA can support. The blueprint described in SB 532 looks to be consistent with our values as it relates to the importance of the science of reading. The inclusion of Kansas NEA, at the table, with an appointment to the Literacy Advisory Council, also ensures that our voice will be heard on matters as the process moves forward. The goal of 85% of fourth graders scoring a Level 2 (at grade level) or higher on the Kansas ELA state assessments by 2033 is a realistic one.

Kansas Teachers, like so many other professionals in the workforce, are saddled with tremendous student loan debt. Because of this, Kansas NEA is skeptical of continuing education mandates that would come at the expense of the educator. That is why we appreciate that the legislative intent of SB 532 is that no educator should be required to cover the cost for training beyond their pre-service education. Kansas NEA is also

appreciative that HB 532 recognizes that educator time is valuable and that in-service recipients of micro-credential programs would receive a \$500 stipend.

Kansas NEA has been very vocal about our disappointment with not being included in discussions regarding issues that impact public education. Often, we're forced to oppose bills that we could've helped fix and pass had we been included up front. Groups that represent educators have been squeezed out of real conversations. The debate over the efficacy of the Kansas public education system seems at times to have been hijacked by outsiders. The debates have also been clouded with emotions and distrust. In short, Kansas NEA believes that the rhetoric has been heavy with blame and light with reasonable ideas to tackle the issues at hand and it is time for a reset.

SB 532, a bill that is not perfect, seems to represent a reset. As written, it looks to be starting point for real collaboration that includes a wide range of stakeholders and attempts to address some of the major issues that have been debated repeatedly without resolution.

We ask the committee to support SB 532.