Testimony before the
House Committee on Education
on
HB 2621 – Curriculum Standards
by
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Madame Chair, Members of the Committee:

I am Tom Krebs, speaking on behalf of the Kansas Association of School Boards. KASB is opposed to HB 2621, for the most part. On one part we are conceptually supportive, but it will make more sense to identify that part after hearing the testimony on other parts of the bill.

In brief, the bill:

- Repeals K.S.A. 2013 Supp. 72-1128, which covers character development program;
- Revises KSA 72-6439, which sets up the current system of school performance accreditation system; pupil assessments; curriculum standards, establishment and review by state board;
- Establishes an advisory council on curriculum content standards within the state department of education;
- Declares null and void the Kansas College and Career Standards in math and language arts approved in October, 2010;
- Declares null and void the Next Generation Science Standards approved in June, 2013;
- Declares null and void the social, emotional, and character development standards adopted by the state board of education on April 2012; and
- Establishes a highly prescriptive standard for handling student and teacher assessment data.

At the hearing on HB 2606 Monday, Dale Dennis, Deputy Commissioner, painted a picture of a Kansas Department of Education that is handling student data in a responsible, ethical and legal manner. The system called for in the bill is unnecessary, likely to be costly and most importantly, will make it increasingly difficult for both educators and policymakers to make sound decisions about instruction at the classroom level, programs at the building and district level, and policy at the district and state level. As I mentioned Monday, “Any road will take you there as long as you don’t care where you are going to go.” Data is the feedback you need to ensure your road is taking you to your goal, which is, in this case, graduating every student in Kansas college and/or career ready. As KASB was a proponent of HB 2606, we stand as a firm opponent of this portion of the bill.

We are opposed to the part of the bill that revises KSA 72-6439. We believe that language has served the state well for over 20 years. As KASB data points out, by looking at a variety of educational achievement standards, Kansas ranks in the top ten in the country.

KASB is opposed to all parts of the bill that make null and void decisions regarding standards made in an absolutely democratic way as outlined in the Kansas Constitution: by a vote of the State Board of Education. Not only does this legislation try to overturn decisions made by the people constitutionally charged to make the decisions, it walks back on years of work implementing the new standards to work, which is costly, damages teacher morale, but absolutely most importantly, will steal years of improved instruction from children they will never, ever get back. Never.
Allow me this analogy. You want to drive to Goodland to visit the Northwest Kansas Technical College for a special event. The trip is about 340 miles, so driving the speed limit and allowing for a couple of stops, the trip takes about five hours. Let’s say about two hours into the trip, 40 percent, it comes to your attention I-70 is not the best way to go, weather or road conditions have changed. Do you turn around, head back to Topeka, another two hours, and reroute your trip, and turn a five-hour trip into one of 9-10 hours and 350 miles into one of almost 650 miles? No, that is not an efficient use of either your time or resources.

What you do is make adjustments. You look at data, possible alternate routes, for example, weather conditions, etc. but you keep driving west towards Goodland. You do not give up the progress you have made because conditions have changed. You respond but you know turning back is the worse decision open to you, because, by doing so, you’ll miss the very event you set out to attend.

Turning our back on the progress we have made in the classroom and with our teachers on adopting, reviewing and implementing the Kansas College and Career Standards would be a similar mistake. New standards, by current statutes, need to be adopted in 2017. Work would begin on them 1-2 years earlier, 2015 or 2016. In other words on our seven-year journey, we’re about 40 percent of the way there. We are hearing from teachers and parents of the power of the new standards as they promote higher order thinking skills. Yes, there are challenges for staff, students and parents as a more rigorous curriculum is taught, but tell me something that doesn’t involve some sacrifice and pain when the going gets tougher.

Bottom line on changing the standards: let’s keep heading west to Goodland, let’s pay attention to data, let’s be attuned to both the progress we make and the challenges that come our way, and let’s not make the mistake of throwing away time and money, because if we do, there will be students, staff and parents who will lose out. KASB is opposed to these parts of the bill.

We are neutral to the creation of the advisory council as described in the bill. The State Board and department do not need that prescriptive and possibly politicized group involved again, what is constitutionally their business. However, if such a group were formed, we’d prefer it would be driven by a collaborative effort between the State Board and legislative leaders, not embedded in statute. We recognize the upside of going through adoption of new standards with an awareness that even more inclusion than that pursued in the process that led up to the KCCRS in 2010 could be helpful in ensuring interested parties were more aware of the process, and if interested, were able to advise in an appropriate fashion.

I’ll be happy to stand for questions.