

February 1, 2024

Chairperson Williams and K-12 Committee:

Thank you for taking time to read my written testimony on HB2612. I try to assume positive intentions, but as I reviewed this bill, there appears to be an underlying assumption that school districts are not following established laws. I disagree.

In regard to complying with statutory requirements, I would be remiss if I didn't remind the committee of the "elephant in the room", which is that the legislature has been breaking the law for over a decade now by not fully funding special education. The old cliché that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones is fitting as it relates to this legislation. I would also submit that constituents are tired of the politicians' attacks on educators and public education. I observed this frustration and disgust at a legislative coffee last spring in Augusta. Many people there were appalled and fed up with the way that politicians conduct business in Topeka.

I believe the state legislature should allow the State Board of Education to perform its established duties. School accreditation is more than a series of numbers or a disagreement on how dollars should be used or how a report should be completed. Schools are required to follow state laws and State Board of Education regulations. If schools don't show growth or meet the expectations, districts are provided the opportunity to review the process while KSDE provides guidance and support. Accreditation affects every student in a school district and should not be used as a punitive punishment based on the interpretation of a law. Accreditation should remain in the hands of the department who have the staff, skills, understanding, and experience working with schools and school districts; the resources to support all schools.

Another concern with the bill is a state audit must be performed by KSDE to reinstate the district to accredited status. The auditors are already overwhelmed with the current caseloads, so adding to their duties will only diminish the fidelity of their work.

Districts are governed by the Kansas State Board of Education and LOCALLY elected boards. The term "local control" was often used during the pandemic by politicians in Topeka to push decisions off to local boards. You can't pick and choose when you are a fan of local control. You believe in it or you don't. Please allow our local boards to monitor educators and the daily work they perform.

In summary, this bill should not make it out of committee, and the Legislature should spend its valuable time figuring out how to meet the statutory requirements of funding special education.

It's far past time to move beyond the finger-pointing and petty antics, and begin working together for the students and families in Kansas.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brett White". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B' and a distinct 'W'.

Brett White  
Andover Public Schools Superintendent