

Testimony before House K-12 Budget Committee  
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HB 2612– Relating to school district accreditation  
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Oral testimony in SUPPORT  
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Madam Chair and members of the Committee

Thanks for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2612. The bill was introduced in Committee by Rep. Thomas at my request on behalf of KPI.

By the reaction it’s received since being scheduled for hearing, it’s having the intended effect. The bill is intended as a platform for having an open and candid discussion of our current system of school district accreditation. If we’re going to have an accreditation requirement that satisfies the intent of the existing statute, we can no longer ignore its failure to stimulate and incentivize improvement in student performance and the quality of instruction.

Opponents focus on the proposed new language. Let’s start with existing law. SBOE was to adopt an accreditation system **“based on improvement in performance that equals or exceeds the educational goals set forth in K.S.A. 72-3218c... and is measurable.”** All districts were to be held accountable through accreditation rules and regulations. The SBOE was to ensure that all school districts and every school had programs and initiatives in place for providing the capacities in statute.

The accountability measures were to be applied both at the district level **and** at the school level. If a school was not fully accredited and a corrective action plan is required, that report and any subsequent reports regarding a district’s progress toward full accreditation must be published on the KSDE website. If a school is not accredited (never happens) the superintendent must appear before the respective Education Committees.

The SBOE is to provide for statewide assessments in the core areas of math, science, reading and social studies and must ensure compatibility between the statewide assessments and the curriculum standards.

If the SBOE determines that a district has failed to meet accreditation requirements, the SBOE is to notify the district of the failure and upon receiving the notice the local board is “encouraged” to reallocate the resources necessary to remedy all deficiencies.

That’s current law. Many have been shocked to learn that to meet these standards, the SBOE apparently does not require that districts comply with existing state laws and rules. Some of the opposition comments I’ve read have tried to trivialize state law by citing minor infractions that could conceivably endanger a district’s accreditation. Instead, let’s talk about the most glaring examples that unquestionably impact student learning.

- Twice documented LPA studies finding that audited districts were not targeting at-risk funds in the manner required by law.
- Utilizing un-proven at-risk programs not based on peer-reviewed research.
- Chronic failure to allocate resources toward instruction notwithstanding constitutionally adequate funding.
- Districts still using now debunked literacy instruction after the SBOE has directed the use of LETRS,(Science of Reading)
- The systemic failure to evaluate and make educational adjustments as a result of required longitudinal tracking of students.
- Reallocating resources required pursuant to the building-based needs assessment law.

**KSDE defines “Accredited” as meaning: “the system is in good standing (compliance) with the State Board, and that they have provided conclusive evidence of growth in student performance. In addition, the system has provided conclusive evidence of an intentional, quality growth process.”** (From KSDE website)

If our school district accreditation law is to have any meaning at all, there needs to be accountability. I suspect that the main reason no school district has been unaccredited in modern history is the fear that parents will become concerned with the quality of education their children are getting. Also, no superintendent wants to have to come over to the Legislature to explain why they haven’t met accreditation standards. Districts where student outcomes are declining rather than improving don’t want the stigma of non-accreditation.

Isn’t that like the discussions we have about social promotion of students, where they are not performing proficiently for grade level work but are promoted to the next grade each and every year in spite of falling further behind? Certainly, no one wants the “stigma” of being held back. But is it worse to graduate with the stigma of being non-proficient as a teenager or is it worse to be held back in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade so that the student can be proficient in reading, a key to success in the succeeding grade levels?

Isn’t it time to “rip the band aid off” and come to grips with the fact that our accreditation system is broken and needs to be fixed? The SBOE is working on this but that process has been extremely slow. The process must now include legislative input. Remember, Art. 6 §2 of the Kansas Constitution directed the legislature to create the SBOE, granting it general supervision of the public schools and providing that:

**“The state board shall perform such other duties as may be provided by law.”**

The status of public education in Kansas has reached a crisis point. Improvement will need to be an “all hands on deck” effort. That includes school districts, local boards, teachers, KSDE, SBOE, parents, and the Legislature. And that includes changing the status quo to something that

is truly *“reasonably calculated to have all Kansas public education students meet or exceed the educational goals set forth in K.S.A. 72-3218c”* (Rose standards.)