

KANSAS
ASSOCIATION



OF
SCHOOL
BOARDS



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Testimony before the
House Committee on Elections
on
HB 2271 – Municipal Elections

by
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Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **HB 2271**. The bill would make the following changes in the election laws for local board members. First, it would move the election date for all local elections from the April of odd-numbered years to November of even-numbered years. Second, it would require elections to be on a partisan basis. Third, it would have board members take office in January, rather than July. Fourth, it would require all local school board elections to be at-large, removing the local option of candidates running by board member district. KASB strongly opposes each of those changes.

This past December, the KASB Delegate Assembly voted to approve a resolution called ***First in Education, the Kansas Way***, which contains our plan to make Kansas the top achieving state in the nation for educational outcomes. It is based on three core principles: raising educational standards, providing suitable finance for educational improvement, and strengthening local leadership to respond to parent and community needs.

This resolution, which was overwhelmingly adopted, includes the following statement: “We believe public engagement in school district governance is best served by electing local board members in non-partisan April elections, rather than the November general elections.” We believe this is the position of the vast majority of local boards and board members. KASB opposes the change contained in this bill for the following reasons:

First, we believe that combining local elections with general elections for federal, state and county offices will detract attention from school board candidates and issues. School board candidates will struggle to be heard. We believe a larger voter turnout with less informed voters on local issues is not an improvement over an election that is focused on local issues and candidates.

Second, we support the non-partisan system of electing board members that has been the practice in Kansas for decades. Our members oppose injecting partisanship and polarization into the governance of our schools, and we believe the people of Kansas agree.

Third, our members support the current system in which the school board term coincides with the school year and fiscal year. New board members elected in April have several months of orientation before taking office in July, when the new fiscal year begins, and prepare for the start of a new school year in August. It also allows them to finish their terms after the district’s graduation in May.

Fourth, ever since the current system of unified school districts was developed in the 1960's, the people of each district have been able to use various systems of board member districts to allow different communities or areas to be assured of representation on the board.

Although these districts must comply with the "one person, one vote" equality of population, the current system helps ensure representation of different communities of interest. We do not believe the state should take away this option solely to move the date of elections. I have attached a report from the KASB Research Department showing the current methods of elections used in school districts in Kansas. As you can see, a majority of districts do not use the at-large method.

I have also attached a document summarizing the results of school board elections since 1973. Two things stand out. First, on average, over 80 percent of board members who file for reelection are successful. Second, because of natural turnover, almost half of the school board members in the state are new every two years. In other words, there seems to be both a high degree of satisfaction with board members and a constant infusion of new members with new ideas and perspectives.

We believe this bill is an example of the adage: if it isn't broken, don't fix it. Actually, this attempted fix would damage a system that isn't broken.

Thank you for your consideration.