



**KANSAS ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL BOARDS**
Serving Educational Leaders, Inspiring Student Success

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Testimony before the
Special Committee on Education

On

Improving Parent Partnerships

by

Mark Tallman, Associate Executive Director

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Thank you for allowing KASB to provide testimony on improving parent partnerships.

First, KASB was asked to address the recent letters from the National School Boards Association regarding school board meetings, the extent KASB was involved in drafting the original letter, etc.

KASB was not involved in the drafting of the original letter. It is our understanding the letter was developed by NSBA staff. Our staff was not aware of the letter before it was sent.

KASB's elected leaders and membership had not been asking for federal involvement in protests directed at school board members. While some boards have experienced some disruptive actions and threats, to our knowledge they have been addressed at the local level, which is our general position on where issues should be resolved whenever possible. We communicated our concerns about the letter to the NSBA, which ultimately apologized for the letter.

On the broader issue of involving parents in education: KASB is strongly supportive of parent engagement, based on input from our members. Most school board members are parents themselves. Many have been involved in the school system before being elected to the local school board, such as serving as teachers, school volunteers, in parent/teacher associations, and/or advisory councils.

Many school board members got involved in the school system because they were dissatisfied with some aspects of the system, which is exactly how the democratic process is supposed to work. The point of a seven-member board – like other elected bodies – is to provide for multiple perspectives in making decisions.

Unless our members collectively change their mind when our Delegate Assembly meets next month, KASB strongly supports the State Board of Education's Kansans Can vision, which is based on input from statewide meetings in 2015 and recently discussed during the State Board's 50-city tour.

Part of the Kansans Can vision is supporting principles of school design that include strong partnerships with parents as well as with business and community. Part of improving parental partnerships will be

implementing other key principles: strong academics supported by social and emotional growth; more personalized education plans and more relevant, “real world” experiences.

KASB works with our members in promoting parent partnerships (along with staff and other community members and students when possible) through activities such as:

- A strategic planning process, including a review of current student achievement data, which is provided to all members of the community planning committee. The planning committees (between 40-60 members) are comprised of parents, patrons, staff, businesses, and in some recent cases, high school students.
- Site council training, which includes parents.
- Facilitating community conversations on local issues, which includes and engages voices of parents and patrons (recent examples include housing and childcare, mascots, school configurations, long range planning.)
- Conducting Culture and Climate Surveys, that provides results to the board to work with the administration team to implement necessary changes.
- Superintendent searches, which include parent and community input.

KASB has advised our members on ways to structure processes for parent and public input at board meetings, on policies for developing and reviewing curriculum, and for dealing with challenges to school materials.

Parental involvement in all of these activities does not mean that conflict will be avoided, for the simple fact that not all parents agree. One thing many school boards learned over the past two years is that sometimes there is no choice that will make all parents or patrons happy. Whatever choice you make will leave some people unhappy.

That is one reason why many school board races around the state were more visible this year. We do not yet know if there will be greater turnover on local school boards due to retirement or defeated incumbents, but clearly education issues were highly visible, not only in Kansas school board races, but in elections around the nation.

Those elections will determine how issues of concern to parents are resolved, as well as any changes in the process of parental involvement, based on the Kansas constitution’s provision that: “Local public schools under the general supervision of the state board of education shall be maintained, developed and operated by locally elected boards.”

Thank you for your consideration.