

KANSAS
ASSOCIATION



OF
SCHOOL
BOARDS

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Testimony before the
House Education Budget Committee

on

HB 2645 – Required Course in Personal Financial Literacy

by

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Madam Chair, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **HB 2645**. KASB appears as a “reluctant” opponent to this bill. We share the concerns behind by this proposal, but we also see it as another unfunded mandate at a time when schools are struggling to achieve current requirements with diminished resources. We would like to present some alternative ideas for the committee to consider.

As we reported to you before, over the past 18 months, KASB has worked hard to find out what Kansans believe about improving their public schools. One issue we heard consistently was the need for more focus on essential life skills, including financial literacy or simple money management.

For example, the Patron Insights public opinion poll commissioned by KASB and the United School Administrators last spring found that 76 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “Students who graduate from Kansas public schools are ready for the next phase of their lives – whether that’s college, vocational training or getting a job.” But only 48 percent agreed or strongly agreed that “Students who graduate from Kansas public schools are prepared for basic life skills, such as managing their own money.”

Based on this input, the “First in Education, the Kansas Way” resolution adopted by our members including the following:

- **Broader curriculum.** Maintain the current breadth of courses and activities and expand focus to include college preparation, career education, fine arts and development of essential life skills.

However, we also heard strong concerns about unfunded state mandates, and a desire to allow local communities to determine the best way to improve education without additional state control. The same survey found that 89 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “Decisions about what’s best for local school districts should be made by local school boards, rather than at the state level.”

As a result, our resolutions included the following two points:

- **Local decision-making.** Support local choices in education policy and use of funding unless the school persistently fails to demonstrate improvement.

- **State mandates.** Review and identify state mandates for possible repeal; oppose new requirements without clear evidence of effectiveness and funding for additional costs.

HB 2645 clearly presents a new state requirement. We are not aware of any studies on the effectiveness of requiring additional financial literacy courses, or of the cost of complying with such a requirement. This bill contains no additional funding and the Governor's budget for next school year provides no funding to implement such requirements.

We would offer the following recommendations to the committee:

First, support the current direction of the Kansas State Board of Education to develop a new accreditation system that encourages districts to go beyond the narrow focus on state reading and math tests. KASB adopted a resolution on accreditation that includes the following recommendation:

- In addition to academic results (reading and math, high school graduation and preparation for college and careers), the accreditation system should give credit for district programs that support student learning, and for improving other measurable outcomes such as safety, health, parent and public engagement, and other factors. This would create incentives and recognition for such programs without imposing specific mandates that ignore individual district needs.

We believe a new accreditation system can be designed to encourage districts to improve their focus on essential life skills without state curriculum mandates. Legislative support for a new accreditation system could be demonstrated through a House or concurrent resolution.

Second, this bill could be amended to direct the State Board to study the impact of these requirements on staffing, costs and student course availability, as well as the research on the effectiveness of such requirements, and report its findings to the Legislature next year. This is similar to the directive for a study of individual career plans contained in the Governor's career and technical education bill.

Third, the Division of Legislative Post Audit could be directed to do this study.

Finally, KASB is preparing to announce a committee of school board members and administrators to conduct our own study of college and career readiness. We would be willing to include an examination of how financial literacy education should be included in preparing students for college, careers and citizenship.

Thank you for your consideration.