

Testimony on **HB 2310 – Bullying and Character Education**
before the
Senate Education Committee

by

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Madam Chair, Members of the Committee:

As we have done on a number of other bills before this Committee this session, KASB regrettably appears in opposition to **HB 2310**. Regrettably, because we certainly agree with the basic intent of the bill: to reduce incidents of bullying and support the development of positive character traits among public school students. But we believe many of the same arguments we have raised in the past to new school mandates also apply to this bill.

Section 1 requires school districts to adopt policies prohibiting bullying. Virtually everything defined as bullying is already against state law and every school district policy. Are there really a lot of students in our schools that need a new school district policy to know that intimidation, threats, physical or mental harm, etc., are prohibited? Are there really schools that need a state law to tell them to prohibit these actions?

The second mandate in section 1 requires school districts adopt and implement a plan to address school bullying, including training for staff and students. We certainly believe school districts are attempting to do just that, regardless of whether or not they have a formal plan. But consider what might be part of such a plan:

- More effective training of staff on how to identify and address bullying behaviors.
- More supervision of students outside the classroom, on the bus, in the hallway, in the lunchroom.
- More school security.
- More intervention to help students with social issues, such as counselors, social workers, etc.
- More time to work with students on behavior or social skills.

The first four of these activities are “non-instructional” items that count against the Legislature’s “65 percent” goal for spending money “in the classroom.” Each of these items must compete against all of the other demands on school district resources, from higher teacher salaries to higher test scores. None of these directly meet the Standard and Poor’s standard of school “efficiency,” which measures only math and reading tests; nor do they directly relate to the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act or school accreditation.

Section 2 of the bill requires school districts provide “character development and instruction” beginning next school year, in grades kindergarten through eight (although the Kansas State Board of Education is required to “authorize and assist” in implementing such programs in grades K-12). As we have said with other curriculum mandates, either the proposed activities are already being done, in which case the bill is unnecessary, or they are not being done, in which case schools will either have spent additional money or time (or usually, both) or cut something else to offset the time and cost of additional requirements.

We therefore suggest that any new curriculum mandate should have a study to determine what it will add to the cost of required state programs, or what other state mandates should be dropped. This bill would add to the list of requirements studied by the Legislative Post Audit Outcomes Cost Study, which was NOT fully funded by the Legislature under the three-year plan.

As we said at the beginning, both sections of **HB 2310** are worthy goals, and there are other steps the state could take to support them. First, if the intent is to raise awareness of issues and urge school districts to address them, these issues could be the focus of one or two resolutions directed at the State Board and local school districts. Second, the Legislature could provide the State Board with resources to provide school districts with more technical assistance to address these issues. Third, the Legislature could create financial or other incentives to help develop programs in this area without diverting resources from other goals. Fourth, the Legislature could add to the woefully under-funded state professional development program, since both of these issues would require staff training and curriculum development.

In short, if these issues are important enough to require school districts to provide more attention and funding, they should be important enough for the state to provide attention and funding.

Thank you for your consideration.