

Dr. Kevin McCannon

Contact information: kevin.mccannon@gmail.com

Bill number and Bill title/topic: HB2612, concerning education relating to school district accreditation

Position on bill: Opponent

February 5, 2024

Dear Honorable Committee Members,

I submit this testimony in opposition to HB 2612 regarding school district accreditation. This bill unfairly holds public and private schools to different accreditation standards. As an instructor at the state's flagship university, I hold the same expectations of preparedness for all of my students, irrespective of their educational background be it from private or public schools. I work under the reasonable assumption that the students from the state of Kansas who enroll in my courses were also held to the same standards by the state during their K-12 school years. While accreditation standards are directed to schools and districts, ultimately what accreditation does is to ensure that student outcomes are commensurate with standard expectations for K-12 students. Per K.S.A. 72-3218(c):

c) Subjects and areas of instruction shall be designed by the state board of education to achieve the goal established by the legislature of providing each and every child with at least the following capacities:

(1) Sufficient oral and written communication skills to enable students to function in a complex and rapidly changing civilization;

(2) sufficient knowledge of economic, social, and political systems to enable the student to make informed choices;

(3) sufficient understanding of governmental processes to enable the student to understand the issues that affect his or her community, state, and nation;

(4) sufficient self-knowledge and knowledge of his or her mental and physical wellness;

(5) sufficient grounding in the arts to enable each student to appreciate his or her cultural and historical heritage;

(6) sufficient training or preparation for advanced training in either academic or vocational fields so as to enable each child to choose and pursue life work intelligently; and

(7) sufficient levels of academic or vocational skills to enable public school students to compete favorably with their counterparts in surrounding states, in academics or in the job market.

I want to emphasize the above language "each and every child." The language of the law implies that the standards 1-7 are applicable to all accredited Kansas school students irrespective of school funding source. All students are thus to be treated equally. By creating a separate

accreditation standard for public schools and one for private schools, the state will be out of compliance with its own standard set forth in K.S.A. 72-3218(c). Separate systems of accreditation open the door for different definitions of the “capacities” as outlined in K.S.A. 72-3218(c), which would not follow from the language cited above. “Each and every child” means all children, not children in public versus private schools. Otherwise, the state should change that language to indicate that students in public schools are to be treated differently than those in private schools. But I am not certain that would be legal, given the *Brown v. Board* decision, or if nothing more, the optics would be bad for the state.

In any event, I should be able to expect that all Kansas students enrolled in my classes have learned the same thing, and that what they have learned reflects the latest, most up-to-date evidence-based (e.g., peer-reviewed scholarly literature, accepted professional standards) curriculum grounded in contemporary pedagogical methods and the educational expertise of K-12 teachers. Kansas students entering the University setting with differential knowledge and skills due to the standards by which their schools were held, not due to their individual proclivities, interests, or efforts, could create disparities in educational attainment in higher education, thus placing increased pressure on college faculty and administration to ensure students at Kansas universities meet standards of excellence and reflect the best of the state of Kansas, which I would have to imagine that you, the honorable legislators of this state, would want of your own children and grandchildren.

Now, I say all the above in reference to law as someone whose expertise is not in law, so perhaps my legal interpretations are inaccurate. I would leave that to law experts to decide. But what I do know is fairness, something I religiously practice in my classes. If I as an individual teacher can hold my handful of students each year to the same standards, then why, I might ask, could the state of Kansas not do the same to all students in all schools across the state? Because if the state can justify holding different groups of students to different standards, then should I also be able to do so? I don’t think that would be the precedent you would want to establish here with this bill. But if this bill passes, and schools are held to different standards, and those standards are such that a school by its functioning according to the above evidence-based standards loses accreditation, the last thing I would want is for a very bright student in the state of Kansas, who might be your own grandchild, or niece and nephew, to lose out on the educational, career, wellbeing, and life opportunities college affords simply because their high school lost its accreditation when they never had to. I don’t think you would want to take that chance.

Thank you,

Kevin McCannon, PhD