



Making public schools great for every child

KANSAS NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION / 715 SW 10TH AVENUE / TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1686

Mark Desetti Testimony
House Committee on Education
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Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I am Mark Desetti and I represent KNEA. I thank you for the opportunity to visit with you today on House Bill 2477.

You have heard many times that future earnings are statistically tied to one's level of education. It is obviously in the best future interest of any young person to stay in school, move on to post-secondary studies, and achieve as high a level of education as possible. And because the state has an interest in ensuring that each young person develop into a skilled worker who will be a taxpayer with the ability to make his or her own way in society, compulsory attendance laws exist to make that possible.

Where compulsory attendance laws allow for young people to voluntarily withdraw from school before graduation, the student is essentially granted permission to give up and resign him or herself to a life fraught with economic peril.

The changes proposed to the compulsory attendance law in HB 2477 may help ensure to the greatest extent possible that a decision to withdraw is made with full awareness of the consequences. Additionally, these changes make it impossible to withdraw for the purpose of simply not going to school. To the extent that these changes strengthen the Kansas compulsory attendance law, we believe that is a good thing.

Specifically, we would point to subsection (b) that includes a school administrator in the decision-making process and to subsection (k) under which the legislature would prescribe and further define an "alternative educational program" with the help of the school administrator and guidance counselor. These provisions ensure to the greatest extent possible that the decision to withdraw is done in full consideration of the consequences and that such a decision will not include the reckless abandonment of an education. I would, however, point out that the school cannot ensure that such plans will be followed. We would oppose any attempt to hold a school principal or any other school employee responsible for the failure of either the student or the parent to follow through on assurances made.

There is one aspect of the bill that we find troublesome. Page 2, line 7 of the bill would allow the student to withdraw from school without the administrator's consent in the case of "financial hardship." We suggest that financial hardship should never be the reason for leaving school. To consider the idea that a child should abandon high school in order to work is to deny that child the opportunity to overcome financial hardship through education and the opportunity it brings. We would urge the Committee to remove financial hardship as a legitimate reason for quitting school.