

HOUSE BILL 2466, PROMOTING ADVANCEMENT IN COMPUTING KNOWLEDGE ACT

PROPONENT TESTIMONY

JOY EAKINS

My name is Joy Eakins. I own a small business in Wichita KS called Cornerstone Data, and I served on the Kansas Computer Science Task Force in 2019. I've also served on the Wichita School Board and am past Chair of the FlagshipKansas.Tech Education Committee.

I'm here today to speak in favor of House Bill 2466. As a member of the CS Task Force, we brought 5 recommendations to the State Board of Education back in 2019. Those included 1) creating a dedicated statewide CS position, 2) encouraging all schools to offer CS courses, 3) allow CS to satisfy a core graduation requirement, 4) create licensure and endorsement for teachers and 5) arrange funding for professional development.

The work on this initiative has been painfully slow – and Kansas is falling farther and farther behind many of our neighbors. Since the Task Force passed the recommendations, we have hired someone to the state CS position. And, after a three-year battle, CS satisfies a core graduation requirement for *some* students starting this year. But we are still waiting on licensures and endorsement paths for teachers. And we need funding for that professional development.

So why is Computer Science important? Why does this group of people you will hear from show up at meeting after meeting in Topeka and around the state to raise awareness and promote solutions for our children? Because many of us work in the technology industry and we see the digital revolution firsthand every day. We also see that our children are not receiving the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in the new economy.

You will hear from others that there are many CTE courses around coding and robotics available for students in Kansas. We're not ignoring that. We're thankful for those opportunities.

But imagine something with me for a moment. Imagine your children went to a school that didn't, in their standard curriculum, teach biology. They never planted a seed and learned about the importance of soil content or studied the mechanics of cell division and DNA or learned that a heart has four chambers and pumps blood to your body. Imagine that your child's only opportunity to study biology was in a Med Tech course in high school – one that only a few students in that district qualified to take. One that was taught by a business teacher who had worked independently to try to understand the content because we had no certifications or professional development for biology teachers. Would you find that acceptable for your child?

Yet that is how we approach Computer Science in Kansas. We have standards for PreK-12 but we don't prepare teachers to incorporate them into classrooms the way we prepare them to

teach cell division or plant growth. We generally offer those classes in the principles of computational thinking in only some of our high schools – and we ask the rest of our students to take CTE courses to satisfy their education – classes often taught by teachers with little opportunity to train and understand the components of Computer Science.

And why does this matter? Because in the digital revolution, every job is being impacted by these skills. You see, Computing Knowledge or Computational Thinking is not just coding. Coding is one component – the way grammar is a component of Literature. But Computational Thinking is much more than that. Students who are exposed to these principles understand how to break problems down into smaller pieces and how to find patterns and sequences. They learn how to build algorithms that solve those problems. They learn to test their processes to see if they work and find and fix the errors they created.

In our own state, we already see how these skills are changing everyday life and the jobs available.

Cargill Protein has created a robotic cattle-bot to herd their cows and keep their people safe.

Freddy's Steakburger franchises are using AI to appropriately staff stores and drive growth.

The **Chiefs** are using algorithms and data to put winning teams on the field.

My generation had a first-row seat watching technology change our daily lives in the ways we connect, learn, and do business. It used to be a joke that our parents needed us to help them program the VCR to record a favorite TV show. Our economy has dramatically changed since then – but we have not kept up with those changes in many of our Kansas classrooms. And neighboring states like Arkansas are surpassing us in preparing their children.^{1,2}

And those same neighboring states are actively pursuing industries like cybersecurity. Think about that – they are pursuing the same industries our South Central Kansas communities are pursuing, but every child in their system will have classes in Computing Knowledge by the time they graduate from high school. The competition for Kansas jobs is real – and they have a major head start in building that workforce.

The best part of this new renaissance is yet to come – but our children will not be prepared to lead it if we do not prepare our educators to meet the challenge ahead or set a goal for teaching and requiring these courses for our children.

House Bill 2466 is an important step in the right direction. Please consider voting yes.

¹ <https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/ar-comp-sci-initiative>

² <https://advocacy.code.org/stateofcs>