

Written Proponent Testimony for Senate Bill 427

For the Senate Education Committee

Hearing Date: March 13, 2024

Cathy Boote

USD 260, Derby, School Board Member

Chair Baumgardner and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide written proponent testimony in support of Senate Bill 427.

I am a recently retired educator that spent 35 years teaching in the Wichita Public School District. I am extremely proud to say that I am a newly elected school board member in the city of Derby. While campaigning for this position, I spent four months knocking on 2000 doors. During this process I visited with residents about my platform, experience and most importantly their concerns and hopes for our schools. I learned valuable information through this process. Residents were appreciative that I was taking the time to introduce myself and listen to them. I shared that communication and transparency were some of my top priorities. Nine candidates ran for four positions and I was honored to be the top vote recipient.

Following the election, I researched school districts that surround Derby. I learned that most had a "Board Reports" section on their agenda. Derby did not. I proposed that we add this to our agenda. It passed unanimously. This is a good way to let internal and external stakeholders in our community know how we are engaged, any training we are receiving and what we are learning about our district. We should also be able to request agenda items be added under New Business. Since we are elected to serve, I firmly believe BOE email addresses should be readily available, and a public forum is always on the agenda for those that would like to address the board. Board members should feel free to ask clarifying questions in order to understand information that is shared.

While communicating with administration and staff in my district, both seemed eager for board members to visit and have knowledge about what takes place in their buildings. During visits to all schools in my district, it has become apparent that Board members should be allowed access to buildings when they are open to school district employees. The first-hand knowledge gained by observing and communicating with students, staff and administration is a critical part of understanding the needs of our district.

Passage of SB427 will improve communication and transparency which will add to the success of our districts. I will conclude with item number 4 of the "8 Characteristics of an Effective School Board" taken from the Kansas School Board Association's website and given to me by our administration:

4. Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals. In high-achieving districts, school board members could provide specific examples of how they connected and listened to the community, and school board members received information from many different sources, including the superintendent, curriculum director, principals and teachers. Findings and research were shared among all board members. (Lighthouse I; Waters and Marzano) By comparison, school boards in low-achieving districts were likely to cite communication and outreach barriers. Staff members from low-achieving districts often said they didn't know the board members at all.

Thank you for your positive consideration of this vital legislation.