

Proponent of SB 427

For the Senate Education Committee

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Kirsten Workman

Registered Nurse & Board of Education Member for USD 469, Lansing School Board

Chair Baumgardner and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Senate Bill 427.

I support this bill because it addresses several tactics currently being used to obfuscate information and discourage engagement from and with school board members who might otherwise discover areas in need of improvement and bring accountability to district employees. I'd like to share my specific experience with you in hopes that you will see the merit and quite frankly, the need for the measures this bill will afford in order to protect the People's ability to address and engage their government.

Speaking Notes:

- I. This Bill Would Require Districts Publish Email Addresses of Board Members
 - A. Experience as a USD 207 parent (2020)
 1. Repeatedly told to submit correspondence to BOE through superintendent
 2. No response; approached at meeting and questioned
 3. Open door
 - B. USD 207 BOE member's email addresses are *still* unpublished (as of 3/11/24)

- II. Board Members May Add Discussion Items under New Business at Any Board Meeting
 - A. Currently, the Board President & VP (with Superintendent) set the agenda
 - B. After the election, our progressive board voted our conservative vice president out of her position and replaced her with another progressive, meaning the conservative board members had no voice in setting the agenda for board meetings.
 - C. During February's meeting, one of the parents who spoke during public comment posed the question, "Can a school guidance counselor meet with my child without my knowledge?" No answer.
 1. Was this possible?
 2. Job Descriptions
 3. Names, number, frequency not documented
 4. Questioning this practice equates to questioning their "professional judgment."
 5. Immediate action vs. administrative delay.
 - D. Two official requests and one informal request that "social worker job descriptions, school counselor record keeping practices, and parental notification of counselor's office visits" be added to the agenda for March.
 1. My official requests were not acknowledged
 2. Item did not make it to agenda

3. Only option was to amend agenda at the start of the meeting, which requires a majority vote **and prevents public from knowing ahead of time.**

Conclusion:

As a whole, Kansas students are suffering academically, and all we've done so far is throw money at the problem. This has only served to grow and enrich school administration and lobbying organizations as what amounts to pocket change painfully and slowly **trickles** down to the classroom.

All voters, but especially parents MUST have the ability to hold their school districts accountable. What we're dealing with on the ground is widespread abuse of administrative processes to cover the up ugly truths we all intuitively sense and silence those who would speak up. It's difficult to even get someone to acknowledge you exist, let alone a response to your email or two minutes of public comment. It's a bureaucratic nightmare and it's by design.

As you are no doubt aware, there is much work to be done by Kansas public schools to academically prepare students. At this point, *anything* to promote transparency and preserve the dialogue between those paid to educate children and those who love them most can only be of benefit to our students. Benjamin Franklin described democracy as two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch. Please preserve the public square by preventing the four from silencing the three, and pass SB 427. Thank you.