

Proponent Testimony of SB427

For the Senate Education Committee

March 13, 2024

Karen Overbey

School Board Member USD 453, Leavenworth

Chairman Baumgardner and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of Senate Bill 427 on behalf of Karen Overbey, School Board member, USD 453, Leavenworth.

My name is Karen Overbey, and I am a newly elected Board member serving on the Leavenworth School Board in Leavenworth Kansas. I support the passing of Senate Bill 427. I feel that the proposals in this bill would help parents and community members better advocate for their students. I am very new to serving on the Board, but I feel that the provisions in this Bill, most specifically the ability for Board members to engage in discussion with members of the public addressing the Board would be beneficial in improving the climate in our district.. Currently, the public comment portion of the Board meetings do not allow for any questions or discussion. It is formal and intimidating, as well as frequently dominated by a small group of activist staff members. This discourages families and members of the public from engaging with Board members, and forces any follow up questions and discussion to occur post meeting, when some issues could be resolved or clarified much more quickly. Currently, follow up is filtered through the superintendent and administration.

I also believe that the provision allowing Board members access to any buildings or attendance centers at any time the properties are open to district employees would be beneficial and even necessary for transparency. As a courtesy, the Board members should generally inform the Superintendent, but there are situations where staff may want to reach out directly to Board members, or Board members may want to observe or directly ask questions of building leadership about daily operations in our schools. Currently, the superintendent is the self-appointed gatekeeper for access to the schools for which we are responsible to make decisions. How are Board members assured of accurate information when all access to the school buildings is coordinated and curated through the superintendent? How can a Board member make good decisions when their access to schools is restricted (as has happened in our district)? This has contributed to a climate of uneasiness, lack of trust, and lack of transparency within the district.

I encourage the members of this committee to pass Senate Bill 427. Thank you.

Karen Overbey, USD 453 Board Member