

Colleen Cunningham, Kansas parent and former teacher

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HB2612, Requiring school districts to be in compliance with all state laws and rules and regulations to be accredited and requiring the state board of education to establish a process to challenge determinations of such compliance.

Opponent

February 1, 2024

Chair Williams and Committee Members,

My name is Colleen Cunningham. I am a former Special Education teacher with an MA in Education, have 3 young children who attend our amazing Blue Valley public schools, and I am writing today in opposition to HB2612.

On its face, HB2612 looks like a pro-student bill. Of course as parents, we all want our children to attend schools that are in compliance with various rules and regulations, and we look to a district's accreditation as a baseline for a school we want to send our children to. As someone who has kept an eye on various Education committees in Topeka, I know that there is more to this bill. I have watched over the past two weeks as discussions have centered on the impossibility of schools meeting evidence-based practices for curriculum standards when it comes to reaching many of our at-risk students. I have watched members of this legislature debate about banning certain types of curriculum that they personally do not support. I wonder about the logic of putting our public schools into a position that we know they cannot meet, or potentially removing local control of curriculum, and then punishing those public schools by revoking accreditation when they cannot meet that goal, or they provide that "woke" instruction. It is difficult to see this bill as much more than this committee working to remove accreditation from our public schools in order to shift enrollment (and funding) to private schools and schools funded by vouchers. I wonder where this change would leave rural families who do not have access to private schools, if their public schools were to lose accreditation.

I also oppose HB2612 because it places disparate demands on public schools, as compared to private schools and those receiving vouchers. I have often heard legislators opine about giving all Kansas children excellent educational opportunities. If this policy is intended to create excellent schools, wouldn't it stand to reason that the same policy would benefit (and therefore should apply to) private schools?

I oppose HB2612 because I think of students like my own children, who are able to attend excellent public schools and who will likely attend college in the not-too-distant future. They are excellent students who work hard in their classes, enjoy exploring a variety of elective courses and are active in extracurricular and volunteer activities in our community. They are doing everything within their power to make themselves "college-ready," even now in elementary and

middle school. Imagine they continue on this trajectory, but as they are getting ready to apply to colleges, this proposed legislation causes our school district to lose accreditation. Hard-working students across the state could very well be denied admission to colleges through no fault of their own.

Finally, I want to note the hypocrisy of this committee requiring school district compliance with statutes while our Kansas legislature has been out of compliance with statutory Special Education funding since 2012. Perhaps rather than holding last-minute hearings on ways to punish public schools for not doing the impossible with limited funding, this committee could spend its time together finding ways to fully fund special education services.

I urge members of this committee to vote NO on HB2612, and I thank you for your time and consideration.

Colleen Cunningham