



Testimony to Senate Education Committee
SB 176 – Coalition of Innovative Schools
 February 20, 2013

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Chairman Abrams and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of SB 176. We are often told that Kansas has high achievement and that schools and teachers want fewer regulations as they seek to educate our children. The bill before you today seems to codify this refrain and creates a greater opportunity for innovation within the public school system.

Like many members of this Committee, I was privileged to recently visit the Walton Rural Life Center in the Newton School District. Aside from hearing the second graders discuss plans to purchase fainting goats, hearing from the teachers and principal about the innovation they can bring to each individual child was stunning. As we also heard from school leaders, the students are performing very well compared to their counterparts across the state. As you have heard Kansas Policy Institute testify to in the past, it is not a straight-forward exercise to compare one district or school with another (primarily for demographic reasons), but the chart below demonstrates this success in fourth grade reading and math on the Kansas assessment.¹

4th Grade Reading, Meets Standard and Above (All Students)		
	2011	2012
Walton Rural Life	96%	96%
State Average	89%	88%

4th Grade Math, Meets Standard and Above (All Students)		
	2011	2012
Walton Rural Life	100%	100%
State Average	89%	87%

To offer a summation of the remainder of my testimony: Why not free as many public school districts in Kansas to bring even more innovation to more children as is being done at the Walton Rural Life Center?

Many students across Kansas are not getting the education they deserve. In fact, lawyers representing Schools for Fair Funding testified as such in the recent *Gannon v. State of Kansas* lawsuit. Some are forced to attend underperforming public schools while others struggle to find the right fit to suit individual needs. This is not to say that teachers and school administrators are not amongst our most dedicated citizens. It is simply a recognition of fact and experience.

As this legislature debates Common Core Curriculum, K-12 finance, and countless other issues related to education, regardless of perspective, much of the conversation is around preparing

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students for college or career. Unfortunately, children are not just being left behind on a state assessment but, even more importantly, when it comes time to leave high school.

Fortunately, the conditions outlined in this bill are working when applied to individual schools around the country and the same potential exists with entire public school districts in Kansas.

- Individual schools organized along the same premise are closing the achievement gap.
 - A recent study funded by the U.S. Department of Education found that such schools were more effective for lower income and lower achieving students; specifically related to positive impacts on students' achievement in math.ⁱⁱ
- Individual schools operating under similar situations to those that would be created under the bill are outperforming comparable traditional public schools.
 - A 2009 study by the RAND Corporation found that students attending such schools had higher ACT scores, graduation rates, and college entrance rates than their peers in traditional public schools.ⁱⁱⁱ

Possibly more important than any achievement statistic is the apparent recognition of parents that other options may present better opportunities for their children. In 2012, 610,000 students across the country were on waiting lists to attend public schools organized along the lines of SB 176.^{iv}

While we are supportive of the bill, I would ask the Committee to review the cap on the number of districts that can participate in the program. If it works for ten districts, why would it not work for every other district?

I would also encourage the Committee to take steps to ensure accountability for student achievement on the backend. If innovative districts are not ultimately held to the highest standards, possibly at the risk of closure or reversion to a traditional school district model, these schools will not provide new, innovative options to Kansas families.

Lastly, I would stress again that these districts remain public schools, are prohibited from charging tuition, and are accountable for finance, student health and safety, and student achievement.

Thank you for the opportunity to present today; I would encourage the Committee to support this bill.

ⁱ <http://online.ksde.org/rcard/index.aspx>

ⁱⁱ http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/newsroom/releases/2010/Charterschool_6_10.asp

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9433/index1.html

^{iv} http://www.publiccharters.org/data/files/Publication_docs/NAPCS%202012%20Market%20Share%20Report_20121113T125312.pdf

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