



SHAWNEE MISSION SCHOOL DISTRICT

Testimony to Senate Committee on Ethics, Elections and Local Government
Honorable Chair, Senator Elaine Bowers
Randi Walters, Committee Assistant, 785-296-7389
Randi.Walters@senate.ks.gov Room 223-E
Hearing – Wednesday, February 6, 2019, 9:30 am Room 142-S

Testimony of the SMSD School Board

Support for SB 7 – Moving school board officer elections and organizations.

Chairman Bowers and Committee Members,

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. I was elected to school board of the Shawnee Mission School District in 2017 and am here today on behalf of our board, speaking in support of Senate Bill 7.

This bill offers a welcomed flexibility for local school boards, challenged by circumstances associated with changes to local municipal election law passed in 2015 (HB 2104). We support this new language which amends the annual organizational meeting to *“the first meeting of the board of education on or after the second Monday in January of each year, or [more importantly] at a later meeting during that calendar year [as] determined by the board at the first meeting, [in which] the board shall elect a president and vice-president...”* (SB 7).

We find that this recognition of local authority strengthens our capacity as a board to structure the organizational meeting in a manner that will best meets the needs of our Shawnee Mission community.

As this committee is likely aware, the last two municipal election cycles have been challenging for local school districts across Kansas. Seating new board members in the middle of a school year can be disruptive to the work of district leadership.

Two of my fellow board members and I were elected in November of 2017 subsequent to these changes in local elections. When we took office in January of 2018, the sitting board president had not been re-elected to his board seat which caused a leadership change after just 6 months from the July 2017 officer elections. In addition, our district had just initiated a search for a new superintendent. The degree of leadership changes, mid-school year created a high degree of uncertainty for our parents, students and staff. Nor was Shawnee Mission the only district to experience such a significant degree of turnover in leadership.

Deliberations among KASB members across the state identified several options to manage these potential disruptions. However, members found no consensus among the alternatives, short of returning non-partisan local elections to the spring. The remaining options included staying with a July organization meeting, changing to January when new members would be seated, or deferring the decision to local boards. This bill incorporates all three.

The Shawnee Mission Board of Education welcomes the opportunity to deliberate the pros and cons of when our organizational meeting should occur, in the context of this 2017 change to the fall election cycle. We would like to extend our appreciation to Senator Tom Hawk for sponsoring this bill. Thank you to the committee for your time and consideration.



Mary Sinclair, SM East Area
[smsd.org/about/board-of-education](https://www.smsd.org/about/board-of-education)

Cc: Brad Stratton, President
Heather Ousley, Vice President
Sara Goodburn, SM North Area
Laura Guy, SM West Area
Patty Mach, SM Northwest Area
Deb Zila, SM South Area

THE SMSD 2019 LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

<https://www.smsd.org/about/legislative-information/legislative-advo>

The Shawnee Mission School District will advocate for all our students, employees, and district. We recognize, however, that the school district boundaries are not the limits of our support. The Shawnee Mission School District joins other districts in supporting constitutionally suitable funding of public education to serve our kids, our community, our economy, and our state. This testimony aligns most closely with number 11 of 14 position statements.

#11. Support maintaining non-partisan school board elections and seek resolution to the challenges created by the fall election cycles.