

RE: Wulfekoetter testimony on HB2039

“America has never been united by blood or birth or soil. We are bound by ideals that move us beyond our backgrounds, lift us above our interests and teach us what it means to be citizens. Every child must be taught these principles. Every citizen must uphold them. And every immigrant, by embracing these ideals, makes our country more, not less, American. “

President George W. Bush

January 20, 2001

Good afternoon and thank you Chairwoman Baumgardner and Senate Education committee members for listening to and considering my testimony on HB2039. I am Blanche Wulfekoetter and I come today to express the reasons I oppose the bill. I have more than twenty years classroom teaching experience at both the middle school and high school level. I am a recipient of the Kansas Civic Educator of the Year, the KCHE Kansas History Teacher of the Year, and the KSDE Kansas Social Studies Teacher of the Year. I am an active board member of Kansas Council for History Education. I am currently serving on the KSDE Higher Education History, Government, and Social Studies Standards revision team. Aside from my educational experience and dedication to growing good citizens as a profession, I am an active citizen in my local community. #AuthenticAdvocate

I adore civic engagement and consider Kansas' commitment to civic education one of her finest qualities. However, making passing a national curriculum civics test a graduation requirement seems counterproductive to the excellent work Kansans has been doing to redesign civic engagement education.

The image I hold in my mind is of the Kansans Can: Civic Engagement successful high school graduate flourishing tree. We root this process of growing good citizens in intrapersonal engagement learning, grow a solid core through civic learning, branch out exploring political action, social justice, and community service - leading to student success through actual engagement in “common good” living, contributing members of society. Here is the rub, civic engagement learning is SUBJECTIVE, and HB2039 attempts to minimize the scope of its impact with an OBJECTIVE test.

While passing a nationally standardized test required for naturalization/citizenship makes for an interesting lesson plan and can be included in both United States history and government classes, it makes for poor assessment of civic engagement success. We are far better served with the data gathered from the current system of calling graduates and documenting their life path after graduation. This is not memorization of information test result data, but application of civic engagement skills data. If the true desire is measurable data, this continues to be the best reflection of both knowledge and skills. Requiring the passage of a civics test to obtain a diploma after we already require passing U.S. History and U. S. Government classes, will not enhance these graduation requirements, and will complicate the process of earning the diploma unnecessarily.

As Ambassador Annenberg stated, "Citizenship is every person's highest calling." I know I come with a bias towards the excellent progress we are making, but the Kansans Can motto of leading the world in success of each student is best continued with the focus on employability skills and growing the civic advocacy network. A pass or fail to earn a diploma standardized test does not serve any worthy purpose and I ask that you let this idea die in committee.

Thank you for your consideration of my logic.

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"Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think"
~Albert Einstein

PS. I so enjoyed discussing this idea of a high-stakes civics test required for graduation with my students. One of my compelling questions to them was: If you knew your diploma rested on you knowing and understanding these big ideas we work with in class, would you be more engaged in the daily? O, the dear honesty of young people. Do you remember your high school social studies tests?