



KANSAS BOARD OF REGENTS

1000 SW JACKSON • SUITE 520 • TOPEKA, KS 66612-1368

TELEPHONE – 785-296-3421
FAX – 785-296-0983
www.kansasregents.org

**House Higher Education Committee
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Testimony in Support of HB 2197

Regent Gary Sherrer

Good afternoon Chairwoman Huntington, Ranking Member Mah, and members of the committee. On behalf of the Kansas Board of Regents, and as the Chair of the Board's State University Admissions Task Force, I am here to testify in support of HB 2197, legislation that embodies the recommendations of the Admissions Task Force. Joining me this afternoon are some members of the Task Force, who will provide brief comment following my testimony.

In 1996, Kansas shifted from an open admission policy to a qualified admissions statutory framework. After a decade of operation under this framework, the Kansas Board of Regents established a State University Admissions Task Force to complete a review of the standards and to make recommendations for university admissions policies for the year 2010 and beyond.

The charge of the Board of Regents specifically asked the Task Force to consider optimal admissions policies from a state higher education system perspective that reflected 5 principles:

1. Provide widespread access for qualified students;
2. Retain the state's best and brightest students for postsecondary study in Kansas;
3. Enhance prospects for student success;
4. Foster seamlessness across the state's postsecondary system; and
5. Promote the efficient use of limited state education resources.

Sixteen individuals from all regions of the state with outstanding civic and professional backgrounds joined me to begin a critical examination of admission to our state's universities.

Before I talk about the specifics of the Task Force recommendations and HB 2197, I would like to take a moment to discuss the Task Force itself. Their names are found on page 15, Appendix A of the Task Force report.

First, the Task Force was not composed entirely of education professionals. In fact, a majority of the members would best be described as "consumers" of higher education including current postsecondary students and representatives from business and industry.

Second, the members that were education professionals were not just from the realm of higher education. We know that families and students begin preparing for higher education early. We

also know that adults are an important group in higher education that can be overlooked. The Task Force reflected this diversity with members from K-12, postsecondary, and adult education.

With a diverse roster, the Task Force determined it would receive testimony from education professionals who work on the “front lines” everyday. All told, the Task Force received over 16 hours of testimony from June through August. All state universities were asked to provide testimony. Also providing testimony were the Kansas State Department of Education, the Kansas Association of School Boards, USA Kansas (representing the United School Administrators of Kansas, the Kansas Association of Supervision & Curriculum Development, and the Kansas Association of Secondary School Principals), the Kansas National Education Association, the Kansas Association of Community College Trustees (representing the community colleges as a whole), the Kansas Association of Technical Colleges (representing the technical colleges as a whole), and Washburn University.

Each presenter was asked to frame their testimony by addressing three questions:

1. What is working with the current qualified admissions standards?
2. What is not working?
3. What recommendations does the stakeholder have for improving the policies?

While listening, the Task Force found that qualified admissions, or QA, has served a number of purposes, including communicating that admission to Kansas’ universities is not automatic and helping to structure the high school experience through the creation of the QA pre-college curriculum. The testimony also revealed that there are issues that must be addressed if the standard is to remain relevant in the 21st Century.

Ultimately, the Task Force made 11 recommendations to the Board; 8 related to qualified admissions, 2 related to transfer, and 1 related to concurrent enrollment. While some of the recommendations do not require statutory change, those requiring statutory change are included in HB 2197. There are 3 I would like to discuss at this time.

When QA standards were passed the Legislature could not have foreseen the changes in educational trends. Increasingly students are graduating from non-accredited high schools, most notably home-schooled students. Currently these students must be admitted through the exception window which reduces the slots available for other deserving students. Admission through the exception window is also reported to be viewed negatively by prospective students and parents.

The solution to this issue is addressed in HB 2197 with the provision that students, both resident and non-resident, be allowed admission by earning a composite ACT score of 21 or higher.

Another issue that was consistently discussed by presenters concerns transfer students. The modern college student is very likely to attend multiple institutions. Students may be enrolled in and taking courses simultaneously from a university, an area community college, and through an online institution. Currently some students that transfer must be admitted in the exception window, reducing the over-all number of slots available. This means there may be fewer slots

open to those graduating from high school and may close the exception window to deserving students.

In answer to this issue the legislation includes provisions for the creation of exception windows designed specifically for transfer students with at least 24 credit hours and a GPA of 2.0. A transfer exception window would be established for resident and non-resident students and mirrors the current 10% exception window for incoming freshman.

HB 2197 also changes the pre-college curriculum, specifically the computer literacy requirement. The Task Force heard consistently from K-12 stakeholders that this requirement is outdated and must be changed. Because technology is now integrated into most classes, this requirement represents an unnecessary burden. From higher education stakeholders the report was also consistent on two items. One, in many cases, students are more knowledgeable than the classes require. And, two, the requirement may be especially challenging to meet for non-resident students who are unable to test-out of the requirement and who come from schools where technology courses that meet the statutory requirement are not available.

In answer to these consistent arguments from front-line professionals, HB 2197 removes the one unit in the field of computer technology requirement from the statutorily defined pre-college curriculum.

The single largest change included in this bill is the provision that gives the Board the responsibility to establish admissions standards to state universities. This change does not represent a transfer of power; rather it puts the responsibility and accountability for admissions standards with the Regents.

The responsibility for admissions standards residing in a Regents-like body is common across the U.S. In fact, Kansas is unique in its approach to state university admissions, and is the only state we could find that places the responsibility for admissions standards with the Legislature.

A survey of all the Regents-like bodies in the U.S. was conducted to inform the Task Force and Board's recommendation to present this statutory change. Of the responding 37 states, only Florida and Colorado include admissions requirements in statute. And, in both cases, the relevant statute establishes minimum standards with institutions allowed to set higher standards consistent with their missions and roles, or a Regents-like body is allowed to set higher standards.

In neighboring states the Regents-like bodies are authorized to set admissions criteria at some level. In Missouri, for example, their Regents-like body establishes selectivity levels. In Oklahoma the regents establish minimum requirements, and in Colorado, statute provides general guidance for admission with most requirements set by their Department of Higher Education.

Even the general public supports the Board having authority to set admissions standards. A public opinion poll, conducted by a nationally respected firm, showed that 71% of Kansans support the recommendation included in HB 2197 to give this authority to the Regents.

And, finally it is worth noting that many of the changes included in HB 2197 would not have been necessary (for example the homeschooled issue) if the Board had the responsibility to set admissions standards initially. Placing responsibility with the Board allows the necessary flexibility to adapt to evolving educational trends and brings Kansas “up-to-date” with our national counterparts.

With this new responsibility comes accountability. The Board stands ready to accept the responsibility, and will remain accountable to higher education professionals, consumers, and the Legislature concerning the impact of more rigorous admissions standards.

It is important to note that any changes cannot be made without adequate time provided to allow students and the system to adjust to new standards. In fact, any changes more restrictive than current standards cannot take effect until the 2014-2015 Academic Year.

The alignment of the K-12 and higher education system plays, and will continue to play, the largest role in the success of students. While admissions standards and statutes cannot be the only lens through which education success is gauged, these issues play a role in fostering that success.

The critical examination of the current state university admissions standards was guided by input from stakeholders and constituents with a shared interest in fostering student success in education and the workforce. The legislation before you seeks to capitalize on their efforts to position Kansas in the context of the rapidly changing workforce environment, and the context of fostering the necessary alignment between all levels of education.

I hope that you will join the Regents, the Task Force members, stakeholders, and the people of Kansas in supporting these changes in admissions standards to position Kansas higher education for the future.

Members of the committee, thank you for your time this afternoon. At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have about the legislation or items included in the Task Force Final Report that was distributed to each of you with a copy of this testimony.