

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

We appreciate this opportunity to present written testimony in support of SB 49.

Over the past two years, I have crisscrossed the state of Kansas, visiting with school board members regarding the Basic Needs Assessment. When used the way intended it is such a valuable tool to enhance learning opportunities for Kansas students.

This brief story can show the effectiveness of the Needs Assessment when properly used – the inclusion of teachers and board members – is the only way this improvement to the learning process would have been implemented.

I was asked to visit a school that was showing very low scores in their reading assessments. I told the administrator that the only way I would participate was if a board of education member was present. The day arrived, and after putting up their test results, I started the conversation, saying, "We are not here to blame anyone for where we are today – this exercise is for us to work together to find a way to improve."

After an initial silence, a first-grade teacher said – "I am a first-year teacher, and I really am not prepared to teach reading. When I started this year, I had no curriculum guide and no supplemental materials."

The third-grade teacher said, "I feel like I am a very good reading instructor, but when the students reach third grade, it takes me all year to catch them up."

Needless to say, the administrators were embarrassed to have those comments made before a concerned board member. The board member had one comment – "What are we going to do to make this better?"

The solution was they hired the third-grade teacher as a reading specialist to work with grades one through three, they hired another teacher for third grade, and they agreed to meet weekly to work together to improve their reading scores. There is no doubt that they will improve, and I am anxious to see the progress they make.

Bottom line – if there were not all the right people working together no change would have occurred.

I know of very few districts that follow the Building Need Assessment law the way that it is intended. I have had many more board members complain they are not even allowed in school buildings or to visit with staff. Board members should not be shut out of the process and just be token stamps at their monthly board meeting. Put some teeth in the law and you will see improvement.

We encourage you to approve SB 49 and thank you for your consideration.