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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Conferee: Troy Pitsch, Ph.D.

Organization: Superintendent, USD 329 – Wabaunsee County

Contact: dr.troypitsch@gmail.com | (512) 630-8691

Bill Number: SB 384 – Public Innovative Districts

Position: Proponent

Testimony Type: Oral, In-Person

Date of Hearing: February 11, 2026

Chairperson Erickson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 384. My name is Dr. Troy Pitsch, and I serve as the Superintendent of USD 329, a rural district educating approximately 405 students. Despite our size and limited resources, our district consistently exceeds state averages in mathematics, reading, and postsecondary outcomes; results driven by intentional design, community partnerships, and disciplined local governance.

The Need for Speed: Aligning Innovation With the School Year

The greatest barrier to rural innovation today is not a lack of vision or capacity, but a lack of administrative alignment with how school systems actually operate. Under current law, districts must apply for Innovative District status by December 1. That timeline requires superintendents to commit to staffing models and local partnerships nearly eight months before a program launches, and well before final budget figures or staffing realities are known.

SB 384 moves the application deadline to May 1, which reflects operational reality. By May, districts have clarity around budgets, staffing gaps, and student needs. Just as importantly, May is when local experts, particularly tradespeople who live and work in our communities, are finally in a position to commit to teaching roles for the upcoming school year. This change aligns state policy with local planning cycles.

The Vision: Reducing Structural Friction

In Wabaunsee County, we intend to leverage Innovative District status to build high-quality Career and Technical Education pathways in fields such as electrical and plumbing. While Kansas statute already allows non-certified experts to teach under certain conditions, the Innovative District designation provides something equally important: structural coherence.

As districts scale these partnerships, we need a board-approved, sustainable framework that offers programmatic flexibility over time. Without it, districts are left navigating a piecemeal waiver process that creates uncertainty for educators, administrators, and community partners alike. The Innovative District model allows us to operate under clear legislative authority rather than a continuous regulatory tug-of-war. Our goal is to place master tradesmen in classrooms—not in bureaucratic limbo.

The Barrier: The “Silent Veto”

Under current law, the state has up to 90 days to review an Innovative District application. In practice, this timeline functions as a silent veto. If I identify a master plumber in May, I cannot reasonably ask that individual, often a busy business owner, to wait until August for a possible decision from Topeka. If the approval process stalls, that expert will take on new contracts, and our students lose an entire year of hands-on training.

SB 384’s 30-day “deemed approved” provision ensures that when a local board and a qualified professional are ready to serve students, progress cannot be halted by administrative delay. It preserves state oversight while preventing inaction from becoming denial.

Conclusion

Innovation requires trust in local boards to act responsibly and decisively on behalf of students. Efficiency, in this context, is not a shortcut; it is a form of accountability. SB 384 strengthens Kansas’s commitment to locally driven innovation while maintaining appropriate safeguards. I respectfully urge the Committee to pass SB 384 favorably.

I am happy to stand for questions.

Respectfully,



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