

February 11, 2015



Kansas National Education Association  
715 SW 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Topeka, KS 66612-1686

## KNEA Op-Ed from President Mark Farr

Who do you trust most with your child's education? If you're following the Kansas Legislature you'd be forced to conclude that many representatives believe your trust is best placed in the hands of a paid lobbyist with no experience in the classroom and no responsibility for student success. I believe that the educators in your child's school--their teachers, their principal, their superintendent and their local school board--working together are the people Kansans should trust most with their child's education.

Collectively, the Kansas Association of School Boards, the United School Administrators of Kansas, the Kansas School Superintendents Association and the Kansas National Education Association met over several months to undertake a charge given to them by the Kansas Legislature to improve the Professional Negotiations Act. The result was a consensus-driven retooling that all steadfastly agreed achieves the objective of improved efficiency, effectiveness, and--most importantly--positively impacts student achievement.

Echoing our efforts, the Governor's own School Performance and Efficiency Task Force rejected special interest lobbyists' calls to destroy this collaborative mechanism in an effort to further weaken the voice of professional educators. Lobbyists are paid to get results for their employer and there is a place for lobbyists, but not on government appointed panels, task forces, or commissions where their influence serves only those they are paid to promote.

Educators also serve a special interest group--Kansas kids. I ask you to remember that the lobbyist I'm referring to in this editorial is paid to advance the same ideology that has our state on the brink of fiscal ruin but who won't disclose by whom he is paid (even when pressed to do so by elected representatives). If his plan weakens working conditions, learning conditions, and public schools--as similar laws have in other states--he and his employers are accountable to no one while you and I are left with consequences that impact your child.

Over specific objections by numerous committee members, a bill offered by this lobbyist and his allies has now advanced in the legislature's House Education Committee while an amended bill reflecting the consensus of the education community was rejected. The Representatives who voted in favor of this bill did more than thumb their noses at the whole of the education community. They sent a clear statement that opinions of lobbyists paid by outside special interests carry more weight with the legislature and state government than do the opinions of trained professionals and the recommendations of the Governor's own task force.

I believe with all my heart that this action by certain representatives in the legislature is wrong in every sense of the word. Pandering to paid lobbyists does not represent constituents. It sets a dangerous precedent by allowing those with money and special interests to rule state government and--most importantly in this case--it harms teaching and learning conditions for your child. I'm asking you to contact your representatives and tell them that "local control" means listening to those in your child's school rather than bowing to lobbyists whose job it is to promote their special interest agenda and who shouldn't be on a government appointed panel meant to guide law makers in the first place.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Farr".

Mark Farr, President

785-232-8271



[www.knea.org](http://www.knea.org)