



## Statement in Response to TEAL Program for Providing Temporary “Reservists” in Kansas Public School Classrooms

Kansas NEA believes that Kansas students learn best in classrooms staffed with highly qualified educators. After a decade of attacks on the education profession, and seemingly endless attempts to reduce funding, districts today face a growing workforce shortage. Keeping schools open and safe requires that we demand the kinds of support and resources needed to respond to a global crisis and that we follow the recommendations of medical experts.

In 2021, spearheaded by leaders of the Kansas House and Senate majority, efforts to limit local control over the ways school district officials can respond to the impacts of the pandemic were passed into law. Consequently, as the current spike in COVID infections and hospitalizations has reached critical levels, school officials are left with few options as they try to keep schools open while also keeping educators and students safe.

While addressing the workforce and substitute crisis we face today, Kansas NEA President Sherri Schwanz said: “the medical experts told us last year that if our state officials enacted the very policies they’ve enacted, we would almost certainly prolong the pandemic, putting both open schools and the health and welfare of Kansans at risk.”

Recent action to *temporarily* reduce requirements to supervise a classroom when an educator is absent is an unfortunate but necessary step forced upon our schools by legislative leaders more interested in partisanship than the health and safety of our students, professional educators, and our communities. “This is rooted in a years-long effort to weaken schools and point the finger of blame toward educators. A global pandemic that has collapsed entire economies worldwide has been viewed as an opportunity by some to sow division, erode confidence, and enact short-sighted policies that ultimately hurt students and families,” said Schwanz.

Schwanz continued, “We support the TEAL (temporary emergency authorized licenses) program because we have to in order to keep schools open, to ensure funding remains stable, and to shield professional educators from negative impacts that threaten their health, well-being, and financial stability. But, let’s not mince words. Our anger should not be directed at the response we’ve been forced to accept, but instead at the elected officials who put our educators and students into this position by enacting laws limiting local control over the response to a global pandemic.”

Kansas NEA is committed to keeping schools open so students can learn safely, according to medical experts.