



Testimony on SB51 – Proponent Verbal
House Education Committee
March 25, 2021
Rachel Marsh, CEO

Chair Huebert, Vice-Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Stogsdill and Members of the Committee, my name is Rachel Marsh, CEO of the Children’s Alliance of Kansas. The Alliance is an association of 18 private, non-profit child welfare agencies that collectively provide a full array of services for children and families in child abuse and neglect prevention, family preservation, foster care, adoption, independent living, and parent, youth, and child skill-building, mental health, and substance use treatment. One of the purposes of the Alliance is to advocate for public policy that strengthens child and family well-being in Kansas. We thank this Committee for considering legislation to support improvement in how our state meets the unique educational needs of foster youth.

SB51 would codify the current Executive Order requiring DCF and the Kansas State Department of Education to jointly prepare a Kansas foster care children annual academic report card. The Children’s Alliance supports SB51 for a variety of reasons, but the core is this: the challenges in meeting the educational needs of youth in foster care requires collaboration, data-sharing, and ongoing focus between the education system and the child welfare system together. There are multiple systemic gaps to identify, address, and resolve. Child welfare providers – whether case management providers, child placing agencies and the foster parents they sponsor, residential providers, or in-home services providers – face ongoing challenges in effectively coordinating with schools to ensure quality education for youth.

We believe it is critical that the data gathered in the report card provide information that will lead us to make improvements for students. From that perspective, the Alliance offers specific suggestions on the data required under SB51:

1. We recommend the report card provide **control/comparison data between students in foster care and students not in foster care**. With the initial report card, some categories of analysis were provided with contextual/comparison data, but others were not. We believe efforts to improve results for children in foster care can most effectively be focused by knowing how they are faring alongside their peers.
2. We recommend the report card endeavor to examine **pre- and post- data** for youth in foster care. A recent University of Michigan study showed that **foster care had a positive outcome on student educational performance**, when contrasted with performance before removal. In

order to drive improvements in our systems, we need to know whether foster care improves or decreases student performance – not only the general performance of students at one static moment.

3. We recommend the report card include **comparison or control data between students placed in foster care and students served by family preservation or other in-home services**. The Michigan study suggested that educational outcomes for children in foster care improved due to *improved parenting skills for families supported by foster care services*. If this result is replicated in Kansas, it may drive us to strengthen our focus on parent skill-building with at-risk students, or coordination of services for students receiving in-home prevention services – currently not included in the report card.
4. We would ask that the foster care report card include **data definitions** or formulas. In the initial report card published recently, the Children’s Alliance located a critical error in promotion rates that was corrected after data definitions were discussed with KSDE. Clear and transparent data definitions support gathering valid and reliable data to support intersystem collaboration.

Improved outcomes for students will result from ongoing, coordinated, and meaningful cross-system communication and collaboration that focuses on trauma-informed, practical systems improvements. To the extent that SB51 gathers quality and contextualized data, SB51 can help the education and child welfare systems work together to drive systems improvements. We look forward to working closely with educators and legislators to improve educational outcomes for foster youth in Kansas.

Thank you for your concern and commitment to the foster youth of Kansas and for the opportunity to share our support of SB51. I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Members of the Children’s Alliance of Kansas:

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