

February 25, 2021

Senate Committee on Education
Kansas State Capital
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, Kansas 66612

RE: Testimony for SB 235

Dear Chairwoman Baumgardner, Vice Chair Erickson, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Committee on Education,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today in support of the SB 235. It is refreshing to see this committee put our children's education first.

My daughter is a junior at Blue Valley West High School in Johnson County. She has had an amazing high school experience until March 2020. Her principal, Dr. Photts, runs the school with an encouraging excitement that promotes an inviting environment of learning and the kids who have attended this school under his leadership have flourished. Since the schools have been closed, school spirit has diminished, her desire to learn fading, and the relationship and engagement between teachers and students failing. Our district launched hybrid learning last fall for a few weeks until the gating criteria used changed causing her to return to full remote learning in November. Only a few weeks ago did she return to a hybrid model.

Remote and Hybrid learning as a solution simply is not adequate. K12 teachers are unprepared to teach in remote and hybrid learning. Their lack of experience and formal education and training evident as I observe and listen to classes being conducted online. This learning environment does not match the maturity level of the kids. Distractions, waning attention spans, the inability to remain focused and learn from a computer screen reduces comprehension and understanding of lessons. Not long ago the message was to limit screen time yet school district leaders quickly set aside that science closing down publicly funded schools in exchange for screen time. K12 education is critical to future success of our children. A success our teacher unions and school boards are depriving the children from in not offering a full in school option.

We all have that one teacher who made a difference in our life; the one who believed in you, talked with you, encouraged you to take a path you may never have taken and was able to guide and teach you. Why can our children today not have the same advantage? Rather, school leadership have allowed a virus to so drastically change the education system out of fear. Next month is our COVID one year anniversary and the Kansas death rate at a 0.001% for all ages as of 9am on February 21, 2021. This death rate includes those we know are at the highest risk, those being over the age of 70.

The schools did not close for H1N1 virus, known as a far more deadly virus to children. The schools did not close for the 2014 Ebola outbreak nor the 2018 H3N2 Flu season defined by the media as record-breaking, deadly and the worst since the 2009 Swine Flu pandemic. In 2018, pictures of outdoor tent cities existed treating patients as hospitals became overcrowded yet schools did not close. Schools did not shut down after school shootings but rather teachers went through extensive training on how to protect the students in their classroom not send them home for online education because of fear.

DeSoto School District has been in full person classroom education for five (5) weeks with a reported increase in achievement, engagement and student grades according to a teacher I spoke with. Private and religious based schools have been in-person full time since August demonstrating the ability for in person education without the spread of a virus among the students. For our district, elementary students and special need students returned to full in person learning last fall yet middle and high school have not and continue to be discriminated against by our superintendent and school board. We need our legislature to step in and correct this situation for the public school kids of Kansas.

My daughter shares that her teachers are not as friendly and welcoming this year. She shared that teacher involvement low, that trying to get ahold of teacher with questions frustrating, and teachers too complain about remote and hybrid learning models. Teachers are not equipped to teach in two different models of education at the same time having half the class on screen and the other half in person. We need to remove such unreasonable expectations on our teachers to teach in hybrid and remote learning. When my daughter and her friends gather to study, figure out assignments and work together on assignments in a face to face group setting, as they would in school, it just makes one wonder what fear and mask of safety the districts hide behind.

The solution should not cause more harm than the problem. A Blue Valley School District parent whose child by the grace of God was unsuccessful at taking his life shared that the Children's Mercy Hospital ER nurse confided in her that the ER has seen an increase in ER visits related to suicides. They are treating and pumping children's stomachs of kids suffering from the world created by our elected officials. Another parent has shared with me her youngest child now on anti-depressants. The school districts appear to have taken no consideration into the home environment of the student. Parents have returned to work yet the child left home alone online all day by themselves, isolated from social interaction. Thank you for working to put a stop to this madness and return our children to having the option for in person learning.

The purpose of education is to teach children not only math, science, English and history but also to encourage them to grow intellectually by asking questions, exploring new thoughts and ideas in a subject that interests them and socially interact with others. Teachers want to encourage inspiring young minds and this cannot be accomplished through a computer screen.

I want to thank each of you for the courage to put this bill forward. It is sad that the idea of in person learning in our public schools is not encouraged and even fought by teacher unions in the county. Thankfully in Kansas, with the passing of this bill, we can move forward.

The bill straight to the point and simply puts kids first. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,
Laura Klingensmith
Johnson County Resident
House of Representatives - District 27
Senate – District