



February 16, 2022

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Kansas Action for Children
Opponent Testimony on SB 496
Senate Education Committee

Chairwoman Baumgardner and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns with SB 496. KAC is a nonpartisan, nonprofit advocacy organization that supports policies that help every child grow up healthy and thrive.

We oppose this bill because it creates an adversarial environment for teachers and parents instead of building positive relationships between them. While we agree that parental involvement is an important component of student success, we believe that SB 496 will ultimately hinder schools from being able to meet the needs of every child.

First, we oppose any move to weaken childhood immunization requirements. Measles, mumps, and polio immunizations have protected Kansas students from communicable and deadly diseases for decades. Kids learn best when they are healthy, and the open-ended and subjective provision in this bill jeopardizes their health – and community health.

We are further concerned that this bill will exacerbate disparities – or at least differences – in the education we offer to students based on the cultural makeup of their community. Put simply, we don't want the books available to children in school to depend on what others find agreeable. Children don't get to choose where they're born, and their zip code shouldn't dictate the quality and depth of the education our state offers them.

Schools are adapting to the needs of the new generation. Personalized learning plans, work study programs, and student-to-student support and group work are essential components of a child's day at school. Teachers adapt their teaching to the questions and curiosities of students, and limiting what a teacher can provide steals an opportunity from our kids that they will never get back.

KAC focuses a significant amount of our time on early learning systems and ensuring every Kansas child is prepared to enter kindergarten. This preparation includes not only their ability to learn, but also their ability to participate in a classroom setting – how to share, how to resolve disagreements, how to self-regulate, and so on. These are skills that will help them in school and beyond. Public school teachers, in partnership with parents, develop and nurture skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, and how to consider more than one point of view. Removing potentially controversial material in our school libraries and classrooms gets in the way of the building of those skills.

Our public school system in Kansas is one of the most critical avenues for the success of Kansas kids. We have dedicated administrators, teachers, and support staff who care deeply about the children who enter their doors every week. We ask the Legislature to consider positive and productive ways to help our teachers and schools, who are struggling more than ever before. **Bills like SB 496 weaken our public school system, seed distrust in education professionals, and set a bad example for our students as they learn how to solve real problems in their daily lives.**

We all want our kids to grow up healthy, happy, and prepared for the real world. As a state, we should aspire to give every child the tools they need to live up to their potential. To achieve those goals, everyone has a contribution to make, and each contribution is needed to set a child on the right path. So please, let the teachers teach, the parents parent, and – most importantly – let the kids learn. Please vote “no” on SB 496.

If you have any questions, you may contact me at mitch@kac.org.