

March 10, 2021

House K-12 Education Budget Committee

Written Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 235

Chairwoman Williams and Members of the Committee:

The Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD) appears today in opposition to Senate Bill 235.

Last July, all parents were given the option to choose between in-person and remote learning. We gave them an option to change that selection at the end of the semester. Once that decision was made, we were able to allocate our teaching staff between in-person and remote learning. The desire for efficiency requires that we staff our buildings and classes efficiently, leaving little if any room to accommodate significant numbers of students changing their learning mode (in-person or remote). Even a small change could require us to hire additional staff, which we do not have the financial resources to do, change teacher/student assignments, and possibly require student to switch to a different building.

SMSD is returning to all grades in person as an option on March 22, 2021. Our Board's decision was made on February 22, 2021, based on contemporaneous infectious disease health information from our Johnson County Health Department and other trained health advisors. Parents were given the option of staying virtual, hybrid, or in-person, and made the selection that best fit their family and student needs. It is critical that families abide by those choices, as they were advised when they made their selection.

SMSD has expended considerable energy and attention to manage the allocation of resources to serve the parents' interests, including arrangements for classroom and virtual teachers, the preparation and organization of paraprofessional and other services and equipment from some of our students with the most high-risk and needs, as well as the preparation and preservation of health and safety resources and service.

The anticipated level of disruption of even a small number of virtual student returning to in-person learning with about 35 days of in-class learning remaining in the current school year would do more harm than good.

With regard to the longer-term, we remain opposed to the bill because its mandate would supercede reasonable Board and local public health experts decision-making with regard to the safety and security of our students, teachers, and staff. We believe this bill complicates future responses to additional disruptions

related to COVID-19 or other causes. Nonetheless, our concern is immediate and practical and we urge the committee to not pass the bill, or amend it to delay the implementation until after the conclusion of the current school year. We would also ask that districts retain the flexibility to require families to stick with their choice of learning model for a specific length of time, to be determined by the district.

If I can provide any additional information or answer questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

David A. Smith
Chief Communications Officer

Direct line: 913-993-6448
E-mail: davidsmith@smsd.org