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K-12 Education Budget Committee
Proponent for HB 2513

Good afternoon committee members and thank you for taking time to hear from me today concerning my support of any and all legislative action that protects and further ensures informed parental consent in all matters pertaining to the children of the state of Kansas, specifically this amendment with regard to tests and surveys that dictate funding of public education. I urge you to vote in favor of this Amendment to make a strong statement that Kansas supports teachers in the classroom and the partnership between schools and parents.

Not only have I spent ample time in private and public classrooms the last 20 years, I am also a mother of 4. As well, I have served as a mental health support provider in a local public school through a partnership with a community mental health provider. My degree and background are in Health and Human Performance. For twenty plus years I have educated and supported youth and adults alike in understanding and taking control of their own personal health choices, physical and emotional.

I was raised the child of a professional educator. My mom is a retired business education professor, having served as the president of the National Business Educators Association, spending the better part of 30 years educating young people as well as the nation's top educators. My great grandfather was the state board of education president for a time, and many others in my family serve as teachers in a plethora of pedagogies and roles within education.

I mention this so that you will understand my commitment to the social and emotional well-being of young people and their families. You may even find it odd that I am here to speak in favor of an amendment that places the priority of parents above that of the system since that is the direction we see advocates of public education taking our country right now.

I have been an outspoken advocate for informed parental consent for many years, including through the last few years of the Covid crisis. To the bane of many in the district where I currently live, I spoke publicly last year against pictures of minor athletes and students being taken and stored on the personal devices of teachers and coaches, for the express purpose of contact tracing, without the informed consent of parents, and worked diligently to invoke changes to board-approved policies that would ensure the safety of all students' privacy at school. When pressed on this issue of student data being stored on a teacher's personal cell phone I was told "legal says it's ok." What they meant was they had spoken to the KASB attorney who assured them protection from any legal trouble. Student safety was placed far, far down the list of importance. The administrators, nor school board members, were interested at all in how this affected my daughter, or the other students. The wellbeing of the minor's in their

care was second-fiddle to their legal cover. This actually told me they knew it was wrong! Otherwise they wouldn't have consulted legal at all and attempted to subvert the issue. My concerns as a parent were overshadowed by "legal says it's ok."

Prior to Covid, I publicly expressed my concern about the damage being caused by "Anti-Bullying Campaigns" in public education. As a society, we quickly began to see the effects of forcing kids to view every undesirable behavior as an offense and an act of bullying, instead of as an opportunity to foster self-control, confident boundary setting, and healthy relationship skills, thus creating millions of bully police focused on the extrinsic world, with less and less personal accountability. These were of course targeted efforts to draw attention to the poor behavior of a few, magnify it and treat everyone as if they are being "bullied." The end result was creating a larger problem in the name of a solution.

We are doing that exact same thing now with gender identity, racial discrimination and racism, sexuality, and socio-economic/at-risk factors. We are globalizing the plight of a few and foisting them upon all young children in schools to "normalize" the problem, for the sake of eradicating it. It didn't work with the Anti-Bully Campaigns; it isn't working now. Proponents of SEL use the data of increased teenage mental illness, suicide, and current and projected need for intervention services as a means for funneling more endless services, while they make money off of this "crisis." They do not acknowledge that the increased devastating data on childhood mental illness are largely caused by the method of intervention itself. Sort of like, the cure is worse than the virus...

I am trying hard to understand the need for an amendment such as this one, as informed parental consent should be a given, embraced by every member of an intelligent and morally astute society. That any rational person would argue against it, and that any law-maker would not see the benefit of ensuring the role of parents and caregivers in the lives of their children is to deny reality. Why we would NOT want informed parental consent is a quandary to me! As the Founders of this country, in the penning of it's guiding contract between the citizens and government so aptly observed, the Truth is self-evident, and so should be the importance of preserving the relationship between children and their parents.

As a member of the community of mental health providers, although some points we would surely vary on, the importance of a client's family as an integral part of their social network is not debatable, especially as it pertains to children. No matter what we do with youth, their immediate family structure and culture are the primary influence on a child's anticipated success as an adult. To deny this is, again, to deny reality. Knowing this to be true, what self-respecting adult attempts to, by any means, limit, restrict, or otherwise deny informed parental consent when engaging children? In fact if the goal were to improve the learning environment and to better create an atmosphere ripe for student achievement, the public education system would be instituting programs and policies that elicit even more involvement from the people who have the most impact on student success. Sure, we give lip service the importance of parents, but our laws and school policies do not support this assertion.

SEL initiatives rarely take into account an age progression and age appropriateness of interventions. From day one human beings are wired for emotional connection to their caregivers. This happens in every single human interaction that a child is exposed to. In the early formative years a child begins to understand the world around them and their role in it. We don't have to teach social emotional skills like we teach math or reading skills; these SE skills are essential to the human's survival and are innate and instinctual. Our job as educators is simply to model appropriate and confident social and emotional behaviors, not to teach it as if it is separate from our natural being. This is why the bond between parent and child is both strong and necessary for a child to thrive in life and be able to create meaningful relationships with peers and authority in the future.

Therefore, a focus on providing an atmosphere ripe with opportunities to develop these social and emotional skills early in life is important for each child. When we support a family's ability to provide for these needs at early ages, thus allowing a child's natural development of the skills, we create a ripe and fertile ground within the child to achieve academic success. We do not need to continue pushing these skills at later ages when adolescent children should be focused on more devoted academic skills. Quite frankly, when we do, we often make hypocrites of ourselves.

I am a mother of twins. At an early age we heard the tired diatribe that we needed to separate them as much as possible, certainly in school settings, so that they could develop their own "personalities." Just as each single child is unique, so is each multiple child, as well as the pair themselves. While some twins may benefit from the time apart, studies show that early and forced separation can cause undo and often irreversible anxiety in one or both twins. At birth my twins each had specific physical needs which meant they were immediately separated; one struggling more than the other to maintain his vitals. However, when reunited, like some cosmic answer to an eternal dilemma, my boys miraculously began to do better and their vitals were strong without medical intervention. We saw the hand of God in that moment, and it shook the entire room, like the air that encompassed us was physically smiling. It was a moment seared into my memory.

Separate them?? No. That would be like separating the stars from the sky.

As far as our educational experience with them progressed, I shared some more recent studies of twin development with their prospective school and explained to them that academic opportunity was the school's contractual agreement with me; their personalities, on the other hand, were solely and divinely theirs, and by virtue of being our children, my husband's and my responsibility. Of course, this may not be the case for all twins, as again, each is unique. It wasn't then, nor is it now, the school's responsibility to assume that role or to determine who my child will be in this life, only to provide them with an opportunity to learn.

When we as educators and providers are not upfront and forthcoming with our assessments, interventions, and full intentions, we break trust with parents. This is detrimental to the network of teachers and staff who, I believe, truly do want to do what is right for each child. More

children are being harmed than helped by laws and school policies that seek to usurp the role of parents and make determinations about a child's needs without the student or their family even realizing it.

For instance, my son was assessed in first grade for reading comprehension through the RTI program. The reading specialist had determined he needed individualized support. We knew he was actually ahead of the game and did not need the service. Even his classroom teacher was dismayed and wanted him back in the classroom but she said she had no influence over the decision. I inquired as to the testing method, sat in on an "individualized" session, and ultimately signed him out of this unnecessary and potentially damaging program. When signing the form as it was written, I asked if this was being turned over to DFS because of the accusatory language in the letter. Today, my son is a highly gifted 8th grader who I have to threaten to destroy his books in a blazing fire if he doesn't STOP reading! The best thing I ever did for that kid was to recognize a flawed system and opt him out of it, so that I could salvage his intelligence and protect his love of reading! The Accelerated Reading program pushed in Kansas schools today has the same effect on students. I speak routinely on my disdain for the program! Love of learning and reading is not a part of this costly program at all! It takes the classroom teachers out of the equation and cheapens the reading experience down to simple ink on paper, and the emphasis on performance destroys children's confidence and love of reading. Yet it continues to be pushed in schools. It is a waste of money and the long term results do not support any benefit to student achievement, yet it is SOLD as a means of reading assessment.

Families, parents, and the society at large are unaware how these in-school surveys and tests are being used to shape an "individual path", design interventions, and target a family with services. Recorded data about a student's academic, behavioral, socio-economic, and personal preference information is assessed and shared. Parents, and in many cases even classroom teachers, are not made aware of how this information is being used outside of their individual district to determine ratings and funding for schools, direct career paths for students, and pump funding for new services into the school. This provides for a breeding ground of incentives for districts to inflate data points in order to ensure further funding into the district. It becomes a tool to elicit support from the community to say "look at the needs we serve", all the while student academic achievement across the board continues to decline. Districts with a greater population of low-income students receive more funding dollars, as if children from poorer homes are not capable of the same student success simply because of money. Likewise, social factors are not always indicators that a child will struggle academically; not every child who comes from a broken family will struggle academically, just as children from "stable" homes are not guaranteed to succeed in school.

Parents are naturally trusting of their child's teachers and schools, without understanding that this data is potentially being shared outside the district. We do not always know how this data is used to benefit or possibly harm our children in their future endeavors. Parents need to be valued in the process by way of upfront and transparent communication about how data collected from their students is being collected, used, and with whom it is shared and for what

purpose. Parents must also be informed that their student is not required to participate in these tests and surveys and instead of “opting out”, have the option to “opt in.” Please do your part as our elected representatives to support and protect informed parental consent and vote yes for this amendment.

Thank you!