

House of Representatives Committee on Education

Proponent Testimony on HB 2302

Given by Linda Highland on February 17, 2021

Thank you for this opportunity to come before you as a proponent for HB 2302. This identical bill passed out of the House Education Committee in 2020 by a unanimous vote.

My concern, as a trained professional in Secondary Education and as a parent and grandparent, is that the practice of giving certain tests, questionnaires, surveys, and examinations is overused in our schools. What kind of behaviors are youth focusing upon in school? Increasingly, the school day is concerned with surveying as a tool in Social and Emotional Learning. Unfortunately, the lessons are not always positive and focused upon the wellbeing of our youth. This is most evident when it comes to drug and alcohol abuse, and the widespread use of the Kansas Communities That Care Youth Survey that gives more attention to their use, than to a healthy lifestyle.

The Kansas Communities That Care Youth Survey (KCTC) is just one example of a survey that has been widely used in Kansas schools for over 25 years as a tool for collecting data and receiving grants for many programs. A growing number of agencies use the unreliable data collected from the KCTC survey. It is also the survey used to support the need for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Curriculum used in most Kansas schools and to establish the need for drug testing students. This hour-long survey, administered four times in a student's life in 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grades, uses leading questions and violates a student's right to privacy by asking very personal questions about drug and alcohol use, family life issues, gun violence, if they think "life is not worth it," if they "hate being at school," and much more. The questions are depressing at best and, in some cases, place dangerous suggestions in the minds of our youth.

The KCTC is a program in the office of the United States Government's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, who funds it through the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services/Behavioral Health Services and administers it through the Southeast Kansas Education Service Center- Greenbush. It has been given in Kansas since 1994, and was first developed by Drs. J. David Hawkins and Richard Catalano at the University of Washington's Social Development Research Group.

As it turns out, this author feels the best training for alcohol and drug abuse and other bad behaviors is the KCTC survey. After you read the KCTC survey, please ask yourself if a sixth grader, or any student for that matter, should be asked the KCTC survey questions. Most teachers will tell you these questions are never appropriate for a sixth grader. Students are told in the instructions, "This is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers." However, the survey incriminates the students and feels very much like a test.

Young adults, whom I have asked if they recall taking a drug survey in school, say that occasion was one they will never forget. It is disturbing that, of all the tests in their education career, this survey stands out and is always remembered by young people. I am also told that they so disliked like taking the KCTC Survey and reading the questions that many self-reported the worst possible answers just to get it done. And who could blame them. More and more legislators, parents, teachers, and citizens groups are questioning the validity of the KCTC survey based upon the known widespread false reporting by students. Data from this survey is not valid.

How would you have reacted as a sixth grader to these probing questions?

27. “How old were you when you first smoked marijuana, smoked a cigarette, had more than a sip or two of beer, wine or hard liquor, began drinking alcoholic beverages regularly, got suspended from school, got arrested, carried a handgun, attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting them, and belonged to a gang?”

35. “How many times in the past year have you been suspended from school, carried a handgun, sold illegal drugs, stolen or tried to steal a motor vehicle such as a car or a motorcycle, been arrested, attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting them, been drunk or high at school, taken a handgun to school, stolen something worth more than \$5, purposely damaged or destroyed property that did not belong to you (not counting family property), taken something from a store without paying for it?”

Should your sixth grader rate their quality of life in questions 46-49? “Sometimes I think that life is not worth it. At times I think I am no good at all. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure. In the past year, have you felt depressed or sad MOST days, even if you felt okay sometimes?” Is this appropriate during a difficult year like 2020, or for that matter, any year?

Next, the KCTC survey inquires about your sixth graders drug usage. “On how many occasions (if any) have you used in your lifetime and during the past 30 days marijuana; LDS or other psychedelic; cocaine or crack; MDMA (“ecstasy”); sniffed glue, breathed the contents of an aerosol spray can, or inhaled other gasses or sprays, in order to get high; Tyrexatine (“T-Rex”, “Reck”); methamphetamines (“meth”); prescription opiate pain relivers, such as Vicodin, OxyContin, or Tylox without a doctor’s orders; prescription tranquilizers, such as Xanax, Valium, or Ambien, without a doctor’s orders; prescription stimulants, such as Ritalin, or Adderall, without a doctor’s orders; or other illegal drugs.” Leaving nothing to chance exposure, every sixth grader has lost all innocence after just reading the questions. Remember, there is nothing wrong with any answer, say the instructions.

Questions 84-141 probe into the family and community life of your sixth grader. “Do you feel very close to your mother and your father? Do you enjoy spending time with them? People in my family have serious arguments. Have any of your brothers or sisters ever (long list of bad behavior)? If you carried a handgun without your parents’ permission, would you be caught by your parents?” This is a training on opportunities to turn in family members!

What is the outcome for students taking this survey? Naturally, youth will learn that all the bad behaviors listed in the survey are normal. The school has reinforced and normalized all the possible ways to consume drugs and alcohol and how to get into trouble.

After statistical analysis of the surveys, it may be determined that the students in the school district have problems so serious that the next obvious step must be drug testing. So, the answers did matter after all! If they come up positive on the real drug test with consequences, it could mean suspension, having it reported on their school record for at least two years, and off extracurricular activities. The positive things in life are taken away! The parent usually is not allowed to opt their child out of the drug testing program.

With this amending legislation of the 2014 Student Data Privacy Act, the parent or guardian must be shown copies of the actual tests, questionnaires, surveys, and examinations, and must give written permission to opt in their child to participate. After the 2014 Student Data Privacy Act passed, I was shown the KCTC survey and as an educator and parent I was outraged by the nature of the questions, only to find out our own children had been coerced into taking it without our consent. From that time on I have wanted Kansans to read the KCTC survey and other offensive and dangerous surveys. Parents and guardians have the right to read all documents when very personal and destructive line of questioning is going to be administered to their children. Hopefully soon the KCTC survey and other such violations to students and families will no longer be used. In their place, juvenile justice reliable data will be used.

I believe the KCTC Survey is a teaching tool that trains students in many dangerous lifestyles, just by the very reading of the survey. What youth focus upon comes about in their lives. By taking this survey a young sixth grader is fully introduced to the world of drugs and fully informed on all possible dangerous activities of which they could become involved. The questions are worded assuming that the youth have engaged in drug activity and are guilty of any number of dangerous lifestyle decisions. Is this fair to these young minds?

Is taking this survey going to solve anything in a student's life? How will the damage from the very taking of the survey be reversed? It has been administered since 1994 in Kansas schools, all the while, the categories it questions have gotten worse for our youth.

In summation, the KCTC Survey: 1. Has failed to solve anything 2. Promotes dangerous lifestyles and drug and alcohol usage 3. Validity of the data is questionable 4. Violates a student's right to privacy 5. Violates parental and guardian rights 6. Is costly to the state and local school districts 7. Wastes precious classroom time.

I humbly ask you to recognize that the KCTC Survey, and other behavioral testing, is being overused in our Kansas schools. Parental oversight is needed to correct this ominous trend. Please help protect our Kansas students from growing data collection invasion of their private lives and support HB 2302.