



## TESTIMONY OPPOSING SB 235

February 25, 2021

Chairwoman Baumgardner and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

The Kansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (KAAP) represents more than 400 practicing pediatricians in the state. The KAAP has the fundamental goal that all children and adolescents in Kansas have the opportunity to grow safe and strong. It is with this goal in mind that we want to communicate our strong opposition to Senate Bill 235 regarding returning to in person school on March 26<sup>th</sup>.

As we wait for enough vaccine for all teachers that want it, teachers and staff should have access to state-provided personal protective equipment that is medical-grade. Like healthcare workers and first-responders, dedicated education professionals are working on the frontlines of our collective battle against the COVID-19 pandemic. Keeping our education institutions safe and fully staffed is vital for the well-being of Kansas kids.

Having students attend classes in-person *safely* is an important goal. We believe our schools can *potentially* be considered safe for teaching and learning, with proper safety precautions even when the community is having high virus transmission. However, our schools can also become a hub for transmission through our classrooms, locker rooms, athletic and extra-curricular venues, and other meeting spaces without proper mitigation protocols.

We recognize the importance of permitting Elementary school students (in particular) to attend school in-person because of the reduced spread among this age group and the very significant need for continued skill development along with psychosocial support. However, we know that schools do not operate in a bubble protected from society at large, and everyone must do their part. Safe, in person learning can only occur when we implement proven measures to ensure protection against transmission of the virus among our students, patrons, and staff. Mitigating the risk of transmission to and from school into the homes of students, education professionals, and the broader community keeps our schools open and our students learning.

Additionally, there have been valid instances during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as in previous school years during Influenza epidemics, when there have not been enough teachers to keep schools open. Furthermore, there may be circumstances that are difficult to plan for or predict, such as natural disasters and acts of violence, which could cause schools to not be able to be open in person. All of these circumstances would essentially become illegal if this legislation were to pass. It is difficult to plan for all eventualities, so we should focus on prevention and mitigating risk where we can.



While we do believe that we need to be working towards getting all students back into the classroom as soon as safely possible, we oppose Senate Bill 235. Furthermore, this bill does not address important safety protocols that should be in place for in person school, nor does it support the state in helping schools access important safety equipment. We welcome any questions you might have and are happy to serve as your resource on all pediatric issues.

Respectfully submitted,

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