

Testimony before Senate Education Committee
Feb. 16, 2022
SB 496 – parents’ bill of rights
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Written-only testimony in SUPPORT
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Madam Chair and members of the Committee

This is the testimony we will be giving on SB 363 dealing with curriculum transparency. It also applies to this bill, which sets up a simple and basic framework for recognizing the rights of parents to play a key role in their child’s education. The bill is self-explanatory if not self-evident.

This legislation fits hand-in-glove with other transparency pieces in play this session. It goes without saying that there has been much concern expressed here in Kansas and nationally over K-12 curriculum content and the content of teacher professional development materials. Up until now, these have largely escaped public scrutiny, leading to suspicion, mistrust and a call for bans on what is perceived as attempts to indoctrinate or inculcate students with certain ideologies and/or to cause students to unnecessarily question their own values and beliefs.

Anecdotal CRT stories abound nationwide. Parents cite example after example while schools deny such a thing is real or being taught.¹ Rather than engage in debate over whether or to what extent this is happening, or to attempt to define what should or should not be banned, we agree with the approach and basic truth that public education should, indeed, be public. That is to say, parents, lawmakers and others who are keenly interested in what and how public education students are being taught should expect full transparency and access to that information.

The language of the bill is simple and straightforward. It is difficult to articulate any rational reason why these materials should not be available for review. Knowledge of what is being taught and, more importantly, how it is being taught is critical for parents to be able to make informed decisions about their children’s educations and for lawmakers to make informed decisions about education policy.

Curriculum transparency and parental involvement are key ingredients in the current ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act). Schools must provide parents with curriculum information and explanations of curriculum and forms of assessments used to measure student progress.² I think we can all agree that robust parental engagement should never be deemed an act of “domestic terrorism”, as some have suggested.³

¹ https://news.yahoo.com/critical-race-theory-wasnt-only-150021996.html?soc_src=social-sh&soc_trk=ma

² https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/ESSA%20Parent%20and%20Family%20Engagement%20Requirements%20PowerPoint.pdf

³ <https://sentinelksmo.org/kasb-wont-say-if-they-will-leave-national-school-boards-association/>

In a poll of teachers, conducted by EdWeek Research Center last November, a clear majority of teachers polled agreed that parents should be somewhat to very involved in selecting curriculum and materials selection in their districts, but only 31% said parents were involved in fact. A majority, 54% were in favor of allowing parents to opt their children out of classes, curricula or units they disapprove of.⁴

A poll conducted last December by SurveyUSA and commissioned by Kansas Policy Institute showed that parents overwhelmingly believe they should have the primary say in their child's education. (88%) Those polled were parents and grandparents of school-aged children who are also registered voters. Views of those polled crossed all geographic and ideological lines. Even 73% of self-professed liberals believe parents should have the ultimate say. Further, the poll showed widespread concern over what students were being taught, with 57% somewhat to very concerned vs. 39% who are not at all or not very concerned.⁵

In the wake of reports of protests and conflict between parents and school boards nationally, a Scott Rasmussen National Survey of 1,200 registered voters conducted last December found that 42% of voters generally side with parents while 28% side with school boards. Broken down by party affiliation, Republicans were found to side with parents by a 59% to 16% margin. Democrats, on the other hand, sided with school boards by a 45% to 26% margin. Independents sided with parents by a margin of 39% to 21%.⁶

These numbers are representative of recent election outcomes from governorships to school board races. With many state legislatures weighing in on parental bill of rights and curriculum transparency legislation, it is a virtual certainty that these issues will play a major role in upcoming primary and general election races across the country and in Kansas. Parental motivation to reform public education is at an all-time high and with that, legislative momentum for reform is reaching critical mass.

In short, if schools truly want what is best for students and have nothing to hide with what is being taught and how it is being taught, there should be unanimous support for curriculum and professional development transparency. If not, there will be legislative consequences and, very likely, political consequences.

⁴ <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/majority-of-educators-believe-parents-should-be-involved-in-curriculum-choices/2021/12>

⁵ <https://sentinelksmo.org/survey-kansas-parents-should-have-primary-say-in-education/>

⁶ <https://scottrasmussen.com/on-school-boards-conflicts-42-generally-side-with-parents-28-with-school-board/>