Kim Whitman, Proponent Testimony for SB 350

Madame Chair and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Kim Whitman, and I'm a parent of two teenagers in a Kansas public school. I'm here in strong support of SB 350 because what I've witnessed over the past twelve years should concern every one of us who cares about children's learning and development.

When my youngest entered kindergarten, the district handed her an iPad as part of the district's new 1:1 digital learning initiative. Every K–6 student received an iPad, and every 7–12 student a MacBook—despite teachers not being trained to use them effectively. Printers were removed from classrooms. Teachers were told to use the devices, and later even evaluated on whether they were using them enough.

Those devices came loaded with more than 300 applications: an internet browser with access to the world, YouTube Kids for elementary students, YouTube for secondary students, news apps, and countless "educational" games. Many children have been exposed to inappropriate content because of this open access.

Despite all this technology, they weren't even taught how to type. The very skills these devices supposedly support were never actually taught.

A kindergartener dragging a finger across an iPad is not developing the same fine motor skills as a child holding a crayon. When hands-on, tactile learning is displaced by screens, children's development is stunted.

Parents pushed back. But twelve years later, very little has changed. Every student from kindergarten through 12th grade is still issued a device, and much of their curriculum lives exclusively on that device.

Learning is hard work. It happens best when students read physical books, write by hand, and engage deeply with material. But today learning is short circuited by students using google and AI to complete their coursework. In addition students struggle to focus due to the constant distractions on the devices—short-form videos, entertainment apps, and endless websites compete for their attention. It's also an impossible task for teachers. One teacher told me that she had to choose between teaching the students that were focused on the lesson OR constantly reprimanding the students continuously watching entertainment videos in her class. She simply couldn't do both.

The consequences are showing. Attention fragmentation is real. Students struggle to read books independently. My son's 9th-grade English class had to read a novel aloud together in class because students could not sustain focus to read on their own.

This is not just my story. College professors across the country are sounding the alarm that students are arriving unprepared for the demands of higher education. Yet most local districts remain committed to the millions of dollars invested in a failed experiment.

SB 350 is a necessary course correction. Our children's education, and their future, are at stake. I urge you to pass this bill and help restore balance, focus, and real learning in Kansas classrooms.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to Kansas students.

Kim Whitman
Co-lead, Smartphone Free Childhood US
Co-lead, Distraction-Free Schools Policy Project
Co-lead, SMSD Digitally Wise
KimSpikingWhitman@gmail.com

Distraction-Free Schools
POLICY PROJECT

Addendum:

Findings

Online and digital products marketed to schools often provide unsafe, ineffective, and inappropriate experiences, and also collect and share student data without appropriate consent.

A lack of regulation has led to:

- Technology companies marketing commercial products as "educational" with no accountability.
- Children being given devices without proof of developmental appropriateness.
- Collection and monetization of student data for non-educational purposes.
- Platforms with advertising, gamification, AI, chat features, and addictive design in classrooms.
- Parents being excluded from decisions about their child's digital exposure.
- Insufficient privacy and safety protections in school technology.

- Significant increase in screen time, which research associates with elevated risks of psychological disorders, and other health risks.

Online and digital products do not prioritize student privacy or safety.

- Nearly all online and digital school tech apps share students' personal information with third parties.
- Nearly 90% of online and digital school tech products surveil or can surveil children outside school hours and "deep into their private lives."
- 60% of school apps send student data to third-party advertising platforms, and only 14% of schools enable caregivers to consent to technology use.
- Schools and online and digital school tech companies are prime targets for cybercriminals.

Online and digital products used at school increase student screen time at the risk of students' physical and mental health.

- Recent surveys show that students spend 1-4 hours daily on screens at school.
- There is a 60% increase in psychological disorders in children who have more than 1-2 hours of screen time per day.
- Using a computer seven hours a week or more triples the risk of nearsightedness.

Online and digital products are ineffective in producing positive learning outcomes.

- A study called "How We Learn" by researchers for Scientific American Mind reviewed more than 700 scientific articles on ten common learning techniques to identify the most advantageous ways to study. Of those deemed most advantageous for learning, exactly ZERO used any sort of advanced digital technology.
- The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development studied millions of High School students worldwide and found that those who used computers heavily at school "do a lot worse in most learning outcomes, even after accounting for social background and student demographics."
- Research suggests that, on average, students using tablets in "all or most of all" of their classes have reading scores that are the equivalent of a full grade lower on assessments than students who never use tablets in their classrooms.
- Fourth-grade students "who used tablets in all or almost all their classes had, on average, reading scores 14 points lower than those who never used them – a differential equivalent to an entire grade level."
- When replication studies conducted by independent researchers were compared to research conducted by app developers, the developer studies tended to yield 80% higher academic gains.

- National assessment scores have declined in recent years, with mounting evidence suggesting a correlation between technology saturation and poor student outcomes, especially in early education.

Districts that have implemented a regulation to reduce screen use have seen positive results:

- Kansas (McPherson Middle School): Moved from the 1:1 Chromebook model to a more intentional, balanced approach to technology use.
- Texas (Frisco ISD): Certain elementary campuses replaced Chromebooks with hands-on, print-first instruction in K–4 and saw stronger engagement from struggling readers.
- Florida (Hillsborough County): Adopted a tiered tech access model where only grades 6–12 received devices, and K–5 classrooms used paper-based curriculum, citing screen fatigue and disciplinary issues.
- Private/Charter Schools: Some use no classroom screens in K–6 and limit device use in 7–12. These schools consistently outperform peers in academic measures.

Schools have been sued due to student access to digital platforms that expose minors to harmful or inappropriate content—without informed parental consent.

Briefing Document for Safe School Technology Legislation

(link to model bill package)

It's time to take an objective look at the **education technology industry** (Ed Tech). Ed Tech is big business, and like the social media giants, its incentives prioritize profits over all else, including learning. The lack of oversight for this industry has left schools vulnerable to marketing scare tactics, leading them to spend taxpayer dollars on unproven—and sometimes harmful—digital platforms. These products not only distract from learning but also pose serious data privacy risks.

This bill is meant to protect kids, empower educators, and ensure that every classroom tool serves a single purpose: helping students learn in safe and effective ways.

The Problem:

1) School technology used by students may provide unsafe, ineffective, and inappropriate experiences;
2) School technology used by students may collect and share student data without appropriate consent and not in compliance with state and federal laws.

Proposed Solution:
Before being used in a classroom, school technology marketed for use by students must be independently vetted for:

1) Safety;
2) Effectiveness;
3) Compliance with existing laws.

Standards for device Introduction:

1) Grades K-5: No screen time.
2) Grades 6-8: Shared classroom technology use that is teacher supervised. Tech stays at school.
3) Grades 9-12: One-to-one tech introduced and may go home with students with parent permission.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1: What does this bill do?
This bill ensures that any school-issued digital technology used in public and charter schools:

1. protects student privacy and does not inappropriately store, share, or exploit student data.
2. is only used by the school if it demonstrates clear and measurable educational value beyond traditional methods like books, paper, and pencil.

Q2: Why is this bill necessary?
Too often, technology is introduced into classrooms without solid evidence that it actually improves learning outcomes. This bill sets clear standards: tech must be safe, must be effective, and must comply with privacy laws. Privacy is also a concern. Students' personal information is highly sensitive, yet many school-issued digital products collect, store, and sell student data.

Q3: Does this bill ban technology in schools?
No. This bill does not prohibit technology in classrooms. It ensures that digital tools are used responsibly—only when they offer clear benefits for student learning and when children's privacy is fully protected.

Q4: Won't this slow down innovation?
No. The bill encourages responsible innovation. Companies will need to design products that are safe, truly improve student learning and protect data. This raises the standard for everyone and promotes trust in school technology.

Q5: How will schools know if a product has "proven educational value"?
Schools will rely on independent research, peer-reviewed studies, or verified evidence of improved learning outcomes. Products must demonstrate that they provide a measurable advantage over traditional instructional methods.

Q6: How does the bill protect student privacy?
The bill prohibits companies from collecting unnecessary personal data, storing it indefinitely, or using it for commercial purposes. It prioritizes data minimization and transparency, ensuring parents and schools know exactly how student information is handled.

Q7: Who supports this bill?
This bill reflects the concerns of parents, educators, and child advocates who want schools to prioritize student well-being and real learning over corporate interests. It ensures that children are not treated as data sources for profit.

Q8: What will be the impact on teachers?
Teachers will continue to use technology when it truly enhances instruction. At the same time, they will no longer be pressured to adopt digital tools that do not add real value or that put students' privacy at risk.

Q9: Will this cost schools more money?
No. In fact, the bill may save schools money by reducing wasteful spending on ineffective technology. Schools can reinvest those savings in proven instructional resources and teacher support.