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Oral Testimony - Opponent
House Bill 2236
House Committee on Education
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Chairman Thomas, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 2236.

Kansas NEA does not oppose parental involvement. In fact, one resolution that guides our organization says:

Kansas NEA believes that the involvement and support of parents/guardians is imperative for students to perform at their optimum levels. Parental/guardian involvement in a child's education is key to academic success and academic development. Parents/guardians, teachers, and schools must share in the responsibility to maintain positive and effective working relationships. KNEA supports actions and programs that enhance parents'/guardians' ability to participate actively in their children's education.

Additionally, one of our core values is partnership. Kansas NEA believes partnerships with parents, families, communities, and other stakeholders are essential to quality public education and student success. But we believe it should be just that, a partnership. Partnerships are most effective when they come with mutual respect and a shared goal, which in this case is preparing every student for success in an ever-changing and diverse global economy.

This is why most teachers right now maintain multiple, interactive channels to communicate with parents on what students are doing in their classrooms, to upload samples of student work for review, to track student progress, to send reminders, and to allow parents to provide feedback. Many will also send home hard copies of calendars outlining general themes to be covered each week for a month at a time. They also spend hours responding to emails from parents and returning phone calls to answer questions or address any concerns related to their student's learning.

Additionally, teachers invite parents to their classrooms for sneak peeks before school starts, parent information nights, parent/teacher conferences, and various classroom activities throughout the entire school year.

There is no denying how critical parent involvement is to the success of every student. Educators understand it is a vital component to being successful in their jobs. It is part of their job, and it is why they fully embrace it.

While this bill is labeled as "establishing parents' right to direct the education and upbringing of their children," we would argue that this bill does not afford parents with anything more than a statutory duplication of what is already being done right now.

Once again, we believe that the problem this bill is attempting to address is a perceived problem founded in misinformation and divisive rhetoric rather than a real problem.

Many school districts already operate with policies adopted by their local boards that outline the same rights as those provided in the bill. These policies are published on school district websites. They include, but not limited to:

- **Policy JAA: Equal education opportunities** – Establishes that school districts cannot discriminate on the basis of sex, religion, color, national origin or ancestry, handicap/disability, or age and provides how someone can submit inquiries or concerns.
- **Policy JRD: Hearing Request** – Establishes that a hearing can be requested by a parent, guardian, or eligible student to challenge the content of the student’s education record and outlines the procedure.
- **Policy JQ: Exceptional Students** – Provides parents of any student in grades 11 or 12 or a gifted student in grades 9 through 12 with the right to apply to enroll their child at a postsecondary education institution.
- **Policy IB: School Site Councils** – Outlines the makeup of School Site Councils in which parents as well as members of the business community and community leaders have opportunities to review materials and provide feedback before they’re adopted by the school board. They are also allowed to bring forward concerns they have with the respective building. These meetings are open to the public. Even if a parent is not a member of the Site Council, they’re still able to attend.
- **Policy IC: Education Program** – Specifies that curricular offerings as well as educational goals and objectives are available for inspection upon request.
- **Policy IF: Textbooks, Instructional Materials, and Media Centers** – Outlines the parameters and expectations for selection of materials as well as the process for challenging textbooks, instructional materials, and media centers. “Any student, parent, or legal guardian of a student currently enrolled in the district having a complaint about textbooks, media center, or other instructional materials shall meet with the teacher, media specialist, or principal.”
- **Policy IFCB: Field Trips** – Provides that parental/guardian consent is required for student attendance of field trips or other activities.
- **Policy IJ: Evaluation of Instructional Program** – Relates to Policy IB (Site Councils) in that it outlines that a superintendent may develop guidelines to evaluate instructional programs on a regular schedule and can include the involvement of committee, not just limited to curriculum review committees.
- **Policy IKCA: Human Sexuality Education** – Provides parents with the right to opt their student out of all or a portion of the Human Sexuality classes and establishes that arrangements shall be made for class reassignment during the opt-out period.
- **Policy IKD: Religion in Curricular or School Sponsored Activities** – Outlines how students and staff members may be excused from participating in activities or practices contrary to their religious beliefs.
- **Policy IKDA: Religious objections to activities** – Outlines the process by which a parent or guardian should follow when requesting that a student be excused from participating in activities for religious reasons.

- **Policy KN: Complaints** – Provides parents with the methods by which they can submit complaints, including complaints about curriculum and instructional materials (KN).

It is not uncommon for educators, particularly those in English Language Arts courses, to make alternative arrangements for students to accommodate their beliefs. They work with the parents to find a suitable alternative so the student can still complete the requirements of an assignment for the course. However, we question how allowing students to be completely excused from the assignment altogether with no academic penalty, as outlined in this bill, is not a direct violation of locally adopted board policies that outline makeup work requirements even for unexcused absences, or the course standards and graduation requirements as established by the Kansas State Board of Education.

This brings me to another core value of ours: democracy. Kansas NEA believes public education provides future generations with the skills to be involved, informed, and engaged in our representative democracy; to become functioning members of our global society.

As such, we believe in upholding article six of the Kansas Constitution, which clearly establishes the duty and authority of the State Board of Education and, subsequently, local school boards. Voters have the ability to impact the direction of public education across the state with the elections of State Board of Education members. Additionally, voters in each school district have the ability to determine the direction of their neighborhood schools every time they participate in nonpartisan school board elections.

These elected board members then have a responsibility to build relationships and engage with parents, teachers, and community stakeholders to help guide them in the decisions they make. If parents are unhappy with the performance of their school board members, they have the ability to vote them out. Finally, we believe that public education is the gateway to opportunity, and all students have the right to a quality public education that develops their potential, independence, and character. As such, we believe we should be working together for the common good, not wasting time and taxpayer dollars on a misperceived issue deployed by a national effort to cast doubt on public schools.

We should be working to ensure that teaching is the most attractive job in the state, and we should be working actively to recruit quality professionals, nurturing the joy of teaching, and trusting these highly trained professionals to do their jobs just as we do with so many other professions.

An educated and well-trained workforce is essential to a healthy economy. These students are our next generation of teachers, engineers, architects, contractors, doctors, nurses, welders, plumbers, legislators, and so on. They all deserve an equal opportunity to succeed.

Therefore, we encourage legislators to join us as we continue cultivating partnerships between parents, families, community members, and other stakeholders for the purpose of preparing students for success.

Kansas NEA does not believe this bill is the way to do that. We urge you to oppose HB 2236.