

2022 K-12 Education Budget Committee

Proponent of HB 2513

Testimony by Linda Highland

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Chair, Kristey Williams and Committee Members thank you for your service and for this opportunity to come before you. I am testifying as a proponent for HB 2513.

Kansas Social Emotional Character Development Curriculum (SEDC), otherwise known as SEL, and its accompanying data collection on students is a blockade to their academic achievement. As a trained professional in secondary education and as a parent and grandparent, I am concerned about the practice of administering, collecting, and storing data files on students from certain Social Emotional Learning (SEL) tests, questionnaires, surveys, and behavioral examinations. This system is overused in our schools, takes away from academics, is dangerous to the student, and a violation of students' and parents' Constitutional rights.

The Kansas Department of Education was the first in the nation to fully adopt a comprehensive SEL K-12 curriculum in April 2012 and it was revised in July 2018. Education decision-makers now look toward probing students psyches rather than instilling academic knowledge. SEL has become the hottest topic in American public education. Increasingly, the school day is concerned with online data collection, surveys, and behavioral questioning to fulfill the 80 to 85% of the school day spent on SEL, as reported by Dr. Randy Watson, KSDE Commissioner, and KSDE Board Members. You read that right, academics accounts for only 15-20 % of the school day. A 1995 publication of *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* by Dan Goleman triggered a wave of belief among businesses and educators that only 20% of IQ factors determine life success, while 80% of success comes from emotional intelligence or EQ. Numerous psychologists and psychiatrists dispute his conclusion and even the term EQ; however this may be from where the focus of 80% of the school day on SEL arrived.

1994 brought a dramatic shift in public education. It was that year the term Social Emotional Learning (SEL) was coined at a meeting hosted by the Fetzer Institute. That same year President Clinton signed Goals 2000 Educate America Act into law. This push for Outcomes Based Education (OBE), implemented by Goals 2000, changed the focus away from a broad academic foundation, but instead toward state directed outcomes for the child. With it, state curriculum standards and standardized tests circumvented local school district control. Workforce Development education began training workers

for a nationally managed economy with the passage of the federal School to Work Act and the Workforce Investment Act. Although KSBE voted to not bring Workforce Development to Kansas schools, then Governor Bill Graves signed an executive order to do just that. Goals 2000 was reauthorized under President Bush's No Child Left Behind, with heavy handed federal intrusion and mental health grants. Next came President Obama's Race to the Top/Common Core curriculum. A memorandum of agreement was signed by then Governor Mark Parkinson to bring Common Core into Kansas schools without authorization from the Kansas Legislature for the increased funding to do so. Schools are now under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). SEL was key in all these national education directives. ESSA title grants provide many opportunities for SEL funding and require SEL state reporting.

Also established in 1994 was CASEL, originally named the Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning, but now called Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional learning. They are well funded by many foundations and immediately began hosting conferences, producing documents, and promoting guidelines for educators. In a press release CASEL announced, in part: "SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities."

OBE, The Communities That Care organization (KCTC), and Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning (CASEL) all began in 1994 and they coordinate their efforts. SEL also ushered in an opportunity for business and public private partnerships to get in on the revenue source of data mining students. Kansas taxpayers have a right to know how much of their money is spent on SEL data collecting, both outgoing expenses and incoming revenues.

What is the return on investment of the SEL curriculum? A meta-analysis research study by Durlak and colleagues is commonly cited, claiming an 11% gain in achievement for every dollar spent. Contrary studies have been ignored by CASEL and other SEL proponents. Questionable brain science is used to support public schools, corporations, and private foundations who are setting norms to assess the values, attitudes, beliefs, and emotions of students from cradle to career. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) paints a gloomy picture of students' accomplishments in reading and mathematics, although they also test for social-emotional characteristics, a violation of federal law, and the 4th Amendment right to privacy.

Shouldn't the Legislature ask what is the return on investment of the SEL curriculum to Kansas students, parents, and taxpayers? We hear that KSBE surveyed businesses about the kind of student they wished the schools to produce. The leading questions asked seemed to give KSBE the go ahead to change the school day to be SEL dominated. Because education is now workforce development driven it would seem appropriate to blame business for this experimental SEL redirection in Kansas education. While businesses really want a well-educated student, achievement scores are falling drastically. All the while, our schools are fully funded, spending approximately \$18,000 a year per child. Millions and millions are being spent on SEL class work, while necessary reforms in teaching reading are ignored. What is our ROI on these expenditures?

Many parents are concerned about the mental wellbeing and safety of their children who are being harmed and frustrated by what is being taught, and they question what their students are learning academically. This, I feel, is the major reason 15,000 students have left Kansas schools. Deputy Commissioner, Craig Neuenswander, told this committee last week that he does not know where 15,000 students went. Also leaving are many highly qualified teachers.

We are seeing increased numbers of suicides among Kansas school children. The SEL curriculum contains a very negative tone in its content, including a major emphasis on suicide. It should be no surprise that local school districts and the Kansas Department of Education website report approximately 18% of Kansas school children are thinking about committing suicide, have a plan in place to commit suicide, and have attempted suicide. Teachers report that they are not allowed to see many of the tests students take on their laptops. Individual Plans of Study (IEP) are really data files on students.

KSBE claims local school districts have control, however all schools are forced into measuring SEL and it is a factor in accreditation. "Social Emotional Factors Measured Locally" is first on the list of results needed for accreditation in Kansas schools. The Foundational Structures for school accreditation are: "Tiered Framework of Supports, Stakeholder Engagement, Diversity and Equity, Communication and Basic Skills, Civic and Social Engagement, Physical and Mental Health, Arts and Cultural Appreciation, and Postsecondary and Career Preparation."

A Kansas Legislative Post Audit October 2021 report revealed major problems with school data security. Data on students is very valuable to many entities and this fact pushed the need for the 2014 Student Data Privacy legislation. Each school district must have their IT security in place. Can the schools promise security of all the data being shared with all the outside companies using SEL testing to data mine? [School Districts' Self-Reported IT Security Practices and Resources – Kansas Legislative Division of Post Audit \(kslpa.org\)](#) Attached is the KSDE Commissioner's response to the audit. Taxpayer ROI on a quality highly

academic school day is dwindling inside of our beautiful school facilities because SEL overrides all the curriculums.

What kind of behaviors are youth focusing upon in school today? Are these the best resources for teachers to use and from which students should learn? The SEL curriculum is being taught to mold minds of children at the most impressionable age to be compliant workers with government established SEL norms. Modeling and nurturing students is mostly replaced with lessons under SEL that give more attention to harmful behaviors and death than to a healthy lifestyle. Students wade through list after list of questions chalked full of inappropriate choices in the widespread use of more than twenty behavioral tests and surveys promoted by KSDE in the SECD, Social Emotional Character Development Curriculum. That list, which comes directly from KSDE Measuring Social Emotional Growth Locally 182-page document is attached to my testimony.

Let's take a deeper look into examples of questioning done in student behavioral data collection. The Kansas Communities That Care Youth Survey (KCTC) is just one example of a survey that has been widely used in Kansas schools for 28 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, along with a Youth Risk Behavior Survey Surveillance System from the CDC, and the Family Engagement Survey are used to make Climate Measures reports on our students. KCTC is also among the surveys used to support the need for SEL and to establish the need for drug testing students.

This hour-long, 26-page 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 usage, violence, and worst of all, if they "made a plan how you would kill yourself!" The questions are depressing at best, and in some cases, place dangerous suggestions in the minds of our youth. Page 124 from the KSDE Measuring Social Emotional Growth Locally document is attached to my testimony. It gives you a sample report of questions from the KCTC survey. I encourage you to read this report and all this 182-page KSDE document, available at ksde.org. Also attached to my testimony is the 2022 KCTC Student Survey, the Depression Suicide Optional Module, plus three additional modules.

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 (KDADS) and administers it through the 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. Taxpayers need to know how

much money KDADS receives for facilitating this destructive survey upon the students of Kansas.

As it turns out, this author feels the best training for alcohol and drug abuse and other dangerous behaviors is the KCTC survey, along with all the other behavioral tests being given. 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. I feel these questions should never be asked, nor are they age appropriate for a sixth grader. The survey incriminates the students and feels very much like a test.

Young adults, whom I have asked if they recall taking a drug and family life survey in school, state 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, and all such surveying. Data from this survey is not valid based upon the known widespread false reporting by students. Juvenile justice reliable data should be used in its place.

Should your sixth grader be asked if they want to kill themselves? Is this appropriate questioning during the recent difficult years, or for that matter, any year? Why are schools normalizing the option of killing oneself? “During the past twelve months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities? Have you ever seriously thought about killing yourself? Have you ever made a plan about how you would kill yourself? Have you ever tried to kill yourself?”

Questions probe into the family domain of your sixth grader. “Do you share thoughts and feelings with your father and your mother? Do you feel close to the adults you live with? Do you enjoy spending time with the adults you live with? Do people in my family often insult or yell at each other? Have any of your siblings or youth you live with ever (long list of bad behavior)? If you carried a gun without permission or supervision, would you be caught by the adults you live with?” This is a training to turn in family members who are mostly referred to as “the adults you live with!”

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

“How many times in the past year have you been suspended from school, carried a gun without permission, sold illegal drugs, stolen or tried to steal a car or other vehicle, been arrested, attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting them, been drunk or high

at school, taken a gun to school, stolen anything worth more than \$5, sold or dealt drugs, dropped out of school, felt like you would like to stop gambling, but didn't think you could, how often are you able to control your emotions when you need to?"

The KCTC survey inquiries 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.

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

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. The questions are not age appropriate for sixth graders and should not be given to any student regardless of age! Why are you allowing this to be done to these young minds?

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.

Parents and guardians should have the right to read and approve the administering of all such SEL very personal and destructive line of questioning before it can be administered to their children. I am outraged by the nature of the questions. Our own children were coerced into taking the KCTC survey without our consent. From that time on I have wanted Kansans to read the KCTC survey and all other offensive and dangerous surveys, tests, and behavioral questioning that go on during the school day throughout the SEL curriculum and all other curriculums with embedded SEL testing.

Questions must be asked by the Legislature and taxpaying public. Should the focus of Kansas education be to create a compliant worker, socially engineered through the SEL curriculum? Or should the focus of Kansas education be upon the wellbeing of our youth, and pursuit of excellence in each student's academic strengths? Where is the data stored? Are the sites secure? What kind of a data files are schools accumulating on students? Are businesses and NGO's collecting and storing data? Who should own these personal records? Are the parents and students shown the data files? Did the schools receive permission from parents to collect data on their children? Will this follow students for life? Is taking surveys going to solve anything in a student's life? How will the damage from the very taking of behavioral surveys be reversed? Are the millions spent on SEL to collect behavioral data on Kansas students a good return on investment in education? Is any of the behavioral data being collected valid? Is money being made selling the student data? Has SEL and behavioral testing become a blockade to learning?

In summation, Social Emotional Learning, behavioral surveys, and data collecting: 1. Have failed to solve anything for students 2. Promote dangerous lifestyles and drug and alcohol usage 3. Have questionable data validity 4. Violate a student's right to privacy 5. Violate parental and guardian Constitutional rights 6. Is costly to the state and local school districts 7. Wastes precious classroom time 8. Is a detriment to academic learning and achievement.

I humbly ask you to recognize that Social Emotional Learning and its accompanying behavioral testing is being overused in our Kansas schools and is dangerous to our students and the future of our nation. SEL curriculum and its accompanying behavioral testing and data collection on students and families must be stopped and replaced with academic learning. Kansas was the first state to comprehensively implement SEL, and we should be the first end this behavioral experiment.

Please protect our Kansas students from Social Emotional Learning and growing data collection invasion into their private lives. HB 2513 will give parents the necessary information by allowing them to read all the behavioral testing and SEL curriculum content. Only then can they make an informed decision before opting in to allow SEL behavioral data collecting on their student. I ask for your support to vote HB 2513 out of committee favorably.

Parental oversight is needed to correct this ominous trend. Are you parents and grandparents willing to allow your children to be used as test subjects in poorly designed and non-validated pseudoscience studies? Time has come for this socially engineered SEL experiment to comes to an end. Today I call upon parents and guardians to act and require transparency from your schools. Let your child's school know in writing that all behavioral data collection and SEL curriculum may not be used with your precious child. Now is the time for PARENTS IN CHARGE of their student's education!