

Opponent
Written Testimony

Dear Members of the K-12 Budget Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to provide my perspective on this legislative matter.

I am a teacher of English Language Learners in KCKPS. I would like to start by stating that I want to be back in the school building, teaching in person. Remote learning is not my preferred way of teaching, especially new English speakers because I rely so much on nonverbal communication that one doesn't get on a computer screen. However, some of my colleagues aren't able to return and have arranged through our HR Department to have an accommodation to remain a remote teacher. I support this completely. What I don't support is any legislative action that forces teachers to be "in person" or take FMLA. That just adds to the burden of the returning teachers because we have a substitute shortage already.

Because I am the only ESOL teacher in my building, I teach four different classes, which requires me to study and prepare four different curricula in order to be an effective teacher. This doesn't account for the time I also spend doing ESOL paperwork, and grading and interpreting data to make the best instructional decisions for my student. I do not have time to substitute for classes that have a teacher on FMLA. I'm not certified in science, the fine arts or math; these classes need certified teachers and because of our shortage, the chances are low that any sub is certified in the subject area being covered.

Another important consideration is that legislating teachers back into the classroom or face FMLA sends a message that we are only valued for our warm body in a classroom, not for the skills and knowledge it takes to be an experienced teacher. We have faced disparaging remarks over the past year which have been difficult to hear as many of the decisions made about remote versus in person learning is out of our control. Still, we have worked hard to do the best we can with what we have and we always strive to be innovative and effective in how we teach. This dedication deserves to be treated with respect.

Finally, I am curious as to the timing of the bill. It is my understanding that KCKPS is the only large district not doing some form of in person learning and our Board of Education has voted to return to a hybrid of in person and remote learning on April 5th; teachers will report March 22nd. We are allowing students to remain as remote learners because so many had to obtain work in order to help their families stay afloat financially. They can't afford to be in school for the full day.

I'm not sure why this bill is needed now, and why the legislature believes that the decision to return to in person learning should be made at the state level without taking into consideration the vast differences in health outcomes and needs of the different districts in the state. For example, Wyandotte County has a high minority population with severely limited access to health care. As a result we have seen a high Covid case count and our students' families have been hit hard by the Covid-19 Pandemic, we have remained remote because it was determined to be in the best interest of the community. Now that the Unified Government Health Department is seeing a decline in cases and has a better understanding of how the schools impact the spread of the virus, they have recommended that we can return to in person learning and the KCKPS Board of Education has responded by voting to have students and staff return to school buildings.

I realize that this is a complex issue and I appreciate your time in hearing my perspective. Please let me know if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

Ms. Rebecca Brown
ESOL Teacher
FL Schlagle High School, Home of the Stallions!