



**Proponent Testimony on SB51  
Senate Education Committee  
February 3, 2021**

Chair Baumgardner and Members of the Committee, my name is Rachel Marsh, CEO of the Children's Alliance of Kansas. The Alliance is an association of 18 private, non-profit child welfare agencies that collectively provide a full array of services for children and families in child abuse and neglect prevention, family preservation, foster care, adoption, independent living, and parent, youth, and child skill-building, mental health, and substance use treatment. One of the purposes of the Alliance is to advocate for public policy that strengthens child and family well-being in Kansas. We thank this Committee for considering legislation to support improvement of the unique educational needs of foster youth in Kansas.

SB51 would codify the current Executive Order requiring DCF and the Kansas State Department of Education to jointly prepare a Kansas foster care children annual academic report card. SB51 would ensure that the foster care children annual academic report card continues regardless of decisions made by future administrations. The Children's Alliance supports SB51 for a variety of reasons, but the core is this: the challenges in meeting the educational needs of youth in foster care requires collaboration, data-sharing, and ongoing focus between the education system and the child welfare system together. There are multiple systemic gaps to identify, address, and resolve. Child welfare providers – whether case management providers, child placing agencies and the foster parents they sponsor, residential providers, or in-home services providers – face ongoing challenges in effectively coordinating with schools to ensure quality education for youth. Here are some examples:

- Educational specialists for contractors face bureaucratic barriers accessing current school records, despite utilizing the Uninterrupted Scholars Act and working to collaborate with schools.
- Case managers and foster parents report it can be difficult to get assessments for IEPs. At times, youth that need special education services struggle to remain in school and placement long enough to get an assessment to begin special services.
- Foster youth may be suspended or expelled for behaviors, leaving no education alternatives for some youth. School funding does not follow foster children expelled from school.
- Foster care workers report that trauma manifested as school behavior challenges can be a 'warning sign' of future placement instability. Schools make repeated calls to foster parents -- trying to maintain full-time employment -- to pick up students for challenging behaviors in school. Eventually placements disrupt, accelerating and exacerbating the youth's trauma and needs.

- Despite child welfare contractor education specialists tracking down credits, there is no systematic inter-school continuity of credit or curriculum for youth outside of alternative school settings.

One question we have, is whether there needs to be comparison or “control” data, so the report card reflects educational outcomes for youth in foster care, compared to the broader population of Kansas students.

We know that schools perceive challenges on the child welfare side as well, complicated by workforce shortages, placement stability challenges, and behavior challenges. Improved outcomes for students will result from ongoing, coordinated, and meaningful cross-system communication and collaboration that focuses on trauma-informed, practical systems improvements. SB51 is a first step. We look forward to working closely with educators and legislators to improve educational outcomes for foster youth in Kansas.

Thank you so much for your concern and commitment to the foster youth of Kansas and for the opportunity to share our support of SB51. I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Members of the Children’s Alliance of Kansas:

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