

Honorable Ron Highland, Chairman; Education Committee Members:

First, I want to thank you for addressing the critical concern of Education in this great state of Kansas. I wanted to present testimony from the view of a parent, grandparent and patron regarding the consideration of school district realignment. I am in a mid-size School District USD 378, Riley County. Parents and patrons of our school district want the best for our students, our children, now and moving forward not only in 378 but for all of Kansas.

In the last ten (10) years our district has struggled with a slow growth problem. During those same ten (10) years, there has been decline of the school district to the East of us, USD 384, Blue Valley at Randolph, KS; while the school district to the South, USD 383, Manhattan-Ogden has experienced dramatic growth. While our future looks brighter regarding growth potential over the next five (5) to twenty (20) years, we will remain a mid-sized school district.

Our 378 School Boards past and present, in majority, have been about “wants” over actual needs of our children. The last school board wanted a major sports complex along with moving and joining the middle school to high school campus. Fortunately, that last bond was soundly defeated by the voters due to the fact that it lacked classrooms, storm shelters but especially it failed to address the lack of curriculum. Now the sitting board is hastily attempting to pass another bond issue, more expensive, but again with the same “wants” over district needs. This sitting board, currently with an unaddressed vacancy of the vice-president position has failed adequately and transparently to inform the public. It is with this type of history that I believe realignment within or among Riley Counties rural school districts which would be most beneficial, especially, if done properly.

Considering this history, of which I do not think is an isolated case, I would like to present an example. USD 378, Riley County Schools, and USD 384, Blue Valley at Randolph, would benefit from just such a consolidation. This consolidation or realignment has been talked about and urged by district patrons for a number of years. USD 378, Riley County High School, would and could take on 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades from USD 384, Blue Valley at Randolph. Grade schools, Pre-school with K-6, would remain viable in their

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respective cities, USD 378, Riley, KS and USD 384, Olsburg, KS in their current facilities. Middle School students, 7-8<sup>th</sup>, would then be moved to the existing stand-alone facilities at the USD 384 campus. This type of consolidation would save the State and taxpayers of both school districts a significant amount of money. Additionally, it would secure the viability of each of the communities and retention of teachers. The savings that would be generated could be applied to innovative curriculum to meet the individual needs of the students.

I do believe that there is very limited, if any, benefit to realign all of Riley County School Districts into just one district...that of being the largest school district, USD 383, Manhattan-Ogden. Disadvantages:

- (1) USD 383, Manhattan-Ogden, is already at or close to capacity. They have already bought land in Pottawatomie to build another school on the eastern border of the district.
- (2) An equitable administration of the counties' school districts seems suspect. It would be largely urban over the smaller rural school districts.
- (3) The politics of the board selection/elections would not favor smaller schools in representation.
- (4) Riley County already has a history of failed or severely flawed realignment of services...ie: Sheriff and Police Departments; Emergency Services and Health Department. Those examples have not benefited the patrons/taxpayers in the rural areas.

In closing, I agree with the realignment or consolidation with some school districts especially in rural counties as it would be beneficial. That said, this realignment just needs to be done with a light touch and not the blow of blow with a sledge hammer.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Larry Tawney

LCTawney@nannysdoor.com

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