

February 1, 2016

To: House Education Committee

From: Dr. Kelly Arnberger, Superintendent/Elementary Principal Bucklin USD 459

Re: HB 2504 -Testimony

Committee Members,

I would like to thank you for taking the time to consider this written testimony against HB 2504. You will hear several reasons why this bill proves detrimental to school districts and communities in Kansas. I would like to provide a narrative of what one rural school looks like.

Bucklin has an enrollment of 249 students Pre K-12 and we are located in Ford County in Southwestern Kansas. Our county is host to three districts; Bucklin, Spearville, and Dodge City. While Spearville is slightly larger, the Dodge City district teaches over 6,100 Kansas Students. Geographically close we are, but the needs of each districts' students differ drastically.

Our school day officially begins at 8:10 a.m. However, for many of our students, the day begins by 7:00 a.m. Some are getting ready to ride the bus. Others are already at school because of parental work schedules and some just come early because the school is a safe place. My junior high students start filling the halls by 7:15 a.m. because the teachers who arrive early eagerly provide space to catch up on homework or assist kids who are struggling. My elementary students await the aides who open up the gym before breakfast so they may skip rope, hula hoop, or shoot baskets. My high school kids show up before school for FFA, SADD, scholars bowl, practice their sport, and also to get help when they struggle. The older kids who come early are also the kids who participate in co-curricular activities. They are engaged in school and they will be the ones making informed decisions as adults when our time has passed.

We offer a variety of electives, CTE pathways, and assistance along with a Kansas Regents core curriculum. My people do not only teach or only sweep. The vast majority of the adults who work here fill more than one capacity and many take on several responsibilities. Why? Commitment to the 249 students who walk through the door every day and deserve the very best we can offer. You see it is not a "local control" issue, it is a moral obligation to serve the future of the Kansas citizenry. Our locals roll up our sleeves and we meet the needs of our kids however necessary.

There is something going on almost every evening in our school. The school hosts athletic contests, scholars bowls, forensics meets, STEM activities, music concerts, after school activities for students who want enrichment or need help, community recreational activities, and outreach classes from the local junior college. Many evenings the lights are on late in classrooms because our quality teachers plan STEM activities, differentiated lessons, and meaningful interventions to see all of our students succeed. We also host the community wide Thanksgiving dinner, doughnuts for dads, and muffins for moms. The school also hosts alumni reunions. I would venture just about every rural school appears similar. The school is a major component of the superior quality of life in our community. It is an opportunity for

folks to gather, commiserate, and cheer for kids. I guess I am at a loss as to why forcing consolidation is even being considered. Truthfully, I cannot imagine the majority of those who honestly represent their constituency in the legislature would be in favor of manipulating their local schools in this manner.

Numbers can be manipulated regardless of leanings or agendas. We do not have time to engage that game. We have kids to serve who one day may sit in this chair or yours. The adults who do the work to prepare our students for a great future need your support, through word and action. Rural schools in Kansas thrive because the citizens of rural communities understand the needs of their children, have hope for the future, and possess willingness to do whatever it takes to make their children successful. This is a bill I heard another person say is a “solution looking for a problem”. Thank you again for reading this testimony. Your thoughtfulness and dedication to the citizens of Kansas is much appreciated.

Respectfully,

Kelly Arnberger

Superintendent/Elementary Principal, USD 459 Bucklin