

Testimony pertaining to HB 2504

From Pat Happer, Superintendent USD 340 Jefferson West

On behalf of the six school districts in Jefferson County I am sharing some of the many concerns that we discussed at a recent meeting. Some of the identified concerns are as follows:

Realignment of school districts; combining more than one school district in a county with others, while limiting the size of the administrative team to facilitate the realigned district. We assume that the legislature would want to support the education of every student with appropriate administrative leadership. We anticipate that would include support for the student learning in the realigned district just as they have experienced in their previous singular districts. We feel it is important that each school in our combined district have the same opportunity for leadership driving the curriculum and maintaining a safe environment as those in districts with 1,500 or more students. We assume that the legislature wants to provide a school environment for all students and staff that has strong academic leadership.

Doesn't the state constitution delegate the right and responsibility of hiring of staff to the local school board? Does that include how many teachers, classified staff, and administrators to employ?

Along those same lines we felt it was important that the combined district be afforded the ability to provide equitable leadership when it comes to district wide leadership regarding policy, budget development and facilitation, along with curriculum and instruction at both the elementary and secondary levels. This bill would limit those duties to 1.2 persons in a newly aligned district for Jefferson County students. Again aren't the right, duty, and responsibility of hiring personnel delegated to the local board of education. It is our premise this bill would limit a local board's ability and right to hire those persons necessary to facilitate a well functioning district?

We are concerned that the state would take local tax dollars and place those funds in the state general fund through taking control of and the sale of local surplus property as indicated in the bill pertaining to possible former central office facilities or vehicles used by superintendents. It is our understanding these facilities and vehicles were paid for with local taxes and belong to the local school districts. Would the action of placing local taxes in the state general fund be a violation of the state constitution?

Are we to assume that with a new district comes new teacher contracts including fringe benefit packages, new board representation, new board policies, etc.? We imagine that would be the case. If so with six communities in the county having K-12 schools how would the selection of board members be determined that is equitable to each community?

We compared a newly created Jefferson County district of approximately 3,500 students with a current district that has approximately 3,700 students.

Currently, in the six school districts in Jefferson County there are six superintendents, 1 assistant superintendent/curriculum, 11 principals and 2 assistant principals serving in the county's 14 school buildings. A total of 20 administrators are employed among the six districts along with 3 transportation directors and 4 food service directors that are also employed as cooks.

Our comparison district of 3,700 students has 1 superintendent, 2 assistant superintendents, 9 principals, 6 assistant principals providing the same service for their students and 4 directors in the areas of curriculum and school health. This is a total of 22 administrators for nearly the same number of students. They also have a director of transportation. The configuration in their district would not be required to change under this bill.

Under one interpretation of the language in the bill our newly realigned district would be limited to 1.2 administrators in the central office since Jefferson West USD 340 is the largest school district in the county has only one central office administrator. That is 1.2 central office administrators for 3,500 students in Jefferson County. Would that level of administration be equitable for the students, parents, and communities in Jefferson County?

Another interpretation of the bill would allow for a total of 9.6 administrators in a newly aligned Jefferson Countywide district, which is 120% of the 8 administrative positions in the USD 340 Jefferson West school district, the largest school district in the county. Those positions could be divided as: a superintendent, and 8.6 administrators to serve in the capacity of building administrators for the 14 school buildings, district assistants for curriculum leadership, or directors for transportation and food service. If all the buildings retained building principals there would not be any administrative positions to help support the district. In either instance the realigned district of 3,500 students would not be able to have a director for elementary or secondary curriculum and instruction among other administrative supports. Again we ask, would that level of administration be equitable to the students, parents, and communities in Jefferson County? Isn't the duty and responsibility of hiring delegated to the local board of education?

It is our belief that the comparison district is NOT administratively over staffed. Our point is that the educational leadership in Jefferson County contends our students, staff, parents, and patrons should be afforded the same quality leadership as that of the district with a comparable student enrollment. Also we feel the determination of the makeup of the administrative team should be a decision of the local school board, a duty delegated by the state constitution.

One point we felt was important to share is that many people currently residing in smaller communities, as found in Jefferson County, have purposely located or remained in these locations to take advantage of small school environments. Passage of HB 2504 would unfairly penalize small school districts across the state by taking away the opportunity for parents to send their provide their children the opportunity to

experience opportunities not really available in larger schools.

Special Education Cooperatives are approved through a process, which involves the State Attorney General's office and the State Board of Education. Changes to those agreements would have to be approved by those two organizations. Through the realignment bill participation in the current Keystone Learning Cooperative, which would impact the six Jefferson County districts along with one district in Atchison County and one in Leavenworth County would have to change again. We recently just concluded the process of having a new agreement approved by the two state agencies at considerable time, energy and expense. If two of those districts are required to join another school district in their county what happens to our special education cooperative? From efficiency point of view going through that process again would not be prudent use of tax dollars.

The combined area of the six Jefferson County districts is 637 sq. miles. The comparison district is 84 sq. miles. The combined assessed valuation of the six county districts is \$184,210,885 that of the comparison district is \$227,693,613. You can envision the challenges that would exist in a realigned Jefferson County school district.

Some final questions for you, the House Education committee, as well as for all House Representatives to consider:

Is there any research that supports that the changes advocated through the passage of this bill would improve the education of our students?

What tax dollars would be saved due to the passage of this bill?

Do the so-called perceived savings outweigh the potential expenses to the quality of education we are able to provide for our students, the future leaders and workforce in our communities and in our state?

One final reflection for down the road; are any buildings in the current districts large enough to accommodate large numbers of additional students? If not what would be the cost of expanding current facilities to meet that need? How would that need be considered under HB 2486 dealing with school bonds?