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Written Testimony, HB 2504
House Education Committee
February 3, 2016

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to House Bill 2504.

While the bill calls it “realignment,” make no mistake that this bill is about forced consolidation of public school districts based purely on size and ignoring all other factors that determine the size of school districts.

In most of Kansas, this bill would create county-wide school districts. The legislature has provided incentives for small districts to consolidate and many have done just that. The number of Kansas school districts has been decreasing in recent years. There is a point at which people realize their district is no longer sustainable.

What this bill ignores is something that was reported to the legislature a number of years ago in a study commissioned by the legislature. That is, there are districts that are small by choice and others that are small by necessity. To simply decree that a school district is too small does not take into account the distances between attendance centers within a county.

The proponents of this bill suggest that it will not close school buildings. But the real savings in consolidation come from closing buildings. County-wide school districts would save a small amount of money in administrative salaries but other expenses would remain the same – unless buildings were consolidated and students moved.

It has also been publicly suggested that this bill would not require eliminating school boards. We wonder how many superintendents would be willing to report to multiple school boards covering the same school district. This bill will inevitably result in fewer school boards and remove a level of representation that is close to the voters.

This bill creates instability in the public education system by requiring boundaries to be redrawn every ten years. Under this bill a child could be in three school districts during his/her K-12 experience without ever moving. We all know how simple the process of redistricting legislative seats every ten years is. Imagine doing the same with our school district boundaries.

Finally, community identity in much of Kansas is defined by school districts. The decision to consolidate needs to be a community decision, not a legislative mandate. We support incentives for consolidation under which communities are encouraged to enter into dialogue with their neighbors and make wise decisions. Given the changes that are happening in many of our rural communities today, consolidation in many cases is inevitable. But it should be a natural change supported by communities who hold the interests of their children above all else.

Leave the decision to the local people and provide them the resources to make the transition on their own.