

Testimony before the
House Education Committee
on
HB 2504 – Redesigning of School Districts
by
Troy Damman, Superintendent for USD #272 Waconda

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee concerning **HB 2504**. This bill requires the consolidation of administrative services to include that all school districts under 1,500 students must operate under one central office administration in that county. For the USD #272 Waconda School District, this would mean that our district would be consolidated with the USD #273 Beloit School District because the district office is located in Mitchell County and Beloit Schools has a larger enrollment.

The Waconda district is primarily a farming community with four separate communities located within the boundaries of the district. The district consists of 411 square miles and communities include Glen Elder, Cawker City, Downs, and Tipton. Also located in the district is the lake Waconda. The majority of the teachers and staff that work in the district are locally grown individuals that have lived in the area for most of their lives. As with smaller districts, most of the community members are related to each other and consider all community members a close neighbor.

About 12 years ago, the Waconda district had two high schools and four elementary schools. At that time the district underwent a reorganization that closed one high school and one elementary building. This was difficult for the communities to accept because they knew it would impact their local community. It did have some impact on the communities and there was some separation developed between the towns because there were some hurt feelings among the patrons as they lost their school in the community. The reorganization was completed because of declining enrollment in the district. This past year the district completed another reorganization of the district and closed two elementary buildings and made one grades 6-12 building and one grades PreK-5 building because of more decline in enrollment. At present, the enrollment in the district has stabilized and future births have shown that the enrollment will maintain or increase over the next 5 years. To have to go through another consolidation would devastate the community as they are still in the bonding stage of the previous 2 realignments in the district.

Even though USD #273 Beloit Schools is located in Mitchell County along with USD #272 Waconda Schools, the general makeup of the districts are totally different in many ways. To say that students would have a better opportunity if attending the Beloit schools is far from the truth. Waconda Schools have a proven track record for exceeding academic standards,

receiving the Governor's Award for academic standards, Blue Ribbon award, and national recognition for academic excellence. These recognitions were received every year throughout the NCLB standards. No other district in the area has come close to match the quality of education of Waconda schools.

I understand that the bill is only proposing to consolidate the district office, but in doing so will remove the local control from the Waconda district because of lack of representation of the board. The Beloit and Waconda districts have different needs and one school board would not be able to serve the two districts in separate manners and still be equitable. Furthermore, the staffing of the districts would be greatly impacted by eliminating several jobs from each of the communities. The school district is considered one of the larger employers of the county and removing more jobs from the county will remove families and decrease the student enrollment even more having a domino effect throughout both districts. As more and more families leave the district, other local businesses will be impacted and the closure of the communities will be soon to follow.

It should be up to the local communities if a consolidation of district offices or other services are needed. The local board has a greater understanding of the needs of the district and how they wish to work with other districts. The area districts continue to discuss ways they wish to share services to best serve their needs.

In conclusion, I hope that my testimony, memo, and information shared today will be helpful for the committee. Thank you for your time and consideration. Troy Damman, Superintendent for Waconda Schools will gladly stand for any questions.