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SUPERINTENDENT/K-12 PRINCIPAL
CENTRE USD 397
2/01/2016

TO: LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS
RE: HB 2504

I am submitting the following information on behalf of Centre USD 397 in opposition to HB 2504:

- As a rural district serving a radius of 400 sq. miles, our school board, comprised of representatives from 6 small communities, enjoys a long history of commitment to working collaboratively and creating partnerships with neighboring districts located in Marion County for purposes of efficiency, all **without coercion**. It is surprising/disturbing to find within the regulation pertaining to the realignment of school districts, there is no language related to or inclusion of local control decision making;
 - Question: Is HB 2504 a break from the practice of local decision-making and will the state now become responsible for dictating educational decisions for an educated and capable populous, all holding constitutional freedoms to the right of a free **public** education?
 - Question: Will the legislature now appropriate dollars for education based on the will of the state, rather than to request local levies, etc., and local input concerning local needs? Why would the local tax payer choose to support a state mandated education program having no input as to where their children attend school or how closely the education program coordinates with personal beliefs and values?
- The realignment of districts, including decreased numbers of administrative staff for purposes of making a deeper swath at administrative costs: Efficiencies at USD 397 – 5 years ago the district buildings were reassigned to one facility and location. More than 4 years ago and voluntarily, the Board of Education collapsed the roles of **Superintendent and K-12 Principal** in to **one position**. These adjustments were made at the decision of the local communities and community efforts to maintain their school district, while saving traditions, norms, and values of education desired by the local residents.
 - Question: How is it that additional efficiencies are more important than what the residents of Kansas's value in terms of educating their children? USD 397 is not a wealthy district and the residents do not want big city ideas; however, they do want a solid education provided to their children in an environment where they feel comfortable visiting, where they can travel to participate in their child's education and activities, and where they can develop

relationships with the folks educating their children. As an added benefit to our small school, our smaller classes lend to a smaller teacher to student ratio allowing for greater student attention; a large percentage of our graduating students are prepared to attend post secondary programs and schools, i.e. Tabor College, Butler Community College, McPherson College, Bethany College, Bethel College, Hutchinson Community College, Emporia State University, Washburn University, Wichita State University, Friends University, Kansas State University, and the University of Kansas. Implications related to the disruption of our small district are of great concern to our school family, as is the idea that the state can better advise how our students will be successful, or does the state care?

- Realignment and the transfer of assets and funds – Facilities and properties owned by the tax paying community of USD 397 are in remarkable physical condition located on Hwy 77, 2 miles north of Lincolnvile, Ks, and 11 miles south of Herington, Ks. The current location of the school was selected in the 1950's for purposes of consolidation of a centrally located high school serving 6 rural communities. Given the rural location, how does one consider a buyer will pursue the purchase of the school property and facilities?
 - Question: Because there are not centrally located school facilities in Marion County, nor are there facilities large enough to accommodate the total student population in one location of the county, will the new district, **out of forced necessity**, need to launch a bond issue to build new facilities? In that scenario, what are the savings? What is the risk cost when we may need to add another bond in 10 years at the time of a new realignment of district boundaries?

On behalf of USD 397, we understand and practice under the guise school management must be mindful of financial resources; however, we propose HB 2504 comes way short of anticipating the many implications resulting from forced district realignment. Effective school leaders, and I believe Kansas has some of the best, are adaptive in their thinking, planning, and implementation. We ask you to give our school leaders the opportunity to share with you the focus of education and our needs, how we plan to meet our goals, and how we intend to restore the image of education in Kansas's schools.