

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Clay Aurand at 9:05 A.M. on February 13, 2008 in Room 313-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except:
Marti Crow- excused

Committee staff present:
Theresa Kiernan, Office of Revisor of Statutes
Dianne Rosell, Office of Revisor of Statutes
Dale Dennis, Kansas State Department of Education
Martha Dorsey, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Sharon Wenger, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Janet Henning, Committee Assistant

Conferees appearing before the committee:
Mark Tallman, Kansas Association of School Boards
Mark Desetti, Kansas National Education Association
Val DeFever, Schools for Quality Education
Rex Bollinger, Superintendent, USD 433 and USD 425.

HB 2734: School districts; consolidation, state financial aid

Mark Tallman, Kansas Association of School Boards, spoke to Committee members in support of **HB 2734** which provides financial incentives for consolidation by allowing the new district to maintain its budget for several years at the previous level. (Attachment 1)

Mark Desetti, Kansas National Education Association, spoke to Committee members in support of **HB 2734**, however, urged the Committee to use caution. He stated **HB 2734** does not force consolidation and it does not determine for a community what the right size of a school is. But it allows school districts to more seriously consider consolidation. The funding provisions of this bill allow districts to move ahead without radical staff cuts and provides districts the funding that will allow them to rework curriculum and programs for a large student population. (Attachment 2)

There were no opponents to the bill.

A question and answer session followed the presentations.

The Chairman closed the hearing on **HB 2734**.

HB 2760: School districts; consolidation; low enrollment weighting

There were no proponents to the bill.

Mark Tallman, Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB), spoke to Committee members in opposition of **HB 2760** which would cap the low enrollment weighting of districts with fewer than 200 students and 200 square miles. Mr. Tallman further stated that if the Legislature is going to allow such districts to continue to operate, KASB believes it should reduce or limit their funding.

Val DeFever, Schools for Quality Education, spoke to Committee members in opposition of **HB 2760**. Ms. DeFever told Committee members that **HB 2760** targets seven of their organization's 124 low enrollment school districts and that it is potentially an economic and cultural distress for those communities. (Attachment 3)

Rex Bollinger, Superintendent, Midwest USD 433 and Highland USD 425, spoke to Committee members in opposition of **HB 2760** and told of the adverse effects the bill would have on the communities in his two districts. (Attachment 4)

A question and answer session followed the presentations.

The Chairman closed the hearing on **HB 2760**.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:35 A.M. The next meeting is scheduled for February 14, 2008.

KANSAS
ASSOCIATION



OF
SCHOOL
BOARDS

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Testimony before the
House Committee on Education

on

HB 2734 – School District Consolidation; State Aid
HB 2760 – School District Consolidation; Low Enrollment Weighting

by

Mark Tallman, Assistant Executive Director/Advocacy
Kansas Association of School Boards

February 13, 2008

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments today on two bills addressing school district consolidation.

KASB's position on school district consolidation is very simple. We support incentives to encourage school districts to consider consolidation when it makes educational and financial sense, and seek to remove barriers that discourage consolidation. However, we oppose measures that directly force districts to consolidate, or indirectly pressure districts to act through financial penalties.

As a result, we support passage of **HB 2734**, which provides financial incentives for consolidation by allowing the new district to maintain its budget for several years at the previous level. This proposal also provides incentives for districts to act before their enrollment further declines, which we think may have more appeal than a previous incentive which required districts to act by a certain date.

However, we oppose the passage of **HB 2760**, which would cap the low enrollment weighting of districts with fewer than 200 students and 200 square miles. If the Legislature is going to allow such districts to continue to operate, we do not believe it should reduce or limit their funding. We are not aware of any study that shows these districts have lower costs.

Thank you for your consideration.

House Education Committee

Date 2-13-08

Attachment # 1



**Mark Desetti, Testimony
House Education Committee
February 13, 2008**

House Bill 2734

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to share our thoughts on **House Bill 2734**.

School district consolidation is one of the most challenging topics this legislature ever brings up for discussion. Several years ago, it was decided to encourage consolidation rather than force it and you passed legislation to allow districts that consolidate to keep their combined funding for two years after the consolidation is completed. As a result a number of school districts made this move.

As you know, the concerns with consolidation are many.

Small communities fear that the loss of their school will result in the ultimate death of their community. In many rural areas, the local school is the community. Ties to that school are strong. Having traveled through a number of Kansas towns that are struggling to survive, where the boarded up school building is a predominant feature, I can certainly understand this fear. Consolidation talks are often derailed by debates about which schools will remain open and which will close.

There are also good reasons to press for consolidation.

The legislature most often focuses on "efficiency" and "cost savings" as if consolidation is a magic bullet that will reduce the cost of education. But an argument for consolidation that might be more persuasive is opportunity. Our students face a future that is radically different from the one I faced in 1973 when I graduated from high school. And the opportunities our students need today are so much greater than those we needed in years gone by.

As we prepare our children for life in the 21st century economy, we need to consider the coursework they must take and the levels of education they must experience if they are to be successful.

There is a point at which schools become too small to offer the rich curriculum needed to prepare those students for the future. It is a fact that large schools can offer more experiences – a more varied curriculum, more extensive course offerings.

I don't believe anyone knows for sure what the cut-off might be where one can begin to offer a full, rich, 21st century curriculum. But we ought to be working to establish schools that are big enough to offer that curriculum and small enough to allow for close relationships between teachers and students.

HB 2734 does not force consolidation; it does not determine for a community what the right size of a school is. But it allows school districts to more seriously consider consolidation. The funding provisions of this bill allow districts to move ahead without radical staff cuts. It provides districts

House Education Committee
Date 2-13-08
Attachment # 2

the funding that will allow them to rework curriculum and programs for a large student population. It smoothes the transition from small district to mid-size district. We think that's a good idea.

But as you consider consolidation, please consider other issues.

First, don't forget that there are school districts that are small by choice and others that are small by necessity. Some communities are very isolated and you can only let a child sit on a school bus for so long. At what point is a community too isolated to consider consolidation and what does the state do to support the offering of a rich, challenging curriculum in those communities?

Secondly, since consolidation often results in the closing of a school building, how can the state help communities that lose their school to stay viable? In rural communities, the school is often the center of activity. Is there a role for the state to play in ensuring that these communities still have a "heart?" For a community to accept consolidation, we must help that community see that it can survive.

In summary, we believe that the "carrot approach" to school district consolidation is the appropriate path to take and that **HB 2734** provides a significant carrot. We also believe that, where consolidation would lead to enhanced opportunities for our students, communities ought to consolidate. At the same time, we believe that the state has a role to play in ensuring that impacted towns can remain vibrant, viable communities. To press consolidation without considering the future of the community is to spell doom for that community.

We urge this committee to proceed with care.



Schools for Quality Education

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Testimony for Housed Education Committee
February 13, 2008
Val DeFever

Chairman Aurand, members of the House Education Committee thank you for letting me come before you to share my concerns about HB2760. Representing small rural schools I am anxious about a bill that targets seven of my organization's one hundred twenty-four, low enrollment school districts.

This bill will directly and immediately affect school districts: Argonia in Sumner County, Attica in Harper County, B&B in Nemaha County, Copeland in Gray County, Elk Valley in Elk County, Healy in Lane County and Midway in Doniphan County. These districts are scattered across the state. A look at these counties demographics provides an interesting perspective. They range in population from 2,155 in Lane County to 25,946 in Sumner County. There are 4,000 to 1,065 households per county. The average size families is 2.25 to 3.31 members. About 25% of their population are over 65 years of age. The population was not broken down into more exact populations.

A seven county average of 82% of the adult population over 25 are high school graduates, 11 % have bachelors degrees and 2.5% have a masters degree.

In HB2760 focuses on districts with less than two hundred square miles and limits low enrollment consideration to no less than two hundred students. Districts of two hundred of fewer square miles come in all shapes and sizes. But districts of less than two hundred students in our rural districts (and the counties they are in) seem to look very much the same.

"Rural is Quality"

House Education Committee

Date 2-13-08
Attachment # 2

A map of Kansas school districts from the middle of the state moving eastward is virtually made up of small school districts that are not visually much larger than the targeted districts. Today many of these districts are a blend of two or more communities. Generally each community will have at least one school.

Schools are the life blood of a community. The hustle and bustle around a school gives a vitality to an otherwise quiet community. When districts merge by choice, tough decisions are made, but they are made by local school boards and every effort is made to preserve the school and the community. It is a decision that is hard on community members, families, and children.

In the past few days I have visited with leadership in each of the school districts that would be affected by HB2760. For the most part these districts have struggled to make things work for many, many year.. During this time they have made adjustments to share services and staff with neighboring districts. Most were quick to tell me that this bill would be very hard on their schools. If they found themselves consolidating with an adjacent district their staffs would more than likely be cut in half. This would not only mean a lose of jobs, but almost assuredly a loss of population in the county. As teachers lose their jobs they would have to move to find employment, resulting in a drain of community members with higher levels of education- quite possibly the higher wage earners in the county. As they move their families, a further decline in student population would occur. The resulting domino affect will be felt most in the counties with the lowest population. All of this would have an adverse impact in the census in 2010.

It is quickly apparent that this is potentially an economic and cultural distress for these communities. Although it may look good on paper, the reality is it will be devastating to the folks in these communities and their less populated counties.

EDUCATION NEWS

39 Kansas high schools receive national recognition

Thirty-nine high schools from across Kansas have received bronze awards in the *U.S. News and World Report* first ever ranking of America's Best High Schools. *U.S. News* used "a formula produced in collaboration with School Evaluation Services, a K-12 data research and analysis business run by Standard & Poor's, which put high schools in 40 states through a three-step analysis." They began by measuring how each school's students performed on state tests, adjusting for student circumstances. Second they evaluated how well the school's disadvantaged

students did. They also looked if the school was successful in providing college-level coursework. They evaluated 18,790 high schools across the United States. Of those evaluated, 505 received gold or silver medals and 1,068 received bronze. Of the 1,068 bronze medal schools, 924 had less than 25 percent poverty enrollment; 488 had less than 50 percent poverty enrollment; 124 had less than 75 percent poverty enrollment. Sixteen schools had no significant poverty enrollment. Five-hundred twenty-three received some percent of Title I funds; while 278 were

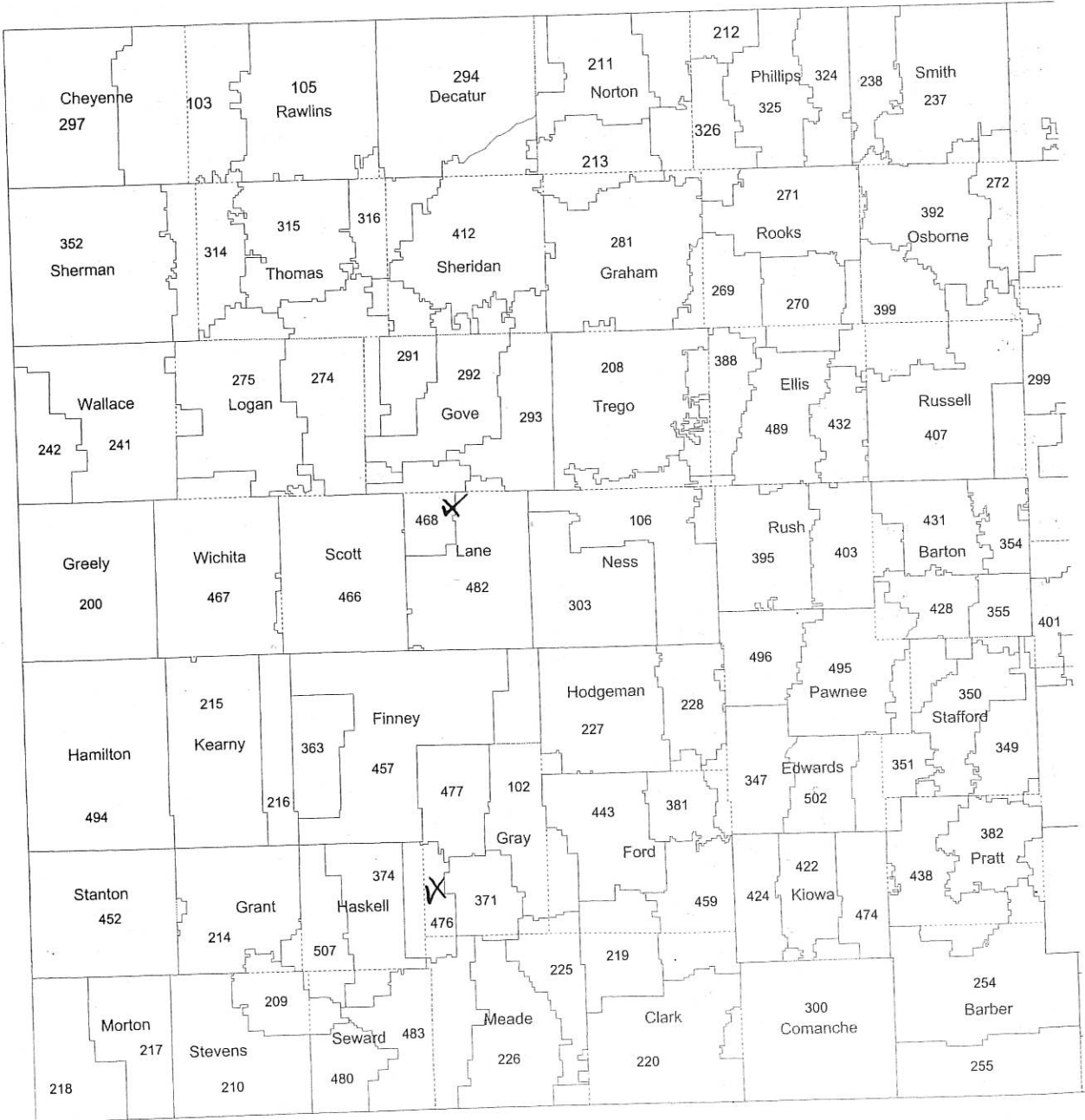
full Title I schools. Forty-two of the bronze winners were charter schools and 41 were magnet schools.

The Kansas schools serve a diverse population from across Kansas. Enrollments range from a low of 47 to a high of 1,594. Two Kansas districts, Vermillion USD 380 and Barnes USD 223 had both high schools earn bronze medals.

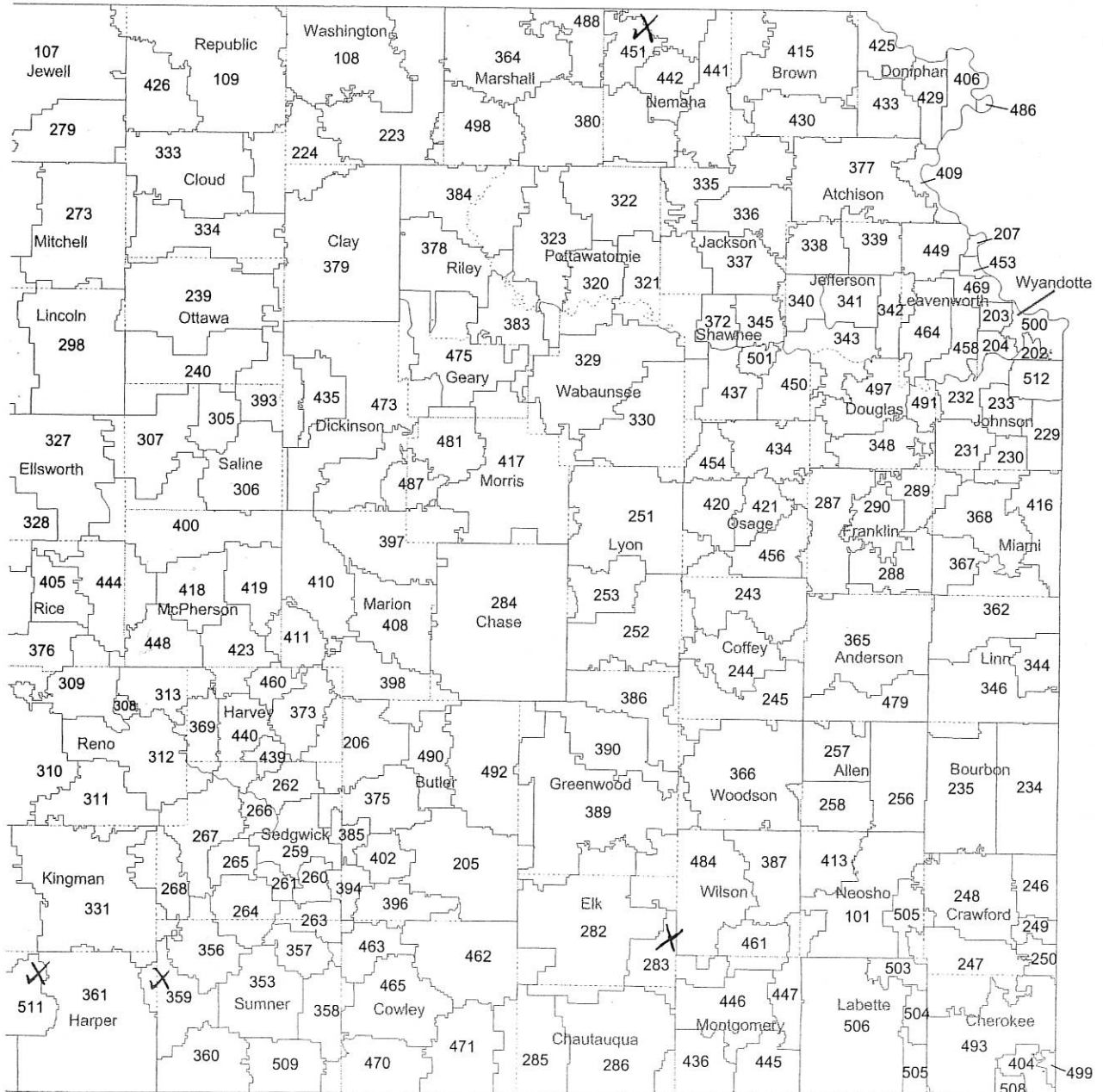
For more information on the awards and the criteria used visit the *U.S. News and World Report* Web site at <http://www.usnews.com/sections/education/high-schools>.

- *Ashland High*, Ashland USD 220
- *Baileyville Sr. Benedict High*, B&B USD 451
- *Hanover High*, Barnes USD 223
- *Linn High*, Barnes USD 223
- *Blue Valley North High*, Blue Valley USD 229
- *Marais Des Cygnes Valley High*, Marais Des Cygnes Valley USD 456
- *Cedar Vale High*, Cedar Vale USD 285
- *Chetopa High*, Chetopa-St. Paul USD 505
- *Clifton-Clyde Senior High*, Clifton-Clyde USD 224
- *Dexter High*, Dexter USD 471
- *Ellis High*, Ellis USD 388
- *Girard High*, Girard USD 248
- *Goessel High*, Goessel USD 411
- *Greensburg High*, Greensburg USD 442
- *Hillsboro High*, Hillsboro-Durham-Lehigh USD 410
- *Hoisington High*, Hoisington USD 431
- *Humboldt High School*, Humboldt USD 258
- *Jewell Senior High*, Jewell County USD 279
- *Sumner Academy*, Kansas City USD 500
- *Wichita County High*, Leoti USD 467
- *Logan High*, Logan USD 326
- *Quivira Heights High*, Lorraine USD 328
- *Macksville High*, Macksville USD 351
- *Minneola High*, Minneola USD 219
- *Osborne High*, Osborne County USD 392
- *Mankato Junior/Senior High*, Rock Hills USD 107
- *Skyline High*, Skyline USD 438
- *South Barber High*, South Barber USD 255
- *Olpe Junior/Senior High School*, Southern Lyon County USD 252
- *Sublette High*, Sublette USD 374
- *Sylvan Unified High*, Sylvan USD 299
- *Syracuse High*, Syracuse USD 494
- *Centralia High*, Vermillion USD 380
- *Frankfort High*, Vermillion USD 380
- *Lakeside High School At Downs*, Waconda USD 272
- *Wallace County High*, Wallace County USD 241
- *Washington High*, Washington County USD 108
- *Onaga Senior High*, Onaga-Havensville-Wheaton USD 322
- *Northeast Magnet/Downtown Camp*, Wichita USD 259

Kansas Unified School Districts



Boundaries as of July 1, 2007



Kansas Legislative Research Department August 14, 2007

25

Mr. Chairman, members of the House Education committee, thank you for allowing me to provide testimony today. My name is Rex Bollinger, I am the superintendent of two small rural school districts of Midway USD 433 and Highland USD 425. As superintendent of those districts I am concerned about House Bill 2760. Although this bill does not affect Highland USD 425 at this point, it may in the future. This bill will affect Midway USD 433 substantially. By using September 20, 2007 enrollment count, my research concludes this bill would affect 7 school districts statewide, one of which is Midway USD 433.

If this bill was passed, the loss of revenue of approximately \$34,600 caused by this bill would effectively wipe out the base state aid per pupil and the at-risk monies designated for our district in year three of the school finance plan adopted by this legislature in 2006. The loss of these funds would cause USD 433 to either cut a staff that is already at the minimum or raise our local option budget to make up the funds.

Midway USD 433 is a rural community made up of 4 small towns in southwestern Doniphan County in Northeast Kansas. The main industry in our community is farming. A one mill increase raises about \$22,250. Six of the seven board members are tied to farming as the main income source of their families. To raise the mill levy substantially would be an increased tax burden and a hardship not only on the six board members families but on their neighbors as well.

Expectations for our schools have not diminished and the costs of delivering educational services have not decreased in rural Kansas. Small schools experience the same increases in costs of good and services as everyone else, yet at the same time we value our independence and the ability to offer a quality education to our students. We also strongly feel that we use our resources wisely.

As an example of this, currently Midway USD 433 is contracting for student services with Highland USD 425. All sixth through eighth graders in both districts attend Doniphan West Middle School located in the Midway school district. All ninth through twelfth graders attend Doniphan West High School in the Highland school district. Both boards are in the process of forming a joint committee to study the possibility of further contracting at the elementary level to be located in the Midway school district. In addition to sharing a superintendent we also share teachers and classified personnel between the two school districts. We feel that we are as lean staff-wise as a consolidated school district. We choose to contract for student services because to consolidate

House Education Committee
Date 2-13-08
Attachment # 4

would lead to a substantial increase of over 10 mills in the local option budget in each school district to make up for the lost revenue in low enrollment weighting.

Each school district provides excellent educational opportunities for students. This past fall the Midway school district was recognized with 6 standards of excellence in reading and math and 2 building-wide standard of excellence in reading at the elementary and middle school levels from the Kansas State Assessment tests taken in the spring of 2007. An equal number of standards of excellence were given to Highland USD 425 as well. We are providing a sound, quality education to our students while at the same time utilizing our resources efficiently and effectively.

This bill singles out seven small school districts and would eliminate vital resources needed to provide a quality education. It is my opinion that a vital part of the fabric of our state and our nation is built upon the values that come from rural schools and the education that they provide for their students. The changes recommended in HB 2760 would have an adverse affect on these districts. I ask the committee to consider their actions before adopting these changes.

Thank you.