



Vermillion Unified School District 380

209 School Street, Vermillion, KS 66544
785-382-6216



Superintendent
Joel Bickford

Board Clerk
Marceil Hasenkamp

District Treasurer
Sherri Wells

Special Committee on Education
- Issues Related to School Closures-
Joel Bickford
USD 380 Vermillion
October 10, 2023

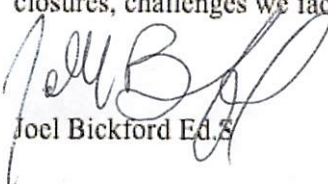
Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Joel Bickford and I have been the Superintendent for USD 380 since 2022. I have been an educator and worked in the public school system for 34 years.

USD 380 is a rural district encompassing over 400 square miles. We have a small student population (600) in our district, with two K12 school systems. Every student is important as in all Kansas districts; however the small districts watch enrollment of even a few students very closely. This school year we gained 8 students due to a school closing in Wetmore, Kansas. We were thrilled to see new faces and we welcomed the students into our small family-like atmosphere. We were the closest school building for these students to attend. We were able to increase our bus routes to accommodate the transportation of the new students. The cost although not severe was a cost to our district. The new students landed in classes that did not overload our capacity, at least this year. However, it was by chance, and the new open enrollment changes could have indeed pushed us to hiring more staff. Historically we have gained students in the same manner and the issues involved in the open enrollment changes were some of the same issues. Increased travel budgets and increased staffing. The students came to us and we were able to attain the student funding, but the district boundary did not change. This did not allow the new students to be afforded representation on our board of education. These students' families were not allowed to vote for board members, nor are they allowed to vote on bond issues. With the price of educating students increasing, many small schools look to the taxpayers to assist in funding, yet these patrons do not. We simply have these students but not the taxes from the land that they are giving the district who is not educating them.

It would be a better situation if the closing district had a timeline for the revenue generated by the taxes on the patrons' land to go to the school that the student attended, and at a predetermined time the district line changed to allow this to happen. The landowner should have the option of this. The landowner would have a process to move their land if the student went to another school after a closure. If the process stays as is, would it not be a situation where a great school that patrons want to attend is punished due to the fact that they will gain students, but the district will not be growing in revenue generating assets(land)? This will harm the district rather than help the district. The district losing the students will have less students but more money in taxes, which could be an advantage to close schools. Moving a district line should be a fairly simple process, however it is not. This is the area I would like to be considered.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony outlining our district's experience with recent school closures, challenges we face, and offer suggestions for legislative consideration.


Joel Bickford Ed.S

"What's Best for Kids"