



Walton Rural Life Center
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Senate Education Committee
Testimony on Innovation and Excellence in Kansas' schools

Walton 21st Century Rural Life Center

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Walton was a small elementary school in Walton Kansas, a town of around 300 people. It is part of the Newton School District #373. Walton was suffering from decline in enrollment and supported around 100 students. In 2006, Dr John Morton suggested that the staff consider applying for charter status to help increase enrollment and remain viable. The staff applied for charter status and was approved as a public charter school in the spring of 2006 and opened as Walton 21st Century Agriculture and Technology Center charter school August 2007.

Today, Walton Rural Life Center has grown to 153 students who learn the same core content as other students in USD #373 and take the same state assessments, but learn through project-based learning. The hands-on learning experiences include research, data collection and presented projects in the greenhouse, vegetable, natural prairie restoration area, sensory garden and rain garden. In addition we have a wind turbine that produces electricity for the greenhouse, a chicken coop, barn and pens for our sheep, bottle calf, bucket calf, and pigs. Each class is partnered with a local farm family for field trips and classroom activities where students learn using agriculture as a tool. Classes receive guidance and support from the farm families and students use them as experts when they need resources and information for projects.

In addition to the agriculture, we focus on healthy lifestyles and character education. Students are broken into multi-age "homeroom" groups for exercise and character education. Student study a character trait each month and practice that trait throughout the day. Chores are on a rotating base each week. Students feed and care for the animals and plants in the gardens and greenhouse. The entire school "walks" or "line dances" together two time a week during our homeroom time. Students can't wait to get to school and we have observed our absenteeism and tardiest be cut in more than half.

As a result of learning through hands-on project-based learning our students have performed very well on the state assessments. Walton has received standard of Excellence in math and reading at all tested levels for 5 years. In the 2011 state assessments, 100 % of our 4th grade

students scored proficient and exemplary in both math and reading. Walton received the Governor's Achievement Award for scores in top 5% of schools in Kansas in 2005-2006 and 2007-2008. We do not "teach to the test". We have found that our methods have been effective for not only students in the general education curriculum but to our students with special needs.

The United States Department of Education hired a professional production crew to come to the school in 2010 and video tape our innovative practices. This video can be found on our website www.newton.k12.ks.us/sch/w as well as on YouTube. This video is used across the county to demonstrate innovative teaching practices in rural settings.

In the spring of 2011 the Follett Company also produced a video of the school to share with schools across the nation as an example of effective project-based learning. In September of 2011, Walton was recognized as a finalist in the Intel Schools of Distinction Program in the area of Science. Walton was one of 3 elementary school recognized from across the country.

Other recognitions include having two teachers being named as Ag Teacher of the Year by the Kansas Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom. This group also videotaped three teachers teaching using ag for teacher training in the state of Kansas.

Each year since in the inception of the charter we have grown. We currently have a waiting list for kindergarten students through the year 2016. Our charter runs out at the end of the current school year and we plan to re-apply to continue our charter status.