McPherson Unified School District 418

"Uplifting Education"

Randy Watson, Ed.D., Superintendent
Chris Ruder, Associate Superintendent

Testimony before the
Senate Committee on Education
Concerning

SB 294
Success Index Education Finance Plan

By
Chris Ruder, Associate Superintendent
McPherson USD 418

March 24, 2015

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important legislation. Our school board and administrative team have spent many hours studying and discussing this formula and sincerely appreciate the work that has gone into it so far. At this time, McPherson likes many parts of this bill, but will appear as neutral because our school board has some concerns about some sections of the current bill.

There are many positives in this bill that McPherson likes and believes moves our discussion of school finance forward.

1. It takes into account base state aid for pupils versus a block grant or school based funding.

2. It takes into account the size and density of a district. This assists districts of all sizes and districts that are larger in square miles (transportation).

3. It rewards student success post high school, but noting that poverty is a key factor in obtaining that success. This is modeled after SB 155 and it could really drive the outcomes we want as a state.

4. It has an equalization component that takes into account poverty as a base factor.

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5. It allows for local control of school boards raising additional funds locally.

6. It is a pilot. The CISD will be able to give ideas, input and suggestions for year two and beyond. This allows the bill to adapt and grow.

McPherson has several areas of concern that we would like to see addressed in the bill.

1. **Lack of funding for McPherson in general**. If one examines the current formula, the new block grant and now this formula, McPherson receives anywhere from several hundred to several thousand dollars LESS per pupil than other school district. This is a left over bias from the old 4th enrollment category formula prior to 1992. If federal money is added to any state formula, the gap between McPherson and the vast majority of school districts in Kansas gets even more distorted. Any new permanent formula should correct this situation for McPherson and districts similar to McPherson.

2. **Mandating GAAP accounting**. In McPherson this would more than double our auditing budgeting requirements without generating any additional public accountability to our funding. Our auditing firm, attorney and school board are strongly opposed to this unfunded mandate in this bill.

3. **Future School Bond Issues.** After reading and studying the section on school bond issues for the future, McPherson has several questions and concerns about how this provision will be handled with fairness for all school districts. In addition, we believe what makes up student success is much more than an academic test score and are concerned that counseling offices and other facilities might not be deemed as "instructional", which we believe is too narrow of a definition.

Thank you again, Senator Abrams and the entire committee. McPherson stands ready to work with the committee to change and address the concerns that we have currently with **SB 294.**

Chris Ruder,
Associate Superintendent USD 418