

Written proponent testimony

SB 31 - Excluding U.S.D. No. 207, Fort Leavenworth and virtual school students from the capital improvements state aid determination

Senate Education Committee

February 24, 2021

By [Melissa Kennedy](#)

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of SB 31.

Valley Heights USD 498 is a rural school district in southern Marshall County. With an average class size of 29 students Valley Heights USD 498 has maintained a solid enrollment and actually increased enrollment from 10 years ago. Valley Heights USD 498 has three separate building locations that were built between 1954 through 1972 with the most recent additions being in the year 2000. Continued strains on the infrastructure in the past weighs heavily upon the district to maintain the HVAC, electrical and outdated water and sewer systems. The inefficiencies of having three locations only 5 miles apart creates a strain on our annual operating budget. With a free and reduced lunch count of over 52% and a predominantly rural population the district is not financially prominent. Valley Heights USD 498 has proven itself to be responsible fiscal steward reducing the district's Mil Levy in the past. However, residents are always wary of increased tax burdens and during these times that is magnified. A large percentage of our tax base is agricultural land. In the past several years, agriculture land appraisals have risen dramatically. In a rural community, we ask our farmers and ranchers to support our students' education by carrying a high tax burden.

Without SB 31, our school district would have to rely on the property tax for school facility costs. Property tax is generally very unpopular and the amount it raises varies widely across the state and is especially a problem in rural areas.

Second, because of the significant difference in local property wealth among local school districts, it means low wealth districts will require much higher property tax levies than higher wealth districts to raise revenue for school facilities. The Kansas Supreme Court has consistently ruled that is unconstitutional because it creates unfair differences in educational opportunities for Kansas students.

For these reasons, Valley Heights USD 489 urges the committee to approve SB 31.

Thank you.