



Schools for Quality Education

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Senate Education Committee

February 24, 2021

Senate Bill 31

Proponent Testimony by

**Justin Coup, Superintendent, UDS 393 Solomon, a member of
Schools for Quality Education**

Chair Baumgardner and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today on behalf of USD 393 Solomon, its Board of Education, and Schools for Quality Education. We stand in strong support of **Senate Bill 31**. First, a bit of history and facts. Our district was directly impacted by the changes made in 2015. The last bond issue passed by our district was in 1994 which provided our rural district with state aid and property tax relief at around the 25% level. Fast forward to November 2017, when our last proposed bond issue of \$10.9 million dollars failed by a 60-40% margin. This was not surprising because our rural Solomon community has experienced numerous years of poor commodity prices which was further influenced by the national tariff discussions. However, the most dominant feedback we received from our patrons, after the failed bond issue, was that the local property owners could not understand why they should be made responsible for 100% of the payments on this bond issue when the 1994 bond issue for a new school (25 years ago) provided state aid. Other school districts in our area who receive state aid have been successful in their passage of major bond improvement issues.

In the failed 2017 bond issue we were asking for asbestos abatement, demolition of a 1964 round elementary structure to replace it with a new PK-4 facility, and upgrades to our HVAC units: critically needed health and preventive maintenance items, as well as an up to date facility from which to provide education services to our early learners. However, our taxpayers saw the price tag as just too much to bear at that time. This bill will allow EQUITY to be put back into future bonds and allow the Solomon district and many other districts to plan for their future. Assessed valuation per pupil can be a bit misleading due to fluctuations in the enrollment and rural demographics of our district. We have little business/industry and must rely on agriculture. This makes it difficult to

advance our capital needs without state assistance. Solomon's assessed valuation of \$28 million does not raise enough in one year to replace buses, HVAC, provide regular maintenance and upkeep, yet alone let us plan and save for our future major structural needs. Bonding for major capital improvements in the future is the only way we can be fiscally responsible to meet our future needs. It also allows us to address a building that is aging from the first bond in 1994 and address its maintenance needs too.

Since the failed bond issue of 2017 our board of education has done a tremendous job focusing on smaller capital improvements, such as: a new bus barn, LED lighting, and sidewalk improvements; however, asbestos abatement, cafeteria/kitchen upgrades, HVAC, and demolishing and rebuilding of the current PK-4 are not possible because of the upfront capital needed to complete such projects. The passage of **Senate Bill 31** would allow us to plan and provide what is best for USD 393 Solomon going forward and help to furnish our district with facilities that meet the needs of future generations of Gorilla students. **Senate Bill 31** impacts not only our local school district, but impacts the future of the families who choose to move to our wonderful rural community and make it their home. Economic development and the quality of life inherent in it is not just a matter for urban centers and the businesses who seek to attract qualified employees, but for our schools who have the responsibility to improve the quality of our student's education so that they may become those sought after employees who will continue to call Kansas home. We stand in full support of **Senate Bill 31**.

Respectfully Submitted,

Justin Coup, Superintendent
Solomon USD 393, a member of
Schools for Quality Education