

Jackson Heights Schools

- **North Jackson Heights Schools USD 335**
- **Jim Howard, Superintendent of School, jimhoward@jhcobras.net, Cell 620-214-9447**
- **SB 386, updating KSEEA to require enrollment to be calculated using the current or preceding school year and requiring districts who close a building to use current year enrollment**
- **Proponent**
- **January 30, 2024**

Chairwoman Baumgardner and Members of the Senate Committee on Education

My name is Jim Howard, and I have been the Superintendent for USD 335 since 2021. I have been an educator and worked in the public school system for 20 years.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit verbal testimony in support of SB 386.

Summary:

In February 2023, USD 113 closed the Wetmore Academic Center, displacing over 120 students at the end of the 2022-2023 school year. In response to that closure and recognizing that our school was geographically closer to many affected families, USD 335 welcomed several new students to our school family. Since they arrived at the beginning of this school year, they have integrated seamlessly into our educational community and have excelled academically.

USD 335 currently has 110 students who reside in USD 113 attending USD 335 schools; this constitutes 24% of our total enrollment. Of those, we welcomed 90 new students at the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year who previously attended the Wetmore school in USD 113; this constituted a 22% increase in USD 335's enrollment. Passage of last year's SB 113 would have ensured we received the per-pupil base aid for these new students this school year. Unfortunately, the Governor's veto of that section prevented us from receiving that funding, which was crucial to alleviate the immediate financial impact of USD 335. (We spent approximately \$600,000 this school year to properly educate these new students.). The veto of SB 113 also allowed the closing district to continue to receive funding for students they no longer educate.

We bear the cost of this increased enrollment without corresponding funding, which has strained our financial resources. While SB 386 will not fix this issue for us, we believe our situation is a case study for why passage of SB 386 is so important - it will help prevent districts like ours from receiving a substantial increase in new students displaced by closures from having to bear the brunt of another district's decision. It is crucial to highlight that while we bear the immediate impact of the added enrollment, USD 113 is set to retain this money for the next two years despite not being responsible for educating these students during that period.

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Direct Impact Overview:

1. **Financial Strain:** Welcoming a substantial influx of students from another district has strained our financial resources, resulting in an approximate loss of \$600,000 in funding for the current year alone.
2. **Deferred Funding:** Importantly, this financial shortfall means that while we bear the immediate impact of added enrollment, USD 113 will retain this money for two years, even though they will not be educating these students.
3. **Transportation Costs:** Among the 110 students, 103 are eligible for busing, incurring a loss of approximately \$1,200 per student. To meet this demand, we expanded our transportation services, increasing the number of routes from 8 to 12, with three exclusively serving students from Wetmore.
4. **Additional Transportation Expenses:** Expanded transportation services resulted in additional costs, including a salary increase of approximately \$64,000, an expenditure of \$30,000 on fuel, and the purchase of 2 buses and three support vehicles, totaling over \$100,000.
5. **Staffing and Resources:** In response to the influx, we hired four new bus drivers, three teachers, and five support staff members. This commitment extended to enhancing food service and extracurricular opportunities, employing more coaches, paras, and additional personnel.

Systemic Issues:

1. **Financial Challenges:** Accommodating substantial growth has led to critical funding challenges. This includes the veto of SB 113 and USD 113's unwillingness to transfer per-pupil base state aid, depleting our reserve funding and creating long-term financial hardships related to property tax dollars.
2. **Disparities in Funding:** The retention of funding by USD 113 following school closures has created disparities. Closure decisions, often centered on Sabetha, raise concerns about intentions and a fear of further closures, leaving small rural communities without essential resources.
3. **Incentives for Closure:** The existing system incentivizes closing smaller schools to preserve funding and land taxes. This has driven collaboration with other districts to address longstanding funding and representation disparities and cultivate a more balanced educational landscape.
4. **Delayed State Aid:** The current funding structure exacerbates the strain on resources by deferring the financial benefits of state aid to subsequent years. This delay poses a significant obstacle in managing the immediate financial impact of sudden enrollment growth.

Importance of Current Year Enrollment Consideration:

Enabling districts to receive state aid in the same year they admit new students, especially those affected by school closures, ensures a more equitable distribution of financial responsibilities. This adjustment is particularly critical when districts like ours go above and beyond to welcome and integrate students displaced due to school closures. Accessing state aid promptly allows for better

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financial planning and resource allocation, mitigating the immediate financial challenges associated with increased enrollment.

Furthermore, advocating for the requirement of closing districts to use current-year enrollment aligns with the principles of fairness and transparency. This measure eliminates any underlying financial incentive for the closure of several rural schools, as the closing district would no longer stand to benefit from the delayed receipt of state aid tied to past enrollment numbers. Instead, it ensures that closing districts are accountable for the financial implications of their decisions in the same fiscal year, fostering responsible decision-making and discouraging closures driven solely by financial considerations.

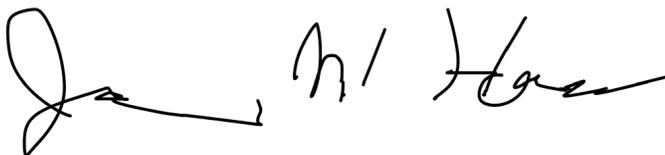
In essence, advocating for current-year enrollment for both receiving and closing districts addresses the financial imbalance inherent in the current system. It promotes a fair and transparent distribution of resources, safeguarding the financial well-being of districts like USD 335 that open doors to students affected by school closures.

Support of SB 386

In closing, I want to voice strong support for SB 386. As a concerned member of our educational community, I believe the proposed legislation addresses critical issues impacting our districts and the students we serve. The proposed changes in SB 386 bring about significant improvements in how enrollment is calculated. The bill ensures that districts experiencing an increase in enrollment receive base state aid for those students annually. However, I have a neutral stance on the provision proposing a change in the lookback from 2 to 1 year. Furthermore, the bill addresses the issue of attendance center closures by requiring districts that closed a building in the preceding year to use current-year enrollment. This provision adds transparency and fairness to the process, aligning it with the current circumstances and preventing potential disparities.

We thank you for your time and attention to these critical issues. Our commitment to providing equitable education and representation for all students remains steadfast regardless of district boundaries. We believe that addressing these challenges and implementing the recommended changes will pave the way for a fairer, more balanced educational landscape in Kansas. By working together and advocating for these necessary reforms, we can ensure that every student has the opportunity to thrive and succeed. Thank you for your consideration and support.

Thanks for all you do,



Jim Howard