

Written Testimony before the
Senate Committee on Education

on

SB 386

by

**Rob Reynolds, Superintendent of Schools
On Behalf of Unified School District 396**

January 30, 2024

Chairperson Baumgardner, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 386. I am providing written testimony against SB 386 as written due to the adverse effects that it would cause for our school district and community. Douglass is a small rural school district that has experienced declining enrollment. We pride ourselves in running a very efficient district while offering outstanding programs and services to the children of our district. Over the past 16 years as the Superintendent in Douglass I have worked with my Board of Education and staff to manage the effects of fluctuating enrolment. We have been thankful for the flexibility historically built in to the funding formula. By allowing districts to use an average to calculate their enrollment it provides stability for the districts who are experiencing declining enrollment.

The ability to no longer stabilize enrollment over multiple years would be detrimental to rural districts and those experiencing declining enrollment. Our BOE is counting on the ability to continue to use the previous 2 year enrollment numbers to help stabilize our budget. Between last year and next year we are projecting to be down 34 students. If we only have the ability to use current year or one year enrollment numbers our district could lose over \$172,000 in our general fund alone. I encourage this committee to consider a two or three year average. By using this strategy districts can stabilize their enrollment to help mitigate the impact of declining enrollment. There are also several other issues to consider outlined below:

- As the ESSER funds end in 24-25 implementing these changes as written will place declining districts at a greater disadvantage as they prepare their budgets to absorb the programs that ESSER funds established.
- With the recent changes and requirements of the new open enrollment policies that districts are implementing districts do not have any idea of how many students they could lose. They will not know the number of students leaving their district until late summer. Districts who are impacted will not have any time to make reductions to staffing due to the continuing contract statutes. By providing a two or three year average, districts could have the time to make the necessary staffing adjustment.
- The budget process/requirements in place due to recent legislative changes makes it impossible to plan effectively with current year enrollment.
- Not having a way to mitigate enrollment fluctuations will effect employees in the community and create hardships for families. As you know small districts are the largest employer in most communities.
- Districts with declining enrollment cannot isolate the decline in one grade level, the decline is across the board affecting all grade levels and buildings. Therefore, ends up being a budget reduction due to not being able to reduce individual classes or grade levels. This creates a reduction in services across the board and a yo-yo effect on services being provided

We recommend maintaining the two year look back or even implementing a two or three year average to help stabilize enrolment. This testimony provides a snap shot of the importance of providing districts the flexibility of a two or three year average in calculating the budget based on enrollment.

Thank you,