

**Written Testimony before the**  
**House Committee on K-12 Education Budget**  
**on**  
**HB 2270**  
**by**  
**Brian D. Smith, Superintendent of the Galena School District USD 499**

**February 15, 2017**

Chairman Campbell and members of the K-12 Budget Committee:

My name is Brian Smith and I am the superintendent of the Galena School District. I am submitting this written testimony in support of House Bill 2270 on behalf of our district. As many of you know, we are one of the poorest districts in the state, both in valuation and student poverty. Many school finance experts have used us as an example for how an inequitable school finance system suppresses the opportunity of the state's most impoverished children. Galena has never participated in a school finance lawsuit because it is our belief that we can create a good system for all Kansas children through the legislative process. We believe that when it comes to the children of Kansas, politics should be set aside, and we should all work together to ensure the success of future generations of Kansans. House Bill 2270 gives us hope that we will achieve that goal. The bill creates equity, stability, and it meets the needs of the 21st century student.

Equity is one of the most important components of any school finance plan. House Bill 2270 addresses this in several ways. First, it provides funding for full day kindergarten. Our district chose to implement full day kindergarten 15 years ago because we understood the importance of early childhood education for children of poverty. To accomplish this goal we had added costs that took away from other district resources. Many wealthier districts are able to charge a fee for students who attend full day kindergarten. We do not have that as an option because of the high rate of poverty in our district. The students who have the most need of education are at a disadvantage when fees are introduced. It is also a burden for many hardworking middle class families who have struggled to provide for their children since the Great Recession. Fully funding special education also helps level the playing field. Many times districts with high poverty rates also have a higher number of students with special needs. When special education is not fully funded, it places a greater burden

on districts with greater special needs populations. Finally, maintaining at risk weighting at .456 also assists leveling the playing field for children who lack the resources in their homes to reach their full potential.

Another strength of this plan is that it provides stability. This assists districts in planning for the future and ensuring that they can create the best learning opportunities for their students. Basing enrollment on the prior year gives districts more time to prepare for issues like declining enrollment. Currently we do not know how our funding will be affected until well into the school year. Leaving the special mill levies in place for declining enrollment, cost of living, and extraordinary growth also assists districts in transitioning to a changing environment. One of the greatest challenges I have faced over my 13 years as superintendent has been the lack of stability in our school finance system. It has put me in the position to slowly address our instructional needs for fear of changes to the system and cuts. This impacts student learning and makes it more difficult to prepare students for their future.

Maybe the most important affect of House Bill 2270 is that it assists districts in ensuring that students are prepared for their future challenges. Not every child needs a four year degree, but we do know they need training above and beyond their K-12 education. The Bill both funds vocational education, but also requires the Kansas Department of Education to study the true financial needs of vocational programs. This will assist the state in becoming more efficient, which will create more opportunities. As schools move toward developing individualized career plans for all students, it is critical that we have the funding necessary to sustain and develop programs that can prepare students for their prospective careers.

We believe that the future of Kansas depends on a strong educational system. This can only be accomplished by inserting equity and stability into a quality school finance system. We believe House Bill 2270 meets these needs. Thank you for considering our position. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

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