

January 31, 2012

Testimony on House Bill 2439

Madam Chair
Members of the House Education Committee

My name is Bob Shannon. I am Superintendent of Manhattan-Ogden USD 383 in Manhattan. Our school district is located along the eastern boundary of Fort Riley. The community of Ogden, the location of one of our elementary schools, is immediately outside the garrison's east gate.

I am here this afternoon in support of HB 2439 relating to the February 20 count of children of active duty military personnel. The proposed change would make permanent the consideration given to school districts surrounding our military installations in Kansas and the unique circumstances relating to the education of military-related students.

This past September, we experienced a year-to-year increase of 100 students in Manhattan-Ogden USD 383. Since September 20, we have seen 160 children of activity duty military personnel move into our schools. The February 20 provision provides our district a margin of confidence to make the best possible plans for our students, both military and non-military, prior to the beginning of the school year.

The number of military students enrolled between September and February last year was 110, the year before it was over 200. As I stated a moment ago, we have received 160 new students whose parents are active duty military since September 20. We currently educate 1300 military students in our district. Projections from military personnel indicate that this number will continue to increase as the dwell times are lengthened the combat needs change from Iraq to Afghanistan. The garrison office works closely with area schools to provide good information about when troops will arrive and depart, but the nature of world affairs can change their needs and plans with relatively short notice. We are told the Headquarters personnel are deploying within 1-2 months, and a combat brigade shortly after that. The Army is on the move, and often times, so are the children.

Our school district has responded with actions to accommodate the new children and welcomed growth. The school districts in our region have worked closely as a team for many years to support children of the U.S. Army as they come to us from all over the country and world. They enrich our classrooms and schools, but also require resources to serve them well beginning with the first day they walk through the school doors. Although many military family relocations occur during the summer months, there is also a significant number who must relocate when orders come to serve the country.

The Manhattan community, together with all other communities and school districts in the Fort Riley region, is grateful for our unique opportunity and responsibility to support our soldiers and their families. In the fall of 2005, we reversed the decision to close an elementary school building that was to have been taken out of service in May of 2006. Furthermore, we re-opened another elementary school building that closed ten years ago. Manhattan voters approved nearly \$100 million in construction bonds to expand most of our school buildings. As a community, we are excited about these changes in enrollment, but also know that we have some uncertainty with another possible Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) as well as decisions about troop deployments.

Because the growth of families stationed at Ft. Riley requires our area schools to hire teaching staff, provide resources, transportation, and supplies; our Manhattan-Ogden Board of Education believes it is important that HB 2439 be made a permanent component of the school finance statute in order to help meet the educational needs of new military students who come to our region. Thank you for your support for all school children in Kansas as well as consideration of the proposed change in the school finance act to count military students on February 20.

Robert Shannon, Superintendent
Manhattan-Ogden USD 383

