



House Committee on K-12 Education Budget
Testimony in support of House Bill 2636

Dr. Chad Higgins, Superintendent of Schools, Maize USD 266

March 9, 2018

Mr. Chairman and committee members,

Maize USD 266 stands in support of House Bill 2636.

Historically, our community has supported bond issues to provide a safe and promising future for all students. Current legislation reduces local control of project development and the election process and limits our board of education's ability to address constituent and community needs. Recent legislation that reduced bond aid rates has already put high density school districts and communities at a disadvantage. These reduced aid rates will result in a limited ability to expand with student growth, longer debt terms, and higher property taxes. This is poor public policy.

To repeal the statutory limit on state board of education approval of school district bond issuances would be positive for a number of reasons, which I respectfully address in this testimony. It expands the districts' ability to address vital safety concerns, supports growing districts, promotes innovation, and is fiscally responsible.

School districts depend on access to and use of bond construction funding for a number of vital reasons, and our vision is for equitable state aid for school bonds that is not arbitrarily capped or dependent on other districts. The bond cap in current legislation places schools in a position to compete against each other for available bond cap dollars each fiscal year.

The benefits of eliminating a cap on bond state aid for, as outlined in House Bill 2636 include:

- **School safety:** Perhaps the most important and relevant improvement HB 2636 would bring is its expansion of districts' ability to address safety improvements and security concerns at a time when school safety is crucial and of utmost concern. These upgrades, such as systems that provide secure entrances, monitoring technology, and more secure classrooms, often can be expensive. Following the historic and deplorable school shooting tragedy in Florida this year, safety and security is a topic educators and our students' parents and the voters in our community want to discuss and further address. Now is not the time to limit local school boards' and communities' ability to keep our students and children safe.

- **Enrollment growth:** The Maize school district is surrounded by booming commercial and residential growth. Our district is wrapping up a \$70.7 million bond issue, the largest in our district’s history, and already is beginning to start planning for our next. In the past year and a half, enrollment has increased by nearly 300 students, above professional demographic projections and contributing to projected capacity concerns. HB 2636 would prevent longer lead time for project development, making it possible for growing school districts like ours to provide adequate space needed to operate schools efficiently and effectively. Current legislation makes delaying projects until necessary risky, prompting districts to instead start projects sooner than necessary.

- **Financial considerations:**
 - A bond cap as Kansas has now reduces the “buying power” due to inflation and therefore will perpetually reduce what schools can construct or renovate over time. The requirement to “get in line” for bond cap dollars results in higher construction and financing costs due to interest rate changes.
 - As the number of school districts and proposed bond projects are delayed due to the current cap, a potential future reprieve from the cap could cause a significant financial liability on the state. This sudden demand also could lead to projects being assigned to out-of-state vendors.
 - A recent reduction in the state aid rates for bond construction already has either limited the ability for schools to construct and/or renovate needed facilities or could significantly increase property tax levies or lengthen debt terms.
 - If denied approval for bonds, districts would be forced to add temporary facilities with Capital Outlay funds. This would be a inefficient use of taxpayer dollars due to the eventual need to construct permanent facilities and the likelihood of delaying preventative maintenance which Capital Outlay funds are currently used for.

- **Innovative programming:** HB 2636 expands the ability for schools to adapt to the changing needs of the workforce. In January, Maize USD 266 opened our new Maize Career Academy, a career and technical education learning space that made a community dream come true, thanks to our June 2015 bond issue.

- **Educational needs:** HB 2636 maximizes districts’ ability to respond to changing community educational needs. In August, Maize USD 266 opened its new Maize Early Childhood Center, our first stand-alone preschool and expanded early childhood program.

We remain hopeful that equitable and accessible bond funding once again will become a tool for school districts and the voters of Kansas to employ when they see fit and support such an option. Thank you for the opportunity to listen to Kansas educators.

Sincerely,



Dr. Chad Higgins
Superintendent, Maize USD 266