



Testimony of Dr. Rick Doll
Superintendent, Lawrence USD 497
Regarding SB 361
Senate Education Committee
Tuesday, February 7, 2012

Madam Chairperson and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

The K-8 Lawrence Virtual School has been in operation in Lawrence Public Schools for eight years. The district also operates a virtual high school, which we reinstated two years ago after suspending the program earlier because of funding concerns. Our virtual schools expand the definition of public school choice in Lawrence and across the state. They combine the best elements of home-schooling – flexibility and individual instruction by parents – with the guidance, support and accountability of certified teachers using a high-quality, standards- and Web-based curriculum.

Currently, students learning in the virtual environment are funded at Base State Aid Per Pupil (BSAPP) plus a 5 percent (5%) weighting factor or a total of \$3,969 per student per year. I want to emphasize the importance of offering an alternative to the traditional bricks-and-mortar school. Virtual learning programs offer parents and children a choice that includes an option to remain in the public school system. Individuals choose the virtual classroom setting for any number of reasons, from an alternative curriculum to safety concerns. Illness, at times, will require a student to seek an alternative to physically attending school at a specific location. Pace of education is often an incentive to pursue a virtual education.

Virtual schools also provide an option to enroll in Advanced Placement classes that may not be offered in their local school districts. Specialized courses can be provided on a cost-effective basis.

Our teachers are state certified and receive extra training to meet the requirements of online teaching. We demand parental involvement and ensure socialization needs are met by offering various functions throughout the year.

Students enrolled in our virtual schools take all of the required state assessment tests and are expected to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards. The Lawrence Virtual School has met AYP requirements in two of the last three years.

The Governor, in his roadmap for education, issued a call to “promote innovation in education such as virtual learning so that a school’s size doesn’t limit course offerings.” However, under the proposed education plan, offered in Senate Bill 361, the funding for students in virtual

settings would be decreased by \$600 per student per year. The new formula raises BSAPP to \$4,492, but only allows those students to be counted as .75 of a Full-Time Equivalency (FTE).

As a superintendent, I have to examine the financial impact that such a cut has, not only on the virtual education program, but also on other district programs that would be required to subsidize it. Under the provisions of SB 361, the virtual education program in Lawrence is in jeopardy.

Lawrence Virtual School Principal Keith Wilson will speak briefly about his experience with the K-8 program.

Also, attached to his testimony, is a copy of a proposed amendment. I ask that you give serious consideration to our recommended language.

Thank you for your attention. I would be happy to answer any questions.