



McPherson Unified School District 418

Randy Watson, Ed.D., Superintendent
Chris Ruder, Associate Superintendent

Testimony before the
House Committee on Education
on
HB 2319 – Innovative School Districts

by
Randy Watson, Superintendent
McPherson Unified School District 418

February 19, 2013

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **HB 2319**. On behalf of our school district, school board, administration, faculty, staff and most importantly the students, I appear today in strong support of this bill.

In the summer of 2010, the work that our Board of Education, community and staff had put in over two years came to fruition as the U.S. Department of Education received and granted McPherson a waiver from the regulations under No Child Left Behind. This waiver was the first in the country and paved the way for great innovation and student success in McPherson.

The waiver was the result of a lot of planning and work in our community. Throughout 2008 and the spring of 2009, the McPherson Board of Education held a series of retreats to define the district goals for the next two years. Three goals came from those sessions:

- 1. We will engage parents and the community in serious discussions about the education of our children.**
- 2. We will provide staff the training, knowledge, skills and resources necessary to assist children to grow to their fullest potential.**
- 3. We will work to hire and retain the best people to serve our students.**

To further obtain these goals, the Board and administration held several more retreats in the late summer and early fall of 2009. The purpose of these retreats was to look at research, the goals adopted by the Board and to examine what we, collectively in USD 418, wanted for our students. The Board specifically looked at the research on student achievement and the role that a strong functioning board



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should play to ensure strong student learning. That research led the McPherson USD 418 Board of Education to establish not only the Board goals, but a deeper commitment to redesign our schools to ensure that all students, upon graduation, were citizenship, college and career ready. This was a non-negotiable position for the school board and one that through collaborative goal setting, our entire administrative staff supported.

The Board asked administration to start to put into practice a system that reached well beyond anything being asked for in the current NCLB system. They asked staff to think broadly and boldly in scaling new challenges. Thus, the work began to implement an entire new system of accountability in USD 418.

Much of the early work in the fall of 2009 was on research. Research on structures, assessments and accountability that would ensure all of our students would be successful. This work was carried out in all buildings. First we created training in the MTSS system. Our district worked with the state as a pilot district for MTSS behavioral supports. We changed our Pre-K system from a centralized system to a neighborhood system. We researched, collaborated and visited other schools. What we found is that many districts and systems talked about raising standards, but we saw little REAL evidence that this was the case. Measures were low, expectations narrow and systems not designed well to achieve real results however; that did not discourage our work. We simply wanted something better for our students. We insisted on multiple measurements of a student, high standards for our graduates and an accountability system that was second to none. As we worked on the system, it all started to come together. One focus – to have all our students be **Citizenship, College and Career Ready** when they walk across the stage at graduation.

Today, McPherson is focused on the three broad areas of **Citizenship, College and Career Readiness** with an intense focus on nine areas of measurement to determine whether or not our students are ready for life after high school. Those measurement areas are:



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Citizenship

Character
Service to the Community
Involvement in Activities

College

College Ready on ACT Assessments
Soft Skills on ACT ENGAGE
Number of Pre-AP/AP courses taken and AP exam scores

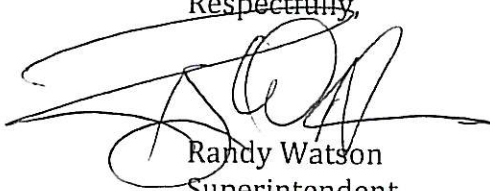
Career

Silver Level on National Career Readiness Certificate (as measured by WorkKeys)
Employment Soft Skills on ACT TALENT
Choosing a Career – 7 year plans

HB 2319 – Innovative School Districts brings to the state of Kansas what the waiver from NCLB did for McPherson – an opportunity for school districts to stretch to a higher standard while getting some regulatory relief in the process. This bill addresses what we firmly believe in McPherson, that given the opportunity to be creative, public schools in Kansas will create models that can be used by other districts and schools. All of this can be accomplished within the public school system and this bill takes our accomplishments a step further by allowing for even more flexibility. This will be a major incentive for up to 10 school districts to develop programs of study that reach every student in their district.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony and this important bill.

Respectfully,



Randy Watson
Superintendent
McPherson USD 418