

## Testimony on House Bill 2504

Submitted by: Greg Clark Superintendent Central Plains School District 112

I would like to present testimony in opposition of House Bill 2504 Realignment of School Districts. In reading the bill, one area that I found missing throughout the bill was the mention of what was best for the students of Kansas. The bill states how the act of realigning school districts would be accomplished and what dissolved districts would do with buildings that were no longer needed. Reading through the bill, it was disappointing that this is where the Kansas Legislature has devolved in their concern for the current and future students of this state. There are many ways the passage of this bill will affect every school district in the state of Kansas, but I would like to, for the sake of my testimony, focus on how it would affect the students, parents, and patrons of USD 112.

First a bit of background on USD 112. Central Plains School District is located in the center of Kansas with 480 students and 580 square miles. We are currently one of two school districts located in five counties (Barton, Ellsworth, Rice, Russell, and Lincoln). Currently we have an elementary school located in Holyrood, a middle school located in Bushton, and a high school located in Claflin, with the town of Wilson hosting a Pre K through 12 building. We have four communities that truly care for their school and the students and staff that work there. This can be seen at high school plays, music concerts, sporting events, and other activities where the entire town turns out to support these students. The pride that each community has for the schools is evident as you cannot walk down a street without seeing a Central Plains Oilers or Wilson Dragons shirt on someone. As you enter Claflin, one business ALWAYS has some school related event or accomplishment on their marquee. These are communities that truly care about their schools and our students! Many of the parents of our students work in the communities of Great Bend, Ellsworth, and Lyons but keep their students enrolled in our district. This, if nothing else, speaks volumes to the job we do educating the students and the opportunities we provide.

How would the passage of this bill affect our district?

1. From the research, I have concluded that Central Plains would be no more. Our students would be divided up based on where they live. With none of the communities on the south end supporting a large enough population to host a K-12 building, students would be bused to surrounding schools in larger districts. This would essentially kill these communities, as much of the local businesses rely on the school district and their employees to stay in business.
2. Student opportunities would be greatly diminished. We have students that participate in sports during the fall, winter, and spring. While they play sports, they also get the chance to be in student council, school plays, music concerts, scholars' bowl and a host of other programs that benefit them and the type of adults we want them to become. Would they still have the same opportunities in a larger district? Yes, but to what degree would they get to participate? There are only so many spots in each of these activities, and with increased numbers of students come decreased opportunities. Why is it your job to take these opportunities away from our children?
3. I touched briefly in section one, the economic impact the passage of this bill would have on these small communities. Many of the staff members live in these communities and shop locally as well. If their child is now being forced to go to a school in another community, it would only

make sense to the parents to live there as well, thus causing a mass exodus from the smaller communities and driving down real estate prices and closing many businesses.

4. Specialized education and student-teacher ratios. One of the things that I am most proud of in the Central Plains School District is the diversity we provide our students. We have students, that when they leave us, attend four-year colleges, tech schools, or straight to the farm. The education we provide helps them to be successful no matter their career choice. From learning to weld, analyzing soil, accounting, and higher-level math, our staff understands what our students need and they provide that for them each and every day. As the superintendent, most if not all, of the students know who I am and know I care about their education. Every year I eat lunch with high school students and one question that I ask sticks in my mind above all others. The question I ask them is, "If you had a problem academically, personally, or other, is there a staff member you could confide in and get the help you need?" The answer always is a resounding "YES". This speaks to the relationships that our staff builds with the students and the trust these students have in them.

In conclusion, why is this bill being introduced? Is it to fix a school problem or a budget problem? After thorough research and investigation, I would conclude the latter has to be the case. Was this bill introduced because smaller districts do a poor job of meeting students' needs both academically and socially? No, that data proves just the opposite. Again, I have to ask why are the current and future students of this state being forced to carry the burden of poor legislation that is shortsighted and did not once mention what is best for the students. Why are we trying to fix a problem that is not of Central Plains' making and not a problem in the first place?