

Written Testimony Submitted by Andrea Estell, Psy.D, Union School District Chair

SB 457 AN ACT CONCERNING THE SIZE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS

SB 738 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Dr. Andrea Estell. I am the chairman of the Union Board of Education.

SB 457 and SB 738: I cannot with good conscience support SB 457 and SB 738. Research indicates that financial efficiencies may initially be achieved by decreasing administrative, teaching, clerical, and support personnel through consolidation.³ However, those cost savings are generally replaced by increased transportation costs, and more expensive staff due to contractual seniority obligations.^{3,4} It is noted that administrative costs initially decline, but they tend to increase disproportionately when enrollment increases and mid-level administrators and support staff are added.³

Although towns may no longer maintain buildings as schools, they can be left with costly vacant buildings for which they are responsible.³ Economies of scale such as purchasing supplies in bulk are to be applauded. However, school purchasing cooperatives through RESCs have been serving that purpose for decades. It is reported that larger consolidated schools provide more student services.⁶ Currently, services such as special education and related services, back office support, transportation, professional development, health insurance, and numerous other services are being purchased from RESCs at significant savings without disrupting an existing school district.

In terms of societal costs, research studies report that there are many benefits of small class size. There is a broad economic benefit to society resulting from improved high school graduation rates which in turn increases the number of productive adults with higher future earnings and lower taxpayer costs for incarceration and social support.¹ It is estimated that taxpayer costs for social supports for a high school drop-out can be as high as \$292,000 over the individual's lifetime.³ When towns lose their schools to consolidation their fiscal capacity is significantly damaged by loss of housing value, decreased tax base, inability to attract high-income professionals and businesses, and increased poverty rates.^{1, 4}

Lastly, but most importantly, are academic considerations. Studies demonstrate that smaller class sizes result in earlier detection of learning disabilities and quicker and less costly remediation. Not only are graduation rates higher in schools with smaller class sizes, the rates of students taking college entrance exams are increased.¹ Project Star, a large scale study with statistically significant findings, demonstrated an inverse relationship between class size and performance on the standardized tests administered. A 14-year follow-up study revealed that the students in the smaller classes were 2.5 percent less likely to be retained during their elementary school career.² There were similar findings in an Indiana study indicating that student performance declined as enrollment increased.⁴ Transportation time is also a consideration, particularly for rural students. Literature reporting measurement of fourth-grade student achievement noted a 2.6 point drop in achievement scores for each hour spent riding a bus.³

In closing, I would like to point out that efficiency refers to the relationship between cost and quality.²

Thank you.

Endnotes:

1. Class Size Reduction: A Proven Reform Strategy Education (2008) Retrieved January 31, 2019 from https://nea.org/assets/docs/PB08_ClassSize08.PDF

2. Boyd-Zaharias, J. (1999) PROJECT STAR: The Story of the Tennessee Class-size Study. Retrieved January 21, 2019 from <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/STARSummer99.PDF>

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3. Rodriguez, O.J. (2018) K-12 Regionalization in Connecticut: Pros, Cons and Surprises. *Hartford Foundation for Giving*. Retrieved January 27, 2019 from https://www.hfpg.org/index.php/download_file/view/1948/796
4. Bard, J., Gardener, C., & Wieland, R. (2006) National Rural Education Report Rural School Consolidation: History, Research, Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations. *Rural Educator*, 27, (2), 40-48. Retrieved January 26, 2019 from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED497049.PDF>
5. Sher, J. (1988) Class dismissed: Examining Nebraska's rural education debate. *Nebraska Rural Schools Association*. Retrieved January 26, 2019 from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED305194>
6. Dolph, D.A. (2008) Coming Together: The Pros and Cons of School Consolidation. Educational Leadership Faculty Publications 209. Retrieved January 26, 2019 from https://ecommons.udayton.edu/edu_fac_pub/209