

House Education Committee:

My name is Tom Turrell, I have been the Superintendent of Schools in Byers School District 32J for the past 10 years. Over that time we have seen steady school successes in achievement both academically and extra-curricular. School Improvement comes in many forms, maybe it is a program, course offerings, teachers or administrators. All could be a single focus of attention if highlighted as the only way to improve student achievement. I have seen programs bring success and those same programs suffer due to the implementation or lack of in the same building. Investing in Professional Development for Teachers and Principals is a must, and does produce positive results. These teachers and principals on average make \$32,000 and \$60,000 annually working in Byers, while being only 35 miles away from salaries averaging \$45,000 and \$85,000 respectively. That is a fact of my "Commuter" District of Byers. We can tout our community as rural and students are respectful, genuine and hardworking. Class sizes are smaller and parents are supportive. To some this means a great deal, and others are looking to advance financially and that is a lure I cannot compete with.

Beginning in the 2009-10 school years we began cutting teachers and courses, stopped replacing busses, computers and put off facility upgrades needed (leaky roofs, faulty boiler, and no HVAC). We cut our music and band program 7-12, cut consumer health and science courses 7-12, upper level English and Math courses were also cut (as Morgan Community College might be able to fill those needs). To add to our despair many areas of our roof were leaking and due to the "commuter status" of most of our community, a BEST Grant would only provide a match of 40%. We applied for a QZAB Loan (which must be repaid) to cover the matching dollars. Our school bus fleet ranges from 134,000 – 171,000 on the odometer (in a district of 500 square miles) we have had students stranded due to breakdowns from time to time over the past 3 years. I can go on and on about the specifics in Byers both the adaptations or band aids we have implemented to make tomorrow happen. We need many things: computers, textbooks, interactive technology – smart boards, busses, gym floors, parking lot repairs, unfreeze staff salaries, roofs, boiler replacement, asbestos removal, lighting (indoor and outdoor) replacement, security doorways and other. We have provided Full – Day Kindergarten for 14 years, 3 and 4 year old preschool, daycare from 6am-6pm on site. We have low ELL populations, however our ELL students are academically as strong or stronger than our Caucasian students. BEST Grants are too high of a match. Our General Fund 10 has dropped 35% this past year and is projected to continue to drop again this year another 20%.

Please consider allowing the Byers School District 32J the opportunity to implement what is needed for our district and not mandate how we spend the money that was cut from our budgets four years ago. This budget year the 'negative factor' reduced funding by over \$800,000. The students and families in Byers deserve a Music/Band program, upper level Math and English as well as business classes to be successful in today's society. They deserve a safe ride to school in a reliable bus, a learning environment that doesn't require a coat be wore during the winter and the opposite in the summer. Score boards should work, playing surfaces should be safe, and harmful toxins should be abated. My staff deserves affordable health care coverage, a competitive salary and joy of teaching students.

Feel free to call or communicate in a fashion you are comfortable with anytime.

Tom Turrell