

2013 SENATE EDUCATION

SB 2282

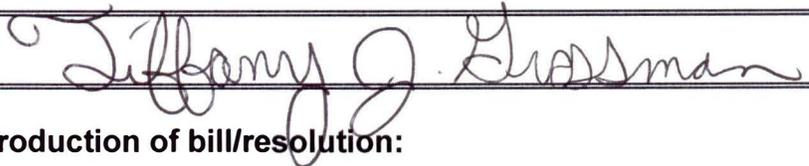
2013 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Senate Education Committee
Missouri River Room, State Capitol

SB 2282
1-28-13
17787

Conference Committee

Committee Clerk Signature



Explanation or reason for introduction of bill/resolution:

Relating to the provisions of educational services by school districts

Minutes:

You may make reference to "attached testimony."

Chairman Flakoll opened hearing on SB 2282.

Senator Karen Krebsbach, District 40: I am a sponsor of this bill, SB 2282. The bill says by July 1, 2014 each school district that offers educational services from K-12 that is unable to meet the requirements of K-12 should become reorganized or should dissolve and not receive state aid. It is becoming difficult in areas we have rapid growth in our communities. The encroachment into the other districts is becoming evident causing people to move into new areas.

Vice Chairman Schaible: The timeline just gives one year. If you are going to do a reorganization, is that realistic?

Senator Karen Krebsbach, District 40: These are dates that are put in the bill. The committee could come up with alternative dates.

Chairman Flakoll: How many schools are we talking about?

Senator Karen Krebsbach, District 40: I don't have that.

Mark Vollmer, Superintendent, Minot Public School District #1: I wish to testify in support of SB 2282. (Written Testimony #1 attached)

Vice Chairman Schaible: Your issue is that you are getting high school students from outside of your district that you have to educate and you are not getting the return from the property, is that correct?

Mark Vollmer, Superintendent, Minot Public School District #1: No the students at the high school level pay tuition. It is students between the grades of K-8 that would be open enrolled in the district. In that case, those we do not get tuition payments from.

Vice Chairman Schaible: Why has annexation or reorganization been difficult?

Mark Vollmer, Superintendent, Minot Public School District #1: They want to keep their own districts.

Vice Chairman Schaible: Is time timeline realistic?

Mark Vollmer, Superintendent, Minot Public School District #1: I agree it is a short window. There would be an opportunity for the committee to recommend changes.

Chairman Flakoll: What is the academic value if this were to happen to the students in the graded elementary?

Mark Vollmer, Superintendent, Minot Public School District #1: I believe the greatest advantage is ensuring that our curriculum is seamless and building relationships in a community.

Chairman Flakoll: Would they have a lower property tax rate than they may in Minot?

Mark Vollmer, Superintendent, Minot Public School District #1: Yes. South Prairie and Minot Public Schools are close. The other issue is that as we look at the costs associated with the education, it is difficult for Minot Public Schools to offer educational services to children without that local cost share. We depend on federal, state, and local funds.

Chairman Flakoll: Do you have the ability to deny the students?

Mark Vollmer, Superintendent, Minot Public School District #1: I believe so but we haven't.

Chairman Flakoll: What does it cost in Minot?

Mark Vollmer, Superintendent, Minot Public School District #1: The value of my home in Minot is \$145,000 and \$920 of that went to the Minot Public School System.

Chairman Flakoll: How much do you receive per child?

Mark Vollmer, Superintendent, Minot Public School District #1: I would be happy to get that information for you. When we go to annexation hearings, there is a formula we need to provide.

Viola LaFontaine, Superintendent of Williston Public School District #1: I wish to testify in support of SB 2282. (See written testimony #2 attached)

Vice Chairman Schaible: How many other elementary districts surround Williston?

Viola LaFontaine, Superintendent of Williston Public School District #1: There are about six.

Vice Chairman Schaible: Why have the reorganization efforts failed?

Viola LaFontaine, Superintendent of Williston Public School District #1: It goes back to feeling that Williston has been the big school and wants to keep their identity and keep the small school mentality available to families.

Chairman Flakoll: In the past there was a provision that did not allow any elementary to close unless the voters from the original school voted to do so. Is that in this bill?

Viola LaFontaine, Superintendent of Williston Public School District #1: No.

Senator Stan Lyson: A bill like this must be passed. It seems that with the transportation that we have today, elementary schools in the county have served their purposes. I think this is more about money. We are landlocked in Williston with District #8. We can't move to get any more money into our school district so we are sitting here wondering what we do. Our population has more than doubled in the last three years. I believe this bill is necessary for our area.

Senator Heckaman: What would the bussing distance be?

Senator Stan Lyson: Not more than 30 miles.

Chairman Flakoll: The intent of this bill is not to close elementary schools but more so to provide equity?

Senator Stan Lyson: The intent is to save money.

Chairman Flakoll: There was a suggestion to change the effective date to July 1, 2015. Are you opposed to that?

Senator Stan Lyson: I am not opposed to anything that would equalize that. I would rather see it go earlier but I don't know that it has to be.

Chairman Flakoll: If there was an amendment applied that a facility may not be closed unless the original voters in that district vote to do so would that be okay?

Senator Stan Lyson: I am looking at where we can spend our money and equalize our funds so that is fine.

Sherilyn Johnson, teacher at Sweet Briar School: I wish to testify against SB 2285. (See written testimony #3 attached)

Vice Chairman Schaible: What do we say when the local communities fail to step up?

Sherilyn Johnson, teacher at Sweet Briar School: In my experience people were so concerned about losing our school and the bussing and transportation. When we got down to 13 students, the community just decided that was the way to go. It was clear to us that we needed to reorganize.

Chairman Flakoll: How would travel be different for the students in your area if the bill would pass and your school would remain open?

Sherilyn Johnson, teacher at Sweet Briar School: Right now all of our students are within 5 miles of the school. It would be about 16-20 miles one way. My fear is that if we come a part of the Mandan School District, they wouldn't keep our school.

Chairman Flakoll: Would you be in favor of an amendment for local decision?

Sherilyn Johnson, teacher at Sweet Briar School: Yes.

Chairman Flakoll: What is the cost per pupil in Sweet Briar?

Sherilyn Johnson, teacher at Sweet Briar School: I don't know.

Chairman Flakoll: Closed hearing on SB 2282

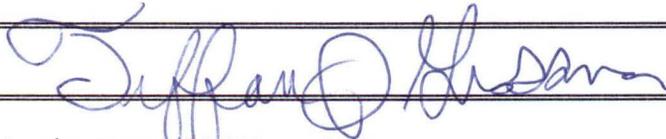
2013 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Senate Education Committee
Missouri River Room, State Capitol

SB 2282
1-28-13
17840

Conference Committee

Committee Clerk Signature



Explanation or reason for introduction of bill/resolution:

Relating to the provisions of educational services by school districts

Minutes:

You may make reference to "attached testimony."

Chairman Flakoll: Opened the hearing on SB 2282. I have an amendment.

Senator Luick: I move a Do pass on Flakoll amendment

Senator Poolman: Second

Vice Chairman Schaible: Is this still enough time?

Senator Luick: Some have three year co-op agreements.

A roll call vote was taken 4 yeas, 2 neas, 0 absent.

Chairman Flakoll: I have another amendment

Senator Heckaman: How is this different than current law?

Chairman Flakoll: Current law allows a whole district to allow a school to close down. If this were to pass, the voters in the original district would have to vote to close their building. The larger district could not vote to close the smaller.

Vice Chairman Schaible: The board could vote to close it. It is board action.

Chairman Flakoll: The intent of the amendment is to provide protection and peace of mind for the smaller graded elementary schools.

Vice Chairman Schaible: Move a Do pass on amendment 1002

Senator Luick: Second

Vice Chairman Schaible: I am in more in favor of this bill with this amendment in there because it is necessary.

Senator Luick: This makes it better. I will have to reevaluate the final bill.

Chairman Flakoll: For the record this is language pulled forward from a previous bill.

A roll call vote was taken 6 yeas, 0 neas, 0 absent.

Chairman Flakoll: Closed the hearing on SB 2282

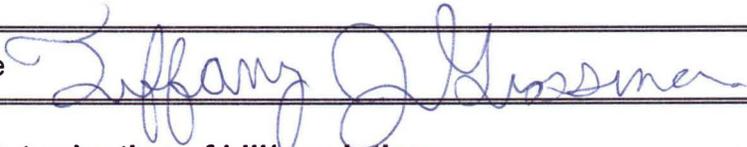
2013 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Senate Education Committee
Missouri River Room, State Capitol

SB 2282
1-29-13
17934

Conference Committee

Committee Clerk Signature



Explanation or reason for introduction of bill/resolution:

Relating to the provisions of educational services by school districts

Minutes:

You may make reference to "attached testimony."

Chairman Flakoll opened the hearing on SB 2282. In the event there is a tie with a bill in the committee, we go to a motion without committee recommendation.

Senator Poolman: Motion for a DO pass for SB 2282 as amended

Vice Chairman Schaible: Second

Senator Heckaman: This bill is better with the amendment on it but I am still not going to support the bill.

Senator Luick: The amendment cleans it up and makes it a much nicer bill but I can't support it either.

A roll call vote was taken for a Do Pass as amended: 3 yeas, 3 neas, 0 absent

Senator Heckaman: Move a Do Not Pass as amended on SB 2282

Senator Marcellais: Second

A roll call vote was taken for a Do Not Pass as amended: 3 yeas, 3 neas, 0 absent

Senator Heckaman: Move SB 2282 as amended be sent without recommendation

Senator Marcellais: Second

A roll call vote was taken for without recommendation: 6 yeas 0 neas, 0 absent

Chairman Flakoll: Will carry the bill

FISCAL NOTE
Requested by Legislative Council
01/22/2013

Amendment to: SB 2282

- 1 A. **State fiscal effect:** *Identify the state fiscal effect and the fiscal effect on agency appropriations compared to funding levels and appropriations anticipated under current law.*

	2011-2013 Biennium		2013-2015 Biennium		2015-2017 Biennium	
	General Fund	Other Funds	General Fund	Other Funds	General Fund	Other Funds
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Expenditures	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Appropriations	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

- 1 B. **County, city, school district and township fiscal effect:** *Identify the fiscal effect on the appropriate political subdivision.*

	2011-2013 Biennium	2013-2015 Biennium	2015-2017 Biennium
Counties	\$0	\$0	\$0
Cities	\$0	\$0	\$0
School Districts	\$0	\$0	\$0
Townships	\$0	\$0	\$0

- 2 A. **Bill and fiscal impact summary:** *Provide a brief summary of the measure, including description of the provisions having fiscal impact (limited to 300 characters).*

SB 2282 requires that all school districts offer educational services to students in grades K-12. Districts unable to meet the requirement must reorganize or dissolve by July 1, 2014. Districts unable to meet these requirements are not eligible to receive state aid payments.

- B. **Fiscal impact sections:** *Identify and provide a brief description of the sections of the measure which have fiscal impact. Include any assumptions and comments relevant to the analysis.*

Section 1 requires, by July 1, 2014, that all school districts provide educational services to students in grades K-12 and districts that do comply must either reorganize or dissolve by July 1, 2014, and further districts that do not meet the requirements may not receive state aid payments. Compliance with the provisions of this section should have no fiscal impact on state revenue or expenditures and will require no state appropriation. Similarly, counties, cities and townships should experience no fiscal impact in relation to this bill. In the case of school districts, no fiscal impact is anticipated beyond minor unquantifiable costs related to efforts to carry out the required provisions of the bill.

3. **State fiscal effect detail:** *For information shown under state fiscal effect in 1A, please:*

- A. **Revenues:** *Explain the revenue amounts. Provide detail, when appropriate, for each revenue type and fund affected and any amounts included in the executive budget.*

No fiscal impact on state revenue is anticipated.

- B. **Expenditures:** *Explain the expenditure amounts. Provide detail, when appropriate, for each agency, line item, and fund affected and the number of FTE positions affected.*

No fiscal impact on state expenditures is anticipated.

- C. **Appropriations:** *Explain the appropriation amounts. Provide detail, when appropriate, for each agency and fund affected. Explain the relationship between the amounts shown for expenditures and appropriations. Indicate whether the appropriation is also included in the executive budget or relates to a continuing appropriation.*

There is no state appropriation required to accomplish the intent of this legislation.

Name: Robert V. Marthaller

Agency: ND Dept of Public Instruction

Telephone: 701-328-2267

Date Prepared: 01/23/2013

FISCAL NOTE
Requested by Legislative Council
01/22/2013

Bill/Resolution No.: SB 2282

- 1 A. **State fiscal effect:** *Identify the state fiscal effect and the fiscal effect on agency appropriations compared to funding levels and appropriations anticipated under current law.*

	2011-2013 Biennium		2013-2015 Biennium		2015-2017 Biennium	
	General Fund	Other Funds	General Fund	Other Funds	General Fund	Other Funds
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Expenditures	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Appropriations	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

- 1 B. **County, city, school district and township fiscal effect:** *Identify the fiscal effect on the appropriate political subdivision.*

	2011-2013 Biennium	2013-2015 Biennium	2015-2017 Biennium
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Cities	\$0	\$0	\$0
School Districts	\$0	\$0	\$0
Townships	\$0	\$0	\$0

- 2 A. **Bill and fiscal impact summary:** *Provide a brief summary of the measure, including description of the provisions having fiscal impact (limited to 300 characters).*

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- B. **Fiscal impact sections:** *Identify and provide a brief description of the sections of the measure which have fiscal impact. Include any assumptions and comments relevant to the analysis.*

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- B. **Expenditures:** *Explain the expenditure amounts. Provide detail, when appropriate, for each agency, line item, and fund affected and the number of FTE positions affected.*

No fiscal impact on state expenditures is anticipated.

- C. **Appropriations:** *Explain the appropriation amounts. Provide detail, when appropriate, for each agency and fund affected. Explain the relationship between the amounts shown for expenditures and appropriations. Indicate whether the appropriation is also included in the executive budget or relates to a continuing appropriation.*

There is no state appropriation required to accomplish the intent of this legislation.

Name: Robert V. Marthaller

Agency: ND Dept of Public Instruction

Telephone: 701-328-2267

Date Prepared: 01/23/2013

January 29, 2013

VR
1/30/13

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL NO. 2282

Page 1, line 1, replace "a" with "two"

Page 1, line 1, replace "section" with "sections"

Page 1, line 2, after "districts" insert "and to the closure of a school"

Page 1, line 7, replace "2014" with "2015"

Page 1, line 11, replace "2014" with "2015"

Page 1, line 12, replace "2014" with "2015"

Page 1, line 13, replace "2014" with "2015"

Page 1, after line 15, insert:

"**SECTION 2.** A new section to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota Century Code is created and enacted as follows:

Closure of school - Required vote.

Before the board of a school district may close a school located within the boundary of a district that was required to undergo reorganization or dissolution under section 1 of this Act, the board shall place the question of closing the school on the ballot. The question may be voted upon only by those qualified electors who reside within the boundary of the district that was required to undergo reorganization or dissolution under section 1 of this Act. The board may not close the school unless a majority of the qualified electors voting on the question approve the closure."

Renumber accordingly

2282

Date: 1-28-13
Roll Call Vote #: 1

2013 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE
ROLL CALL VOTES

BILL/RESOLUTION NO.

Senate Education Committee

Check here for Conference Committee

Legislative Council Amendment Number _____

Action Taken

DO PASS on amendment #1 13.0741
01003

Motion Made By

Luick

Seconded By

Poolman

Senators	Yes	No	Senator	Yes	No
Chairman Tim Flakoll	✓		Senator Joan Heckaman		✓
Vice Chairman Donald Schaible	✓		Senator Richard Marcellais		✓
Senator Larry Luick	✓				
Senator Nicole Poolman	✓				

Total (Yes) 4 No 2

Absent 0

Floor Assignment _____

If the vote is on an amendment, briefly indicate intent:

Sunset

2282

Date: 1-28-13
Roll Call Vote #: 2

2013 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE
ROLL CALL VOTES

BILL/RESOLUTION NO.

Senate Education Committee

Check here for Conference Committee

Legislative Council Amendment Number

Action Taken DO pass on amendment # 2 13,074, 01003

Motion Made By Schaible Seconded By Luick

Senators	Yes	No	Senator	Yes	No
Chairman Tim Flakoll	✓		Senator Joan Heckaman	✓	
Vice Chairman Donald Schaible	✓		Senator Richard Marcellais	✓	
Senator Larry Luick	✓				
Senator Nicole Poolman	✓				

Total (Yes) 6 No 0

Absent 0

Floor Assignment _____

If the vote is on an amendment, briefly indicate intent:

requires vote by both schools
when they re-organize

2282

Date: 1-29-13
Roll Call Vote #:

2013 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE
ROLL CALL VOTES

BILL/RESOLUTION NO.

Senate Education Committee

Check here for Conference Committee

Legislative Council Amendment Number

Action Taken

Do Pass as amended 13, 07-11, 01 003

Motion Made By

Poolman

Seconded By

Schaible

Senators	Yes	No	Senator	Yes	No
Chairman Tim Flakoll	✓		Senator Joan Heckaman		✓
Vice Chairman Donald Schaible	✓		Senator Richard Marcellais		✓
Senator Larry Luick		✓			
Senator Nicole Poolman	✓				

Total (Yes) 3 No 3

Absent 0

Floor Assignment _____

If the vote is on an amendment, briefly indicate intent:

2202

Date: 1-29-13
Roll Call Vote #: 2

2013 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE
ROLL CALL VOTES

BILL/RESOLUTION NO.

Senate Education Committee

Check here for Conference Committee

Legislative Council Amendment Number

Action Taken DO NOT PASS as amended 13.0741.01003

Motion Made By Heckaman Seconded By Marcellais

Senators	Yes	No	Senator	Yes	No
Chariman Tim Flakoll		✓	Senator Joan Heckaman	✓	
Vice Chairman Donald Schaible		✓	Senator Richard Marcellais	✓	
Senator Larry Luick	✓				
Senator Nicole Poolman		✓			

Total (Yes) 3 No 3

Absent 0

Floor Assignment _____

If the vote is on an amendment, briefly indicate intent:

2282

Date: 1-29-13
Roll Call Vote #: 3

2013 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE
ROLL CALL VOTES

BILL/RESOLUTION NO.

Senate Education Committee

Check here for Conference Committee

Legislative Council Amendment Number

Action Taken Move without recommendation 13.0741,
01003

Motion Made By Heckaman Seconded By Marcellais

Senators	Yes	No	Senator	Yes	No
Chairman Tim Flakoll	✓		Senator Joan Heckaman	✓	
Vice Chairman Donald Schaible	✓		Senator Richard Marcellais	✓	
Senator Larry Luick	✓				
Senator Nicole Poolman	✓				

Total (Yes) 6 No 0

Absent 0

Floor Assignment Flakoll

If the vote is on an amendment, briefly indicate intent:

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE

SB 2282: Education Committee (Sen. Flakoll, Chairman) recommends AMENDMENTS AS FOLLOWS and when so amended, recommends BE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR WITHOUT RECOMMENDATION (6 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING). SB 2282 was placed on the Sixth order on the calendar.

Page 1, line 1, replace "a" with "two"

Page 1, line 1, replace "section" with "sections"

Page 1, line 2, after "districts" insert "and to the closure of a school"

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Renumber accordingly

2013 TESTIMONY

SB 2282

1

**Testimony to the Joint Education Committee
in regard to Senate Bill 2282**

by

Mark Vollmer, Superintendent, Minot Public School District #1
January 28, 2013

Mr. Chairman and members of Senate Education Committee, my name is Mark Vollmer, and I proudly serve as Superintendent of Minot Public School District #1. Thank you for allowing me to testify today on behalf of the Minot Public School District. I would like to take this opportunity to discuss Senate Bill 2282, a bill that would require all school districts to offer educational services to all children from grades kindergarten through grade 12.

As you are already aware, the community of Minot is experiencing exponential growth. During five of the past 6 school years, our district has witnessed an average student population growth of 3.5%. After the Flood of 2011 (over 4,000 structures heavily damaged in the Souris River Valley) the district declined less than one-half of one percent. Despite all, Minot continues to grow.

North Dakota is, and will remain to be, a rural state. During the frontier years, schools were built within townships. These small, one-room schools provided a basic education for residents. High school became a more viable option after World War I – during this time, we saw a movement to the community-based school concept. School district boundaries changed as well.

During the 1950's we saw a drastic change in school district boundaries throughout the state. School districts were formed that centered on a simple concept; a K-12 school in a community that was surrounded by agricultural land. Students in rural areas were bussed to town. The system seemed to work well. And so was the situation with the Minot Public School District.

During recent years, things have changed. Rapid growth has extended the boundaries of the City of Minot. The city continues to grow, and is expanding in to areas that are in the Nedrose and South Prairie school districts; both are graded elementary districts. In short, agricultural land in our district has been developed; and developers are now extending into the Nedrose and South Prairie school districts.

Here is our present reality: Families (some of which were displaced by the flood) buy homes in these extended city areas - they assume their children will attend the Minot School District. They may be closer to a Minot school than the Nedrose or South Prairie school, they may have a Minot address, they may access Minot City Water and Sewer, but they are not in the Minot School District.

State law does not allow for school district boundaries to expand. The only legal remedy available to these families is annexation; to annex their property into the Minot School District, pursuant to NDCC 15.1-12. Each family must meet the requirements of the law – the family must have at least one school-aged child living on the property, and the land must be contiguous with the Minot District. The process involves hearings at the county and state level.

Since 2010, the county annexation board has been inundated with requests for annexation into the Minot School District. 50 lots were annexed into the district in 2010, 4 lots in 2011, 11 lots in 2012, with an additional 26 lots pending in 2013.

The State Board of Public Schools often asks . . . *why not just let these families open-enroll into the district?* Open enrollment was implemented to assist families who desire their children attend another school district. Open enrollment is considered an exception, not the rule; an option for a handful of families who make the decision to enroll students in another school district. North Dakota school finance is a mixture of federal, state and local funding. When a student is open enrolled into the Minot District, the tax dollars generated through the family's property tax stays with the district of residence – it is not transferred to Minot Public Schools.

The Minot Public School District lost over \$76,000,000 in infrastructure as a result of the flood – this has placed a high tax burden on our residents.

It is also important to note that parents of open enrolled students do not have resident rights, including the right to vote in elections involving the operations of the school district; *operations that have a direct effect on their children's education.*

The potential for growth on the boundary lines between these districts is great – if open enrollment were allowed, the Minot Public School District could receive hundreds, if not thousands, of additional students, with no tax base to support the local cost share. In this were the case, the residents of the Minot Public School District would be not only be responsible for the education of students who reside their district, they would also be responsible for the education of students who live in other districts. I do not believe this is the intent of Open Enrollment legislation, nor is it the intent the North Dakota school funding process. In areas of unprecedented growth, this has become an unintended consequence.

Representatives of the Minot School District met with members of the Nedrose and South Prairie School districts to discuss these concerns. We have explored the option of a joint-powers agreement – a plan to build a school near district boundaries that would be shared by all three districts. While the idea may appear innovative and intriguing, a major problem exists -- the North Dakota Attorney General's office, on two separate occasions, has ruled that a joint-powers agreement cannot serve as an alternative to reorganization or dissolution of a school district. The with growth in all areas of Minot (not just our boundaries), the district does not believe this is a viable option, even if state law would allow such an agreement.

The Minot Public School District does not wish to create an empire, nor do we imply that our school district is better than our neighbors. We express concern about financial equity, about the responsibility of school districts to provide educational services for their residents, and we support City of Minot residents who move into these newly developed areas, naturally believing they are a part of the Minot School District. Therefore, the Minot Public School District supports Senate Bill 2282.

Mark Vollmer
Minot Public Schools Superintendent

H2

Senate Bill 2282
Senate Education Committee

Viola LaFontaine

January 28, 2013

I am providing testimony in support of Senate Bill 2282

My name is Viola LaFontaine. I am the school Superintendent for Williston Public School District # 1, Williston, ND.

Williston is experiencing growth. Williston School District has closed open enrollment due to the increase in student enrollment and the unknown number of students coming to the district each year. In the past 4 years Williston's enrollment has grown by 600 students.

New housing developments are built in Williston which are right across the street from one of our elementary schools. However, the development is not in Williston Public School District #1, but in the elementary district surrounding Williston Public School District #1.

Parents come to the school to register their child thinking they are in our school district and become very upset when they find out they are not and must go to the country school many miles away from their home.

Our district now requires a verification of residency of families so we are ensured the students live in our district.

The school does not follow the annexation of the city, therefore even though the property is annexed into the city, they are still in the surrounding school district. The only way for the students to attend Williston School District #1 is for their property to be annexed into Williston #1 School District. Parents can petition to have their property annexed into our school district.

I believe we could better serve all students in Williston if this bill was passed.

Thank you.

Viola LaFontaine

#3

Honorable Chairman Flakoll and members of the Senate Education Committee,
Good Morning! My name is **Sherilyn Johnson**. I am currently the teacher and administrator at **Sweet Briar School** (between New Salem and Mandan). I have been teaching for 30 years, 18 of which have been in the small rural communities of Almont and Sweet Briar. **For the past 18 years, I have come before the House and/or Senate Education Committees to address legislation similar to Senate Bill #2282- the mandated dissolution of graded elementary schools to a K-12 district.**

Our successful graduating students are testimony to the fact that this is not an issue of “quality.” We follow all DPI requirements and are active members of the Missouri River Education Cooperative (MREC) that provides an efficient system of shared quality resources and services for our students, including administrative and professional development. We are members of the Morton-Sioux Special Education Unit. We are actively involved in the ND State School Improvement Process focusing on our target areas of Mathematics and Reading. We are currently integrating the Common Core Standards into our curriculum with an emphasis on Number Sense and Writing skills. Our students participate in the Burleigh/Morton County Mathcounts competition, the MREC Reading Challenge, creative STEM projects, our local math club, local reading and mathematics competitions, and hold offices in our local student senate. We utilize technology including desktop computers, laptops, the Epson Interactive Projector/white board, iPads, and broadband Internet. We have a student-to-teacher ratio second to none. We are exceeding the students’ needs. **Our students go on to high school confident in themselves. They are solid and they know from where they have come.**

We place a very high value on our freedom to choose our rural lifestyle and where our children are educated. This issue of “choosing what is best for our children” is at the very heart of why we oppose Senate Bill #2282. For twelve years, I came to you from Almont Public School with similar testimony. Thankfully, this proposed legislation did not pass & we were able to hold community forums & to deal locally with our declining enrollment. In the end, our school board, with input from the Almont community & guidance from our county superintendent, made the tough decision to close Almont School & to work out a reorganization plan with the New Salem School District.

Each school district in any of our rural communities, when faced with issues of declining enrollment or financial difficulties, will collaborate with their community to make the thoughtful necessary decisions as to the future of their school. **When the time is right, local communities will step up to make those tough decisions. And in the end, we can hold our heads up high knowing that, by our own initiative and hard work, we made those tough decisions ourselves; that we weren’t forced or mandated by the legislature to prematurely close; that we had the freedom and opportunity to make those decisions ourselves.**

Why has this legislation been introduced again? Is it to extend the district boundaries of the larger K-12 districts? Is it for the larger nearby K-12 districts to gain potential property tax revenue and the mineral rights? In dissolving rural graded elementary school districts, these reasons are small benefits compared to the

significant consequences for the children attending our rural schools; significant consequences for the young children who would have to ride 2-3 hours round-trip a day to the larger adjacent district; significant consequences to the vitality and economic stability of rural North Dakota communities; significant consequences in taking away a parent's right to choose the type of education he/she knows is best for his/her child.

With all due respect, I strongly urge you to vote "NO!" on Senate Bill #2282 in order to preserve our freedom of local decision making, as well as to preserve what is in the best interest of our children and our rural communities. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

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