

Chairman Mortimer and members of the committee,

I am Byron Stutzman. I grew up on the farm and farmed for twenty years in Buhl before becoming an educator, ultimately landing in Saint Anthony as the Fremont County School District superintendent. Thank you for this opportunity to address you on the funding formula legislation, and I appreciate your dedication and desire to do what is right for all public school students in this great state of Idaho.

First, thank you for the 2% “hold positive” provision as Fremont County School District has consistently been the big loser in all configurations of the spreadsheet, anywhere from 8% to 15% depending on the settings of the dials. One of my worries is at the end of the 3 years of hold positive, not only will we be 16.5% behind the districts which gain 7.5% each year, but the districts in the hold positive will have a financial cliff.

Second, while I heard members of the interim committee state the current formula is broken, I don't believe that to be true. The results of the survey administered by the interim committee shows that to be true, and I remember taking that survey. Yes, I should have thought through that question a bit better, because I answered yes to the question of whether or not I thought the current formula was broken. However, in the comment box, I distinctly remember stating the current formula to be broken because it is underfunded.

There are numerous other issues within this formula which I will let the more intelligent people address, but one thing I would request of you is the highest possible student base funding is provided. While I love to be first in most comparisons, second isn't all that bad either. Second from the bottom in per student funding is definitely not the spot Idaho should be when funding our children's and grandchildren's education. Also, I believe we should eliminate the wealth factor from the formula. Fremont County School District is considered one of the “wealthy” districts by this formula's definition. However, our median family income is by no means wealthy, and to place our district's funding onto our patrons would be unconscionable. If you truly believe property tax is a portion of the funding revenue, then reinstitute the 3 mil levy state wide and utilize that revenue to help fund education. We all know how that would fly yet leaving the wealth adjustment in the formula to be leveraged at a later date is doing just that only just to the districts which have high property values. Is this forcing unfair or unequal taxation because of lack of funding?

As you continue to work to improve this legislation toward a win/win solution for all schools, I would ask that we take more time to get this completed correctly. The interim committee has taken 3 years to get us to this point. Let's don't rush it just because we want to “get er' dun.” I definitely don't want to hear the words of my father when, on the farm growing up, I didn't do something well. He would say, “Why is there always time to do it over, when we didn't have time to do it right the first time.” Please take the time to get this right the first time. The students of Idaho deserve the best, and we can give them the best education possible if we do this right the first time.

Again, thank you for allowing me to address the committee, and I stand for questions.

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