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Senate Education Committee Written Testimony - 3.18.19

*Chairman Mortimer and Senate Education Committee*

*My name is Shawn Tiegs and I am the Superintendent of the Nezperce School District in Nezperce, Idaho.*

*I want to thank you and the committee for taking the time to listen to me today.*

*When I was just starting as an administrator, I was dealing with a particularly difficult student, a wise mentor told me... "Remember Shawn... every parent is sending us the best kids that they have" Of course, he meant that the parents are sending the worst and best kids that they have. The highest and lowest academic performers. The best and the worst behaved. In fact, they are sending us all of the kids that they have. Similarly, our school is the best, the worst, the ONLY school our community has.*

*My plea today as you proceed to consideration of this funding bill is that you don't forget the little districts like ours and others. We are doing everything we can to keep pace with a rapidly changing state. Nezperce, Idaho... population 453. 140 kids in grades K-12. 2 school buildings, 1 gym and infinite school pride. I am asking that you don't forget Nezperce and other schools like ours.*

*Ultimately, i am here on behalf of the Nezperce students... my kids. Nezperce is a small community, some might call it a village. Our nearest district is 15 miles away and several of our bus routes begin just after 6:00 am to ensure that we are able to get our kids to school on time at 8:00. Our community is committed to it's children. We have demonstrated this commitment by passing a levy, that runs between 15 and 20% of our operating budget, successfully for the last 30+ years. We have had skin in the game for a long time. Like many small, rural school districts we do the very best with the limited resources we have to provide our kids the skills they need to be successful in life. We know that many of these wonderful students will move on to other towns, cities and communities, but we are especially proud of those who come back with skills that can be reinvested back into our town. We are resourceful and we work hard to provide our kids with as many opportunities as we can.*

*What do we get out of this commitment? Only one of the best performing schools in the state. More than 70% of our kids score proficient of the ELA and Math ISAT tests. Compare that to the State averages. Our kids are perennial challengers for state sports academic championships*

*and perform on-par academically with some of the best elite urban charters around the state. 90% of our HS students are involved in extracurricular activities and the vast majority of these students are involved in 3 or more. Our kids rock!*

*What do we get from the State in return? Quite honestly, this proposed formula would be a punch in the gut. "Awarding" us with flat or shrinking revenues and/or an increased financial reliance on local farmers, ranchers and agricultural support professionals all while large districts and urban charters reap a plentiful harvest.*

*With a quick search of the internet, I found that the mean average population of the cities in which each of the committee members list as a home address is 101,989. The median is 61,076. In fact, the smallest city, in which one of you lives is Grangeville, Idaho with a population of 3,166 citizens. With all due respect, I don't know that there is a vision on this committee or in the larger legislative body of what it truly means to be a small rural school district in this state. Nezperce will likely never have a charter or private school. We will likely always be the sole provider of a plentiful OR deficient K-12 education for our town and surrounding agricultural areas. We are the simultaneously the best and only school our community has.*

*I know that it is tempting to simply state that every child is worth a dollar amount, but in many small districts like ours, this is illogical... At the Nezperce school district, we do not view every child as a dollar amount, we consider the programs that we want to offer. We need a high school, we need a certified English, Math, History, Science, Music, Agriculture, Speech. We need an elementary teacher at every grade level. If this isn't the best for kids, why is it true in every district where the population base is higher? I am grateful that there are some built in protections for small districts like ours, but they are, quite simply, insufficient.*

*As a result, I am asking the committee to consider the following:*

*#1 Is a new formula which sees some districts gaining more than 133% of funding and others seeing cuts up to 7% after 3 years really a fair or good formula? This proposed change would be a demonstration of the belief that little districts like mine have been receiving too much money historically. I believe more work can be done to ensure that there is not such a wide disparity of "winners" and "losers?" This is not thorough, this is not uniform.*

*#2 Would you consider a plan that provides a high school AND elementary school minimum payment for districts such as ours?*

*#3 After three years, there are no controls on this system. You and I both know that changes in legislation are difficult. Shouldn't protections be in place to ensure that districts like mine are able to continue to operate beyond a three years window?*

*#4 Thorough and uniform: If education is best when it is primarily a function of local governance with the financial support of the state, why does this formula clearly pick the financial winners and losers?*

*#5 Why include a career ladder reference at all if the funding model is not related to where teachers sit on ANY ladder or matrix or grid.*

*#6 Why include a requirement for CTE Occupational specialists to be paid more, when there are no longer earmarked state funds to provide for this?*

*There is an axiom in business and engineering that while we all have a desire for good, fast, and cheap, it is never actually possible to get all three characteristics. As a leader of a small district, I would prefer Good and the legislature can pick the second adjective as opposed Fast and Cheap. I know that an interim committee has worked on this for years, but the legislature as a body has not. Please consider holding this bill to provide more time to consider the potential ramifications of a bill that really does create financial winners and losers. Don't hold the little schools back, we are the very "BEST" and only schools our communities have.*

*Thank you again Chairman Mortimer and this committee for your time and commitment to the State of Idaho and its people and Go Nezperce Indians!*

