



Rural Education Center

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To: State Board of Education

Thank you for being in Spokane for your September board meetings.

I wanted to speak briefly on a couple of items as you continue the process of refining and finalizing your 2016 legislative priorities.

First of all, I want to thank the Board and Mr. Rarick for your consistent advocacy for ample funding for basic education. You have been a consistent and powerful voice to the Legislature for full funding of education and this is very much appreciated from those of us directly serving students. I do ask that as we hopefully transition to less reliance of local levies that we don't cripple districts by taking away too much levy capacity. Many of us are worried that a poorly designed "levy swap" could occur, leaving local districts with little capacity to use local levy dollars to enrich their educational offerings. I also ask that you officially support the small high school funding enhancement that districts that have high schools with enrollment of less than 300 students receive. This funding allows our small and rural districts to offer comprehensive programs so that students they serve are able to take the required courses they need for high school graduation. This small amount of funding from the state is a worthwhile investment as evidenced by the fact that our small and rural high schools have the highest average of on-time graduation rates in our state.

I also want to thank you for your consistent advocacy for high quality, state funded development for educators. As you know, we lost our state funded Learning Improvement Days several years ago. This occurred at a time where there was an incredible amount of educational reform taking place in our state. How can we offer a world class education to our students if we do not offer high quality training to our staff? Districts currently use levy dollars to fund staff development. This should be a state responsibility.

I know that you are working on "bringing clarity to the definition of school day and instructional hours". I do ask that you keep in mind the importance of local control and the need for consistent and regular professional development and collaboration time for staff. In my school district, we have one-hour late starts each Monday for our staff to work together in Professional Learning Communities. I cannot express to you how important this time is. We have a long school day and we are well above the minimum average of 1027 instructional hours that is required. My school board and community hold us accountable to making sure we use this time effectively. I ask that you help us find a balance of local control and state accountability regarding instructional hours. There also needs to be consideration of allowing districts to use late starts due to dangerous winter weather. I have provided copies of the Rural Ed. Center's 2015 Legislative Position for your reference.

Thank you for all of the work you do to help improve our public schools. I did want to take another minute and offer a special thank you to Cindy McMullen for her outstanding service as a State Board of Education member. Her advocacy for our schools has been amazing!

Sincerely,

Jim Kowalkowski
Director- Rural Education Center
& Superintendent- Davenport School District

