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January 17, 2023

Chairman Heinert, Vice-Chair Schreiber-Beck, and members of the House Education Committee:

**I am writing in opposition to HB 1251.** I am in my eleventh year as an Oakes Public School Board member and my ninth year as board president. My district currently serves about 485 students. Our 2022-23 budget includes \$1.55 million of local property tax revenue and \$4.15 million of unrestricted state aid, for a total of just under \$5.7 million. Applying the 1.5% limit yields total compensation to our superintendent to about \$85,500.

During my time on the board, we have hired a superintendent four times. In 2013, we hired a first-time superintendent for an annual salary of \$100,000, PLUS benefits including retirement, health insurance, cafeteria plan, professional dues, and a moving allowance. He had previously been a principal in a smaller district, and we could not have hired him for less than we did. In the current school year, we hired a first-time superintendent who was previously our elementary principal, a position for which her salary alone was \$96,000 for a 10-month contract (our superintendent has a 12-month contract). We would not have hired either of these individuals had we been subject to the stated compensation limit. In fact, I doubt whether we would have had a single applicant for a superintendent for our district, let alone two or three districts together! Either of these now-superintendents could have accepted a principal or assistant superintendent position in a larger district for more compensation than they would have had as our superintendent.

Our district already shares administrative services for both Career and Technical Education and Special Education through our affiliations with SRCTC and Sheyenne Valley Special Education. Even with that administrative collaboration, our superintendent is ALWAYS BUSY. NONE of the five superintendents I have worked with have been underworked and overpaid!

Yesterday, a search of my district's policies that contain the word "superintendent" yielded 143 separate results! While not all of these delineate responsibilities of superintendents, many do. These required duties and expectations cover a wide range of topics, from recruiting, hiring, and evaluating both teaching and non-teaching staff; preparing for board meetings; making decisions related to sex offenders; dealing with matters involving violent and threatening behavior; deciding whether to close school due to weather; planning the district budget; reviewing complaints about instructional material. I found these on only the first three of fifteen pages of policies that mentioned superintendents. Many of these policies are in place to assure that our district meets requirements of state and federal laws and regulations. Our small-school superintendents do not have an army of assistant administrators to help them carry out their required duties and expectations.

Further, superintendents in my district undertake duties every day that may not be outlined in policy or their job description, including, but not limited to driving bus, substituting in the kitchen, being on-duty at evening activities, stepping into a classroom when a teacher needs to leave early, and many others. ALL these tasks would have to be done by someone else in the absence of the superintendent who is already doing them with no additional compensation. I doubt that the “someone else” would do these things for nothing.

This bill would limit the number and compensation of administrators without regard to whether a district is growing or declining, the number of students in the district in poverty or with special needs, the number and experience of staff employed by the district, the age and condition of the district’s buildings, whether a significant building project or bond referendum is underway, and many other factors. I have always admired superintendents’ willingness to help one another out, but in my experience, they simply have no capacity to take on all these duties for another district.

Our superintendents are expected to be our educational leaders and the face of our district in our community. Local school board members in both large and small districts are best suited to determine the number of administrative staff in their district and compensation of their superintendent. With appreciation for your service in the legislature, and with all due respect for your intentions, I ask you to vote DO NOT PASS on HB 1251.

Kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sonia Meehl". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sonia Meehl