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March 15, 2023

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Erik Sweet, and I am Superintendent of the TGU School District. Thank you for your service to our great state, and for the opportunity to provide my testimony today. I am here to express my support for SB 2328.

Over twenty years ago, the communities of Towner, Granville, and Upham consolidated to form the TGU School District. The motivation for this decision was an effort to be fiscally conservative, and dramatically reduce the mills collected on local stakeholders. That hard work was rewarded, and the district was able to create a significant amount of savings for the local tax base.

Eventually a change was made to the state aid which eliminated the incentive for creating a consolidated district in the first place. This change came in the form of a student based funding formula. This new formula also included a weighting factor to provide equity for smaller schools. While the new formula was a positive for taxpayers statewide, it had an unfortunate impact for consolidated districts. Because consolidation boosted the district enrollment numbers, any savings created by the reduction of administration cost or the utilization of shared resources was far outweighed by the lower per pupil weighting factor. For that reason, only three districts had gone through the consolidation process by 2020.

Today, TGU operates two K-12 facilities for our students; one in Towner, the other in Granville. These two sites are located 23 miles apart and have an enrollment of 340 students in the district. We have worked hard to create a single community out of our small towns and a district landmass of over 1000 square miles. SB 2328 would aid both the students and stakeholders of the TGU school district by reinstating the benefits of our consolidation twenty years ago. More importantly, however, I believe that this bill would provide those same benefits to small districts across our state. Communities and schools with low or declining enrollments could once again utilize consolidation as a viable tool to keep their schools open and their small towns thriving.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Erik Sweet
Superintendent
TGU School District