

Chairman Sorvaag and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee,

I am Steph Roland. I am a teacher in the Lewis and Clark School district teaching 8th-12th grade social studies as well as taking on the role of curriculum coordinator, MTSS leader, mentor teacher, and instructional coach at Berthold School. I am here today to speak in favor of the provision in Senate Bill 2328 that calls for funding districts with separate and distant schools based on the enrollment of each facility, rather than the enrollment of the district.

Our district is made up of two schools, North Shore/Plaza and Berthold, which are 30 miles apart. On average, it takes a little under 40 minutes to get from one school to the other. Each school has about 200 students and is the center of its community; there is so much pride attached to being a Berthold Bomber or North Shore/Plaza Wildcat. Year after year, I have been able to form lasting relationships with my students and their families while watching my students become well-rounded individuals who find their passion in life. And as an educator, I do it all for the absolute love of teaching, but I also do it for a source of income.

Our school district is already stretched thin and struggles to provide financially for our teachers. District teachers have not received an adequate raise in the past few years. The legislature has tried its best to fund teachers' salaries, and our district and negotiators have done their best to reach compromises based on the realities of the situation. With the transition payments, we have been able to remain operable, but going forward we will be unable to sustain the staff that we have. We have already cut vital services to our student's education like our libraries and Family and Consumer Education- while Special Ed and VoAg are on a shoestring. What is next? Electives like Business and Music? Having teachers drive 40 min between schools to teach their content? That is not sustainable. That is not equitable. That is not fair.

The state is now in the position to provide increases to education, and that is so wonderful, but even this increase would mean nothing for our district without an amendment to the school district size weighting factor. Right now, the formula assumes we can operate as efficiently as a district with 400 students in the same

building and does not take into account the 30 miles that separates our two schools. It would be devastating to our students, teachers, families, and communities to not rectify this. As a profession, it is already hard to keep and retain teachers to stay in this line of work, but without the reevaluation of our weighting factor, our district would be in a desperate situation, unable to compensate our educators fairly. Many of our teachers would be forced to leave to find a living wage pay in another district, leaving the students the ones paying the price.

The weighting factor needs to be revisited for our unique situation. Please pass this amendment and help make education in our district equitable and adequate.

This concludes my testimony. I will now stand for questions.

Stephanie Pusc-Roland
Berthold School