

SB 2328

Testimony in support

Senator Elkin and members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on Senate Bill 2328. My name is Sheila Schlafmann, I am the Superintendent of Turtle Lake – Mercer School District 72. Turtle Lake – Mercer currently has 177 students in grades kindergarten through 12. Our district is spread out over 530 square miles with the city of Turtle Lake located pretty close to the center of our district. Today I would like to share why senate bill 2328 is important to our district.

The TL-M school district runs five bus routes. In 2021-22 our bus routes ran 41, 53, 59, 73, and 74 miles per run for a total of up to 600 miles per day. The amount of time our students spent on a bus ranged from 55 to 100 minutes. Of our current 177 students, 107 of those students utilize school transportation as their families live outside of city limits. If our school district did not exist the Turtle Lake – Mercer students would have to travel to McClusky, Wilton, Washburn, Underwood, Garrison, or Velva depending on where they are located in our district.

In the 2016-17 school year our enrollment was 186 students K – 12, this year we have 177 students K – 12. While we have seen that number decrease and rebound over the years, we have not seen it grow beyond 186 students. Our enrollment is a vital piece of our funding. In 2016-17 our foundation aid payment was \$1,750,234.53, now in 2022-23 we are receiving \$1,486,049.41. That is a decrease of \$264,185.12 which now includes a yearly decrease of 15% in our Transition Minimum payment. In order to keep up with inflation, fluctuating enrollments, individual student needs, and salary increases we have had to increase our local tax levies by \$365,000.00 since 2016-17 and have now reached our max of 70 mills. Knowing that our foundation aid payment is decreasing we have still been making a conscious effort to increase teacher pay, since 2016-17 we have increased our base salary by 16.4% for teachers while increasing our administrative salaries by 6.5%. We have made teacher salary a priority in our district because we as administration feel it is important to recruit and retain quality educators. In 2021 we deficit spent by \$10,680.98, last year was \$58,182.88, and this year we are on track to deficit spend even more. We need your support and senate bill 2328 is the financial support we need right now.

Thank you for allowing me to share our story, I kindly ask you to consider this testimony as you discuss senate bill 2328 to support not only Turtle Lake – Mercer School District 72, but also the other 24 school districts that are similar to my district in square miles and enrollment.

 1-24-2023