



## Rural Education Center

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In Partnership with...

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April 16, 2010

The Honorable Christine Gregoire  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Re: ESSB 6444 Part V Education Sec. 501 (1) (b) (i through iv) School District Reorganization Committee

Dear Governor Gregoire,

On behalf of the members of the Rural Education Center, I respectfully request that you veto Section 501 (1) (b) (i-iv) of Engrossed Substitute Senate bill 6444. This section calls for establishing a "School District Reorganization Commission" that is directed to develop and recommend a comprehensive plan to reorganize and reduce school districts in our state.

As you may recall, I was appointed by you to serve on the Washington State Joint Task Force on Basic Education. I took this appointment very seriously and attended and actively participated in all but two of the 24 meetings that the Task Force held over a two year period. I missed two meetings due to emergency eye surgery. I was honored to be appointed by you and I learned a great deal about the many studies that have taken place regarding our K-12 education system. **I am not aware of any of these studies (including Washington Learns) recommending that the school districts in our state should be reorganized and reduced.**

I am perplexed and troubled that, without any public hearings, the Legislature passed a budget that will fund a commission to reduce school districts. Reorganizing and reducing Washington school districts is a **significant policy matter!** Yet, there was no open debate, no opportunity for students, staff, community members, researchers, educational organizations, and/or concerned citizens to be heard. That, in my opinion, is just plain wrong.

Here are a few other reasons that I urge you to consider:

- The Joint Legislative Audit Review Committee (JLARC) is currently engaged in a study of the relationship between the cost of school districts and their enrollment size. This study will also examine changes in cost patterns resulting from district consolidation. This study will be completed this spring with a final report due in June. A foregone conclusion to reduce school districts (as called for in ESSB 6444) before the current JLARC study is even completed makes no sense.
- As I informed you when I met with you last spring, many of our small and rural districts are very concerned that they will be forced to consolidate. You told me that you did not want to force consolidation but you did want to encourage efficiency. According to research recently conducted by the Center for Research and Data Analysis at ESD 113 in Olympia, the small and rural districts in our state have the highest on-time graduation rates and the lowest dropout rates. Is that not an example of efficiency?

Governor Gergoire  
Page Two  
April 16, 2010

- Many school districts, **large and small**, will be impacted by a “comprehensive plan for the reorganization and reduction of Washington school districts” and a possible “reorganization of the number and boundaries of educational service districts”. The plan and final report from the commission is due by December 1, 2012. All school districts in our state will now have to wait at least two years to find out if they will be forced to be eliminated or forced to “take on” another school district. This is not the way to treat our communities, our students, our staff, and our citizens.
- I say to you, “Bring on a study of our small and rural districts. Take a close look at how our students perform, at how safe our schools are, at how much community support we get. Look under every rock and find out if we are efficient and cost-effective. Look at the research. Then form an educated conclusion and then a possible plan of action.”

I believe that a study of this nature would reveal that elimination of school districts would not be a wise decision. But it looks like the decision has already been made.

Our students deserve better than that.

When I had the privilege of having dinner with you last spring, you asked for input on how we can improve our K-12 educational system. I told you that I would love to be “Governor for One Day”. I then told you that, during my brief one-day term, I would find a way to help ensure that every one of our students is provided with a top-notch education, regardless of where they lived. I also stated that I would make education funding the number one priority of our state. You remarked that education of our kids is indeed a high priority for you and that you also want every one of our students to be provided with a top-notch education. To force some of our school districts to be eliminated is moving the wrong direction and sends the message that some of our districts and communities are not valued. I urge you to exercise your veto power.

I do appreciate your efforts and I know this has been a challenging legislative session for you. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of any assistance to you or if you would like any further information.

Sincerely,



Jim Kowalkowski  
Director - Rural Ed. Center  
& Superintendent- Davenport School District

cc: Electronically to:

Judy Hartmann, K-12 Executive Policy Advisor, OFM