

Adequacy Testimony Summary

26 January, 2018

JOINT LEGISLATIVE ADEQUACY COMMITTEE

Knowing many Professional Educational entities have been invited to submit testimony, Arkansas Rural Education Association's testimony, to not be redundant, will be brief and to the point.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS AFFECTING ADEQUACY

The following items, essential for school operation, require Districts, especially smaller and/or rural Districts, to expend additional funds outside the matrix, resulting in underfunding necessary resources. Districts tax themselves (local money) beyond the 25 mill URT, also at great disparity regarding the value of a mill, but this testimony is regarding Adequacy, which is limited to the disbursement of Foundation Funds generated by the URT:

- **COMPETITIVE TEACHER SALARIES.** It is a constant struggle to acquire and retain high quality teachers when larger districts with a larger tax base can offer higher salaries. This can occur even though the tax per individual property owner may be less. It is difficult to attract and retain enough of the best teachers who, as data and research show, are necessary to meet Adequacy in rural and/or high poverty areas.
- **FACILITY DISPARITY.** Growing Districts have obvious facility needs, however, each new student generates additional funds and property values in growing districts continue to rise making each existing mill more valuable which generates additional funds for those Districts. Districts which are not growing or losing enrollment, continue to have facility needs required to meet Adequacy, by needing to replace life cycle systems or buildings. The ability of small and/or rural districts to generate enough funds to repair or replace outdated facilities is approaching the critical stage. These districts may have to tax themselves two,

three, or four times as much as a district with higher assessment to raise the same amount of money.

- **SIPHONING OF STATE DOLLARS WITH LITTLE OR NO ACCOUNTABILITY.**

State education dollars going toward any student's education should carry the same accountability as public schools. Dollars diverted from public education without the same scrutiny and accountability to taxpayers affects Adequacy and the state's Constitutional mandate.

- **OTHER CONTINUING ISSUES.** Categorical funding continues to address many issues associated with educating high cost students and need to keep pace with educational costs. These funds allow Districts to target individual learning requirements and need to be flexible enough to address and ever-changing and evolving list of needs which must be met to provide an adequate and equitable education. High cost transportation continues to be an issue for some districts. Some movement to address this problem has been implemented, however, there continue to be Districts who must spend money targeted for Adequacy on transportation to get students to and from school. Catastrophic special education funding is not meeting the need. The number of high cost special needs students continues to grow and the funding is woefully inadequate. Expenditures for regular students can easily exceed \$10,000, it is not uncommon for a District to spend two to ten times that amount for special needs students. Teacher shortage in some academic areas and in some geographical areas is of great concern. Today's teachers shoulder much greater responsibility and accountability than ever before. The good news is, they welcome these challenges and most are up to the task. Arkansas is blessed with many great teachers, there is just not enough of them. The teacher pipeline must be filled and teachers must be viewed in a positive light to attract the best and brightest to the field. The Teacher Retirement Program as well as health insurance are two excellent recruiting tools. Enhancing those variables provide Districts tangible items to attract quality persons to the profession.

Dale Query

Executive Director, Arkansas Rural Education Association

870-421-4064