



01/16/2012

To: Senate Committee on Education
From: Gail Gillespie, Director
Re: Testimony on part (f) 1-6 of SB 260

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding part f, of SB 260, with the goal of eliminating the minimum and maximum calculations of special education. If this bill were not passed, High Plains Educational Cooperative #611 would reap an increase in state aid of approximately \$145,008 for the upcoming year. Yet as the Director of High Plains Educational Cooperative, I SUPPORT the passage of SB 260 on several points.

If SB 260 is not passed, there would be an influx of additional state aid to our organization that would have to maintain from year to year to make maintenance of effort (MOE). Our only source of such funding would have to come from our member districts through an assessment increase. There is uncertainty in the stability of the upper (\$1028) and lower (\$514) limit, which would change based on student identification and staffing decisions throughout the state. The amount of categorical aid entitlement changes each year and is usually determined around the first of June, past the legal requirement to notify teachers of continued employment. This would impede staffing decisions and our ability to find and hire highly qualified staff. We spend a great deal of time and financial resources recruiting and retaining staff. Staff turnover serves no one.

If High Plains Educational Cooperative were to use the increase in state aid to hire additional staff and the funding dropped the following year, we would have to increase our budget to cover such positions, or release

staff because of unknown funding ability. We work hard to provide staff development and stability in staff for student learning. The first year in any job is a sharp learning curve. Experience and developing a working relationship with parents, students and staff is critical for students with disabilities.

The original Senate Bill 359 was developed to return catastrophic aid to its intent of providing for extreme excess cost. The addition of part f only redistributes dollars from one district to another without providing any new funding. I oppose reallocating funds between district based on the process of setting upper and lower limits. Each district is unique due to its size, location and student make up. My job as the Director of High Plains Educational Cooperative is to hire the best staff within budgetary considerations to meet the needs of the students with disabilities in our member districts. I carry out this task with great passion for the education of our children and I find this same passion in my fellow Directors.

Thank you for your time and consideration of SB 260.

Gail Gillespie
Director
High Plains Educational Cooperative