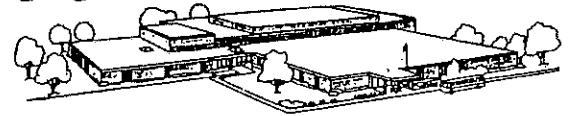


"Cooperatively Preparing All Students to Succeed"

Chester Area School No. 39-1

PO BOX 159

CHESTER, SD 57016



September 27, 2017

Senator Deb Peters, Chair

Representative Jean Hunhoff, Vice-Chair

Dear Committee:

My name is Heath Larson, superintendent of the Chester Area School District. As requested from Senator Deb Peters and Representative Jean Hunhoff, I have written responses to the questions from the committee regarding student enrollments in South Dakota school districts.

1. Are you aware of situations where school districts attempt to include students in their headcounts that likely do not reflect their full-time student enrollment for the year? If you are aware of these situations, how long has this been going on?

No, I am not aware of this happening in our state other than the recent attempt from the Tri-Valley School District.

2. Would you support the Department of Legislative Audit examining 5-10 school districts that may have the highest disparity between the student enrollment figure for purposes of the funding formula and the number of high school graduates the previous spring (or some other objective measure)?

I believe that school districts are being accurate in their student enrollment counts and doing their best to educate the students enrolled. School districts operate most effectively with local control. I believe in school accountability. I would note, student outcomes can vary greatly due to a variety of factors. With that said, I would not oppose nor support an examination from the Department of Legislative Audit for any school due to not knowing at this time if additional school staff would need to be hired or a disruption of the learning environment would occur.

3. What recommendations do you have for adjusting the school funding formula to avoid attempts to game student headcounts for purposes of garnering more state funds?

At this time, I do not have a recommendation as the current system utilizing the last Friday in September has worked.

Senator Deb Peters, Chair

Representative Jean Hunhoff, Vice-Chair

September 27, 2017

p. 2

- a. Consider an alternative unannounced date for counting student enrollment?

I have no formal opinion on an unannounced date for counting student enrollment. However, I will mention two considerations that may be factors:

- Do some school districts utilize an alternative software program for their student data system that would require additional preparation time to complete their enrollment counts?
- Is an unannounced count date manageable for the Department of Education? They provide valuable technical assistance for school districts and if an unannounced count date would hamper their timely support for schools, I think that should be considered.

- b. Make headcounts subject to a periodic audit?

I do not oppose nor support a periodic audit of headcounts for school districts based on not knowing if schools would have to hire additional staff or would be subject to a disruption of the learning environment.

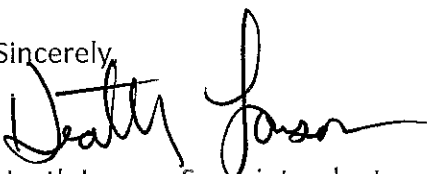
- c. Have student headcounts periodically reviewed by the Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee.

I have no opposition nor support for the review of student headcounts by the Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee for school districts. Again, if schools would have to hire additional staff or the learning environment is disrupted, those factors would be considerations.

- d. Should there be a fine for any of this behavior which is uncovered?

The state legislature should determine if a fine is appropriate and if so, the respective amount.

Sincerely,



Heath Larson, Superintendent