

Testimony for Basic Education Funding Commission Hearing
Mrs. Jean M. McCleary, Superintendent of Union School District
September 30, 2014

State Revenues	74.3%
Local Revenues	22.8%
Federal Revenues	3 %

Enrollment	617 (K-12)
Budget	10.9 Million
Free/Reduced Lunch	60%
Special Ed.	15%

School Performance Profile (SPP): 2014 Overall 70%

2014 Ranked by US News and World Report as Top HS High School-Union High School

Good Morning. My name is Jeannie McCleary and I have been an educator for twenty three years in public education as a secondary teacher, principal and I am currently serving my third year as a Superintendent at Union School District which is the 7th poorest district in the state of Pennsylvania. I am here this morning to provide testimony about fair and equitable funding for schools in Pennsylvania. All of my experience in public education has been in small and rural schools in Jefferson, Forest and Clarion Counties.

The subsidies Union School District receives look much different than what the other superintendents are going to testify about. The largest subsidy our school district receives comes from the state which is 74%. Local revenue is 22% and Federal subsidy is at 3%. The state subsidy is the lifeline to our school district. To put our local revenue into perspective, one mil of tax is the equivalent of \$35,000.00. Raising taxes to the index will not generate the monies that are needed to balance the cost of the increase of retirement contributions which is at 21% for the 14-15 and rising for the 2015-2016.

We have been cutting programs which directly impact students to balance budgets over the past several years. Several program cuts include: music, art, physical education, family consumer science, industrial arts, business and math courses. At the same time we are being held to the highest standards according to the School Performance Profile (Keystone and PSSA Assessments).

One of the successes to the Basic Education Funding for Small and Rural schools is Hold Harmless. Since there tends to be declining enrollments in small and rural schools this enables most schools to financially stabilize at this point. In our district if there were not "Hold Harmless" our district's walls would collapse. Since almost 75% of our

monies come from state subsidies. We could never generate enough local tax revenue to make up the difference. Under Act 1 we could not tax at a rate fast enough to make up enough money, nor could our tax payers pay their taxes since we have a 25% poverty level according to the census data.

Our district is so concerned about the financial future from the state we started recruiting students on a F1 Visa to our district from international countries. We are currently accepting students from Korea and Poland through our Union Outreach program. Of course for diversity but also to increase enrollment and to help bring in tuition money to our school to offset other costs our district has incurred from other unfunded mandates by the state we cannot afford. The program will pay for a special education aide wages or for the student we lost due to Cyber Charter education. Our expected Cyber costs this year are to be over \$300,000.00.

A solution to the funding issue cannot be based solely on enrollment since declining enrollment is a common problem for rural schools. Just as I am here today testifying on behalf of my district and community, I would be happy to participate in the process of creating a solution with all of you. I would ask the commission members for your support today on behalf of our schools and communities. Please consider your small and rural schools in Pennsylvania and develop a fair and equitable basic education funding formula. We need to maintain a strong public education system in Pennsylvania. Schools are what make communities strong and communities are strong because of their schools.