



# Bennington Public Schools

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[www.BenningtonSchools.org](http://www.BenningtonSchools.org)

January 31, 2023

Senator Linehan  
District 39  
Room 1116, NE Capitol Building  
PO Box 94604  
Lincoln, NE 68509

Dear Senator Linehan and members of the Revenue Committee:

The Bennington Public Schools District submits this letter in opposition to LB 589. We request that this letter be made a part of the public record.

Good morning Senator Linehan and members of the committee. My name is Terry L. Haack, Superintendent for Bennington Public Schools. Bennington Public Schools is testifying in opposition of LB 589 this morning. LB 589 states that a school district's "property tax request" may not exceed its "property tax request authority" by three or, with board approval, five percent in a given year. Our district believes the bill, as written, is detrimental to the growth of our community and hinders the mission of our school district to help students learn and grow.

As many of you may, or may not, know Bennington Public Schools is a rapidly growing school district. From 2011-12 to 2020-21, our ten-year growth averaged 10.26% with an average budget growth of 11.30%; a difference of 1.04%. During the same period, the District's average per pupil cost experienced an annual increase of 2.57% while the state experienced an annual increase of 3.83%. Our District has had the lowest or the second lowest per pupil cost in the state for the past eight years. This information is provided as evidence that Bennington Public Schools has met the goal of three percent or less growth despite double digit enrollment growth over the past decade.

This past year, Bennington Public Schools opened two new facilities (Stratford Elementary and Bennington South Middle School). Our Board of Education approved a 14.5% increase in our General Fund budget without any increase in our General Fund Levy. In other words, with our assessed valuation growth and prudent budget decisions in previous years, we were able to accommodate our community needs and maintain educational programming without a tax increase. It is estimated that LB 589 would limit this budget growth by approximately two-thirds. This is equivalent to 35 teachers which would have increased class size by 1.5 to 2 students per classroom and eliminated selected programs.

If the Committee sees the need to move this legislation forward, we respectfully request the Committee delete Section #2: a-d of LB 589. This section states that a district "may exceed its property tax request authority by a percentage approved by an affirmative vote of at least seventy-five percent of the school board" by 4% to 7% depending the size of the district. State leaders have repeatedly promoted Nebraskans must maintain local control of their school districts. This

section of the bill simply eliminates local control and should be deleted to allow political leaders to keep their promise.

Bennington Public Schools also struggles to understand why growing school districts can only increase their budget for 40% of annual increases in student growth. Section 3-2a is neither equal nor equitable to funding for students of a growing school district compared to all other students in the state. Growing school districts should be able to budget for all current students at 100% and the full percentage increase in student enrollment on an annual basis.

Bennington Public Schools appreciates the efforts of past and present state senators in addressing the needs of all public school children. We recognize our school district is an outlier in terms of enrollment and persistent growth. Our District understands the difficulty in drafting legislation that fits the needs of all students in our diverse state. Nebraska public schools currently have several limitations (i.e. local approval, expenditure and levy) connected to their budgets. Boards of Education and administrators work diligently to create budgets that meet the educational needs of students while taking into consideration the impact on local parents and patrons. This legislation makes a difficult task daunting for growing school districts like Bennington.

No matter how difficult this may be, it is important that this governing body develop policy to help grow our state – all students in our great state and not a select group of students. We reiterate, for the reasons stated above, that Senator Briese or this committee, maintain the current calculations for budget growth or modify LB 589 to allow Boards of Education local control of their budget.

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Terry L. Haack,  
Superintendent, BPS

#### Bennington Public Schools General Fund Notes:

- General fund revenue is composed of 45.0% Property Taxes, 41.3% State Aid, 13.7% Other Actual Receipts
- Assessed Valuation (AV) has been certified to increase by approximately 13.5% to \$2.128 billion in 2022. The ten-year average AV growth has been 10.44%; the past five-year average AV growth has been 12.34%
- Personnel costs make up 80.92% of the total budget, up from 78.0% last year
- The District's Per Pupil Cost (PPC) for 2020/21 fiscal year was \$3,635 below the state average. The District's 2020/21 PPC equates to 74.9% of the state average for PPC
- The District has passed six bond issues since 2003 for a total of \$198,090,000 and has refinanced several bonds over the past decade for an estimated saving of \$10.15 million