

UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 113  
Board of Education office  
1619 South Old HWY 75  
Sabetha Kansas 66534

**Preparing Kids, Shaping the Future**

**Minutes of the Special Board of Education meeting, Saturday February 4, 2023 10:00 AM  
Held at the Wetmore Academic Center, 321 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Wetmore KS**

**The purpose of this meeting was to conduct a public hearing for the proposed closure of the Wetmore Academic Center**

**1. Call the meeting to order**

President Leslie Scoby called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. President Scoby led the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance. Jim Scoby said the prayer. Board members present were Kathy Lippert, Anissa Bloom, Kent Saylor, Phillip Buessing, Jim Scoby, and Stan Keim. Also present were Superintendent Todd Evans, Board Clerk Deb Damman, and those listed on the attached sign-in sheet.

**2. Public Hearing for the Proposed Closure of the Wetmore Academic Center**

Lori Kopp, Kansas Association of School Board attorney introduced herself, the Board and Mr. Evans. Ms. Kopp explained the purpose of the meeting, a hearing to close the Wetmore Academic Center.

Mr. Evans shared financial information that had been requested showing the impact of Lookback or Adjusted weighting on the viability formula. He provided a brief review on how students are counted and weighted for use in state formulas and the viability formula that was adopted by the Board.

Mr. Evans then shared rationale supportive of the closure of the Wetmore Academic Center. A copy of his statement is attached to and becomes part of these minutes.

Mr. Evans provided a letter to the USD 113 Board of Education from the USD 335 Board of Education regarding the potential closure of Wetmore. The letter is attached and becomes part of these minutes.

Ms. Kopp opened up the floor to individuals who wished to address the Board regarding the closure of Wetmore Academic Center. Each individual was allowed 5 minutes to speak to the Board:

The following members of the public released their time to others:

Steve Sheldon and Kamber Wommack released their time to Andrea Lagos.  
Kathi Noe and Wes Noe released their time to Analyssa Noe  
Mathew Rice released his time to Analyssa Noe

The following members of the public spoke to the Board:

Ryan Schuler, Goff, is a sophomore at Wetmore – gave Board a student’s perspective on Wetmore closure.

Jessica Atwood, 27- year resident of Wetmore, graduate of Wetmore – spoke supporting the quality of staff in Wetmore.

Linda Boyd, Wetmore – was English teacher at Wetmore High School for 42 years – spoke in support of Wetmore

Matt Walters, Wamego, KS spoke in support of Wetmore.

Rodney Burdick, Wetmore -- had remarks about prior meeting comments.

Sarah Cormier, Wetmore – read a letter for student Clayton Murrow, who could not attend the meeting. Clayton's letter declared that the school was the heart of Wetmore, and would not like to go anywhere else.

Michelle Flewelling – her children will not attend Sabetha, and she would like land transferred.

Andy Henry, 2015 graduate of Wetmore – spoke in support of Wetmore

Kyla Milligan – 8<sup>th</sup> grade Wetmore student – had gone to a larger school prior to Wetmore and ended up coming back to Wetmore. Her message was that teachers give you more attention in a smaller school.

Ethan Schmitz, Kansas City – attended B&B. Married to Brianna Boden, Wetmore. Spoke in support of Wetmore school.

Brianna Schmitz, Kansas City. Wetmore 2014 grad – spoke in support of Wetmore

Matt Kramer, Bancroft – one child in Wetmore, two kids not in school yet. Would like his land taxes and unearned revenue to go with the children.

Matt Bloom, rural Goff – have two grade school kids in Wetmore. Why has attendance dropped so much. There are students in the Wetmore area that don't go to school here, but there are plans to help bring students in.

James Dobbins, Section 32, Harrison township (Goff) – spoke in support of Wetmore.

Malori Henry, rural Goff – speaking for Lysie and Jeff Tanking who could not attend. Children will not attend school in Sabetha if Wetmore is closed. Land valuation should follow students.

Matthew Rice, Wetmore – said he has heard about finances and teachers, but not the kids. Take care of the kids.

Corey Bloom, Wetmore – spoke in support of Wetmore schools.

Tabetha Schuller, Goff – have 3 children in WAC, who will not attend Sabetha. Would like land to follow kids.

Taygan Fischer, Wetmore 8<sup>th</sup> grader – closing the school would hurt students and staff. Afraid she won't find staff who cares in a bigger school.

Susan Bloom, Netawaka – grandchildren attend Wetmore – Wetmore community supports the Wetmore schools – parental involvement is high.

Ginny Pfrang, rural Goff – spoke in support of Wetmore schools.

Andrea Meggison, rural Goff – has 3 children, 2 attend Wetmore. Would like land valuation to follow the children to the school they attend.

Riggsby Scott – on behalf of her father, she informed the Board that she and her brother will not be attending Sabetha.

Deandra Lighthiser, 8<sup>th</sup> grade student – doesn't want to go to a new school and be separated from her friends.

Andrea Lagos, Wetmore – 15 minutes due to donated times. Spoke in support of Wetmore schools. Provided suggestions for other alternatives rather than closing Wetmore.

Analyssa Noe – 17.5 minutes due to donated time. Spoke in support of Wetmore. Asked Board for time to prepare for a path forward and to give time to manage the transition.

Ms. Kopp thanked everyone for their time, and recommended that the Board take the information that they heard today under consideration for possible action to be taken at another Board meeting. Ms. Kopp concluded the hearing.

### **3. Adjourn**

Motion made by Kathy Lippert, seconded by Phillips Buessing, to adjourn. Motion passed 7-0. Meeting adjourned at 12:11 p.m.

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Board President

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Board Clerk

## Rationale for the potential closure of Wetmore

My role this morning is to provide factual information supporting the closure of the Wetmore Academic Center.

### **Legislative Post Audit**

The most thorough financial study ever conducted of USD 113 was the Legislative Post Audit study during the 2014-15 school year. The study recommended the closure of the Wetmore School as a cost saving measure. The primary basis of this conclusion was articulated, "As a school building's enrollment declines, school officials sometimes decide it is necessary to consolidate the students into a combined location. This allows the district to take advantage of economies of scale in terms of staffing, and also results in reduced operational costs such as utilities and insurance."

In addition to the cost savings mentioned in the study, costs for maintenance, transportation, and facility repairs will also result in a reduction of expenditures. The recommendation from the Legislative Post Audit auditors would have more relevance today because of the significant decline in enrollment since the time of the audit.

### **Enrollment**

In the past 10 years, USD 113's decline in Headcount enrollment, using data provided by Kansas State Department of Education's Data Central, has been a cumulative loss of 77 students (from 1,141 [FY14] to 1,064 [FY23]). Wetmore's declining enrollment during the same time period is 51 from 174 – 123. In this time period, Wetmore's declining enrollment is 66% of the entire district's decline, even though their Headcount for the 22-23 school year accounts for 11.56% of the total district enrollment according to the same data source. This is an average decline for the Wetmore Academic Center of 2.9% per year for the 10-year period.

If we look at the last 5 years, using data provided by Kansas State Department of Education's Data Central, the district headcount enrollment has dropped a total of 56 students (1,120 [FY19] – 1,064 [FY23]). During the same 5-year time period, Wetmore has dropped 29 students (152-123). 51.78% of the district's enrollment decline over the past five years can be attributed to Wetmore. This is an average decline of 3.81% per year for the five-year time period.

Based upon the number of seniors at Wetmore this year who will be graduating and the estimated number of Kindergartners for next year, this trend will continue for the 2023-24 school year. Based upon information recorded on Sept. 20, 2022, count day, the total Headcount is estimated to drop from 123 to 120 students for next year. As student numbers decrease, cost per student increases. This situation is compounded as the district is facing the need for increased compensation costs as we strive to remain competitive with other school districts as well as private industry for human resources.

Looking at students in Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, the headcount range of class sizes is a low of 3 students in a class to a high of 14. Based upon the Sept. 20, 2022 count, there are 3 classes of students with 5 or less students and five classes with less than 10 students. The average grade level size is 9.46 students per class.

### **Cost per student**

In looking at campus-level expenditures from the 21-22 USD 113 viability report, and using Kansas State Department of Education's Data Central's headcount for the same year (21-22), the cost for educating a student in Sabetha is \$10,627. Axtell's is \$12,768 and Wetmore's is \$13,059. This difference is concerning as is the historical trend line of declining enrollment. According to the same data source, Wetmore experienced a decline of 11 students or 8.2% from the 21-22 school year to the 22-23 school year. In considering this continued decline, the disparity of campus per pupil cost will have increased. The high cost per pupil impacts the entire district.

### **Personnel**

Especially in recent years, the hiring of personnel has been extremely challenging and is anticipated to become even more of a challenge as fewer people are choosing teaching and the field of education as a career. USD 113 has been fortunate to be able to fill teaching positions. In some cases we have had to rely on transition to teach programs as opposed to hiring teachers already licensed to teach specific grade levels and/or content areas, but with each passing year the potential of not filling teaching positions increases as applicants for positions decrease.

Finding qualified classified staff has also become very challenging. Many of our district's custodians are nearing retirement age and qualified applicants have been extremely difficult to find. Many of our bus drivers are also at or near retirement age and new drivers are also extremely hard to find. In the past couple of years, we have advertised for regular-route bus drivers from the Wetmore area and have not been able to fill positions with employees from that locale who can start and stop routes from the Wetmore area. At this time, bus drivers from Sabetha drive school vehicles to and from the Wetmore area, adding to miles on vehicles, cost of vehicle operation, as well as driver time to be compensated. In addition to drivers, our district has had challenges in finding food service employees and clerical staff. This personnel shortage is predicted to worsen and will continue to challenge the operation of schools. The reduction of a facility will require fewer positions to serve the students of USD 113.

## **Curriculum opportunities**

As a district, USD 113 must name the school buildings to which the involved pupils shall be reassigned. This information is provided considering that students from Wetmore could be educated in the Sabetha Schools. It is important to recognize that Wetmore constituents have reported that Wetmore students would likely attend schools in closer proximity to their residences than Sabetha. It is the responsibility of USD 113 Board of Education members to consider the resources within the control of the district. It is also important to recognize that increased curricular opportunities are not to be confused with the assertion that Wetmore students have not been provided quality instruction. It is recognized that there is a great deal of respect for the competence and professionalism of Wetmore staff and administration.

This final area for consideration by the USD 113 Board of Education is that there are a number of curricular opportunities for students that would be increased if Wetmore students were to attend school in Sabetha. The majority of these opportunities impact high school age students, although there are some that impact middle school students. At the high school level, there are specialized vocal music choirs. A full-time vocational agriculture teacher is available, along with classroom, shop and greenhouse facilities to facilitate hands-on learning. USD 113 has long held the position that a classroom teacher provides a better learning opportunity for students than on-line or remote platforms. Wetmore students who have been on-line learners in the past would have the opportunity to take Spanish, physics, A.P. Government and Anatomy & Physiology from actual classroom teachers. Elementary, Middle and High School Art programs are another curricular opportunity that Wetmore students haven't had in the past that are planned to be available.

## **Conclusion**

As mentioned in the 2014-15 Legislative Post Audit Study, Wetmore students could be served at Sabetha attendance centers with very little or no additional staff. This would result in considerable "economy of scale" savings.

The closure of the Wetmore building would result in a more equitable distribution of resources for the purpose of educating district students.

A reduction in the necessary personnel required to educate students is predicted to reduce future challenges of staffing.

Finally, Wetmore students would have expanded curricular opportunities.

Again, my role this morning is to provide information supporting the closure of the Wetmore facility. I have many emotional connections to the Wetmore school and community. This has been a heartbreaking process. I appreciate our board of education for considering this information as well as the information that will follow this morning.

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# North Jackson USD #335

Circleville  
Netawaka  
Soldier  
Whiting

## Jackson Heights Schools

01/22/2023

Leslie Scoby, Board President  
Kathy Lippert  
Kent Saylor  
Anissa Bloom  
Jim Scoby  
Phillip Buessing  
Stan Keim  
Todd Evans, Superintendent  
y Deb Damman, Board Clerk

Members of the Board of Education:

We appreciated the invitation to meet with you offered by Ms Scoby to discuss a possible scenario to keep the Wetmore school open.

Let me first say that our desire is to see the Wetmore school be able to stay open and provide an education to their students. We clearly realize the negative impact that school closure has on a small community.

With that being said, our board has reached a consensus that we are unable to engage in the discussion of being the sponsoring district to keep the Wetmore school open at this time.

Should the unfortunate decision to close the Wetmore school be made, USD 335 is immediately able and willing to accept any students from the Wetmore school who would like to come into our district. We have ample classroom capacity to continue to provide Wetmore students with a learning environment that is small and personal.

If school closure at Wetmore is the ultimate decision that is made by your Board of Education, our Board of Education would like to meet to discuss the potential of transferring to USD 335 the property belonging to Wetmore school patrons whose students might choose to attend Jackson Heights.

This is clearly a very complex and difficult decision that you are making. It will make a significant impact on many students and families as well as a small rural community. We will await your decision.

Sincerely,



David R Allen, President USD 335 Board of Education

Jackson Heights Elementary  
School  
12763 266<sup>th</sup> Road  
Holton, KS 66436

Jim Howard, Superintendent  
Derek Smith, HS/MS Principal  
Daniel Pray, Elementary Principal  
Sheri Dibbern, Clerk of the Board

Jackson Heights High/Middle  
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