

**2010 Commission Meeting  
June 29, 2009  
State Capitol Building, Room 545-N**

**Destry Brown  
Superintendent of Schools, USD # 250 – Pittsburg**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning. Because of the recommendations and direction from this commission, schools across this state have had resources available to them that had not been available in the past. I hope that together we can continue along the journey of ensuring that every child in this state receives a quality education.

I consider it an honor to be able to tell you the story of our kids and our school district in Pittsburg. But please keep in mind that our story is not unique to our part of the state. The same story can be told about nearly every school district in the nine counties comprising the Southeast Corner of our state.

The Pittsburg school district is the largest school district in Southeast Kansas. Our district encompasses 43 square miles in southeastern Crawford County. Our enrollment has been growing in recent years and is currently at 2819 students. This is **an increase** of about 300 students in the last five years.

Along with that growth, we have experienced some **changes in the demographics** of the students we serve in the district. Last year, 1,462, or **52% of our students qualified for free lunch**, an increase of 350 students from 5 years ago. We have **434 special education students** served through the Southeast Kansas Special Education Interlocal. This accounts for 15% of our student population and this number continues to increase in proportion to our poverty and enrollment. We also provided **189 children ELL** services last year. This number has more than doubled in the last five years.

Even through the growth and the changes in our district, our schools are achieving at very high standards. Our elementary schools are achieving at or near the **Standard of**

**Excellence** each year. Our middle and high schools are also doing very well but did not make **Adequate Yearly Progress** this year in our special education subgroup. I believe that this is possible because our teachers are doing an outstanding job of meeting the individual needs of our students. Our teachers are working harder and smarter than ever and our kids are **achieving at higher levels** every year.

I also believe that we have been able to make this progress because of the increased funding for at-risk students using the **number of students who qualify for free lunch and the high-density at-risk weighting**. We have used this money to provide after school and summer school programs. We have hired additional personnel to work with students in our primary grades in the areas of reading and math with the goal of each child performing at grade level by the end of second grade. These funds have also allowed us to successfully implement the **Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)** in all of our schools. We have also implemented a program that allows kids to take home meals to be eaten on the weekends and a summer feeding program at several locations around town. **This summer, we are preparing approximately 600 meals for kids who come to the schools on a daily basis to eat breakfast and lunch.**

We are also using at-risk funds to implement **all-day kindergarten** next year throughout the district. All-day kindergarten is no longer an option in providing for the educational needs of the children in our school district. We have so many children who come to us without any prior preschool experiences. Some students enter kindergarten reading while others enter having not even seen a book. It is nearly impossible to close this gap during a half-day of kindergarten. **Because of the increase in our community of students living in poverty, it is essential that we be able to provide an all-day kindergarten program that is fully funded by counting each kindergartner at 1.0 FTE.**

**Access to quality preschool programs is also essential to meeting the educational needs of the students in our community.** We need to be able to increase the number of slots for our at-risk preschools. Currently, we serve **48 children** in the at-risk preschool programs in Pittsburg. **This number needs to double in order to more adequately**

**provide preschool experiences for our children.** Increasingly, we have more children with no social experiences prior to entering school. We also have seen a growing number of students who enter kindergarten needing mental health support because of the number and severity of traumatic episodes in their households. **Having more access to quality preschool programs would help these students to transition into kindergarten more successfully.**

With our **growing number of ELL students**, we have needed to provide more language support services. Currently, our funds are limited because of the funding mechanism in place for counting those students. **Our children coming to our schools speaking languages other than English have made tremendous progress.** However, we are not able to provide the kind of support that we believe would most benefit these children because of the lack of funding. It would seem to me that that the fairest way to **count our ELL students is through headcount with a weighting factor similar to At-Risk rather than counting their contact hours in an ELL program.**

Another funding mechanism that I believe could use some attention is the **funding for student transportation.** Currently, we receive transportation funding for students who live 2.5 miles or further from school. In Pittsburg, we **transport nearly 1,000 students on a daily basis.** Only about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of those students live at or beyond 2.5 miles. The other  $\frac{3}{4}$  live between one mile and 2.5 miles from school. Because of family economic factors and child safety, we have chosen to provide transportation to school at no charge to our families. We do this because it is what is **best for kids.** Many of our families work in jobs that require that they begin by 7:00 AM. Other families do not have reliable transportation to consistently take their children to school. On top of that, the infrastructure within our city has not provided sidewalks or safe crossings across major thoroughfares. **By reducing the mileage from 2.5 to 1.0 or 1.5, we would be able to utilize resources that we are currently using for transportation and reallocate it to our schools for instructional purposes.**

I appreciate that this commission has placed in its recommendations **the need for educational reform through innovative and research-based programs**. I believe that the **MTSS and Professional Learning Communities** initiative has helped to make a huge difference for many of our students and staff. Unfortunately, as funds continue to diminish, it becomes more difficult to provide even the most basic educational programs for our children. Many districts are facing the need to **make choices about whether to provide fine arts and vocational programs because of the lack of funds**. I think that this only cheats our kids out of experiences that enrich their minds and their lives. Our state has always been a leader in the development and implementation of innovative programs. Presently, we are trying to retool our instruction to **develop the skills of 21<sup>st</sup> Century learners**. As funds become less available, it becomes more difficult to provide training for our staff in order to do this successfully across the board. **Our vocational programs need to be updated to meet the standards of business and industry in the future and the equipment and training for these programs is cost prohibitive under our current funding structure.**

Lastly, I would like to talk to you about health care. **Many of our families do not have access to adequate health care services**. We have large numbers of children who come to Kindergarten Roundup and have not had any of the **immunizations** that are required for entry into school. We have children who have **health needs that go unmet** because families are faced with making the choice between eating and going to the doctor. We have children with severe **dental needs that largely go unmet**. The solution for most families is to have teeth pulled because of the cost of repair. I have seen children sit in classrooms in such pain that they cannot concentrate or eat because of an infected tooth. Kids in poverty miss school frequently because of illness and many of their conditions are treatable if the families had access to adequate health care. I hope that the legislature will begin to **plan for some type of health care program that can be accessed by everyone equally**. This has a tremendous effect on attendance and achievement.

As a state, we have **made tremendous progress** in the last five years. Our kids are achieving at levels that were unheard of prior to No Child Left Behind. I have seen

teachers and administrators provide for our kids in ways that I could never have imagined. I can assure you that every child who comes to school in Pittsburg is being loved and encouraged to do their very best. I am so proud of the accomplishments of the kids and the staff not only in Pittsburg and Southeast Kansas, but in every school across this state. I am a believer in the fact that things have been great in our school systems. But I also truly believe that the best is yet to come. **Thank you for all that you do for Kansas kids and for listening to the story of my district this morning.**