

For the House Education Committee

March 18, 2014

I am JoAn Canning, Superintendent of Schools in the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union. I have been in my present position for almost 4 years and have had the distinct pleasure of serving in both single districts and supervisory union districts in various capacities as superintendent, assistant superintendent, curriculum director and director of special education in five public education institutions for over 20 years.

I have been an elementary school teacher, a special educator in a variety of K-12 capacities. I worked with college level students to help them advocate for accommodations for their disabilities. I have worked as a teacher trainer for developing individual learning plans for learning differences, been a national speaker on the subject of college transition planning for students with disabilities and have been an active member of several state and national organizations.

I think the most important role of any key educational leader in our public schools today is to understand and lead school reform from a strong understanding of instruction and learning. I have a passion and commitment to improving the outcomes of all students in our public educational institutions. It is the most important work we can do to prepare our students for a different future while keeping in mind these students will make significant contributions in improving our world.

There is a significant difference between the single school district system vs supervisory union system which in my belief has an impact on the way in which you can provide a quality education. Supervisory unions have multiple boards whose work is similar in content and in form. Superintendents of supervisory unions spend most of their time duplicating efforts to support these boards in the form of agenda planning, building budgets and spending time responding to concerns of the community and of individual board members. In addition some schools district boards have developed different student outcomes even while many of them funnel into one of our high schools. They do this because of the explanation "that we are different here in this community". The reality is that boards want the same thing for all their students; they want them to be successful. I believe there are actually more common values and perspectives than differences among the communities in a supervisory union but there seems to be a strong underlying fear of losing individual community identity

All of the research points to the fact that what makes the biggest impact on student learning outcomes is a highly qualified teacher. A highly qualified Instructional Leader (principal) is only second to the most effective way to improve student learning. There is a plethora of information and research that can be gained from looking at the Wallace Foundation research. Principals can only become the Instructional Leaders that we want them to be if there is a highly skilled, supportive and knowledgeable Superintendent of Schools who truly believes and creates the supports and systems for this laser focus on learning to occur. Superintendents who serve in large supervisory unions do not have the time to play this critical role because most of our time is

spent on serving boards. Superintendent's as educational leaders must be visible in the classroom, in schools and in the community to make connections and make sure that everyone is working towards that same vision. Superintendents used to be thought of as successful leaders if they could manage "busses, boilers, buildings and boards", now we need "communication, collaboration, connections in the learning process to be successful and we need the time to do so.

In a supervisory union there is a lot of redundancy that gets in the way of truly being able to be effective and efficient. Currently I plan for 7 Board meetings monthly with the same agenda and required information. Similarly, I create 9 budgets which also have a level of redundancy in the process. There are two sub-committees of the boards which add two more meetings each month.

We are in the second year in my supervisory union with a consolidated special education program and budget. In the first year of consolidation we actually sent money back to the districts and currently we are on track to do the same at the end of this year. Previously we were approximately 3-400,000.00 over budget every year. Through consolidation we have seen efficiency especially in the use of staff which has also resulted in cost savings. Unfortunately, due to the lack of trust that consolidation is actually a good move, we have been forced to track individual school costs to prove the positive aspects of consolidation. This tracking has created the redundancy of effort we were hoping to avoid.

Another example is with the Master Agreements. We have been successful in creating the common contract language and salary grid but unfortunately, because of "local control" each board and association wanted to keep their bargaining unit even though a district negotiations team is responsible for negotiating for all. So while it is great we have common standards of practice for these contracts, we cannot share staff and have challenges tracking benefits for staff who work across the SU, again a duplication of effort.

I am in the process of helping my Voluntary Study Merger Committee complete their articles of agreement to submit to the State Board of Education this spring. While the group has been engaged and working for two years on this process the committee members are all over the map in their support of actually creating a Regional Education District even though our students can have school choice of 4 elementary schools and two high schools. I believe we would see cost saving of time and money by creating one School Board, learning opportunities would be expanded for all students and finally we could protect several small schools in the RED.

In closing, I would like to put my vote of support behind the legislation being considered around consolidation. The time and effort of staff as well as budgets could all be aligned to improve student learning and would minimize the distractions that keep us from creating a world class education.

Please don't hesitate to contact me,
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