

Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Steve Cash, and I am the Chair of the Ripton School Board. The testimony below is in regards to H. 727.

1. The Ripton School Board supports the closure moratorium and extending it to 2024.
2. The Ripton School Board supports the closure and withdrawal studies, and would appreciate the opportunity to contribute to these efforts.
3. Draft minutes from one of our recent board meetings were utilized by the State Board of Education (SBE) Chair, Oliver Olsen, in testimony he provided to this committee. The portion of the minutes Mr. Olsen shared seemed to indicate that if Ripton was to proceed with our withdraw, Ripton Elementary School (RES) would be left with no staff. To clarify, the information in those minutes was the result of a conversation between a consultant we are working with, and our school's principal, who is at the school part-time. We as a board are evaluating the information from that conversation, but it should not be taken as definitive fact, as it was removed from the source. Our informal conversations with current RES staff have indicated mixed positions in regards to remaining at the school, and many of those decisions seem to depend in part on how the withdrawal process progresses.
4. Ripton was made a stand-alone district in January 2022 by the SBE. This decision was made not in the name of student success, or finance, but to avoid the consequences of the other options available. There is a document attached to this testimony titled, **edu-sbe-item j-recommendation for ripton assignment-9-15-2021 0**. This is a memo Secretary French shared prior to the SBE assigning Ripton to be our own district. If you look on Pg. 4, the second paragraph reads, *"it is likely that the RSD would be too small a system to perform some of SU duties itself in an efficient and effective manner."* In spite of this recognition of the challenges a stand-alone district assignment would mean for Ripton, the Secretary made this recommendation and the SBE later followed this recommendation. If the SBE was dedicated to the withdrawal process being successful for Ripton, they would not have saddled such a small district with this herculean task. With the SBE's decision it became clear to the Ripton School Board that our situation was only being assessed through a state-wide lens, focused on governance, and not focused on what is best for Ripton's students. The Ripton School Board pushed back against this decision. As a result of the current draft of H. 727, Ripton would have to go back before the SBE, and be subject to a newly introduced decision making process. This additional SBE oversight is something we do not support. We feel Ripton should control our withdrawal path going forward as we are best positioned to make the necessary decisions. Ripton has been dutifully in step with the process to this point and we should be allowed to continue. We have previously supported the SBE issuing an advisory opinion, and the off ramp concept, and continue to do so. We support the SBE being able to facilitate the off-ramp to return to the district, but only if we ask them to do so. Throughout this process we feel we have made decisions that our in our town's and student's best interest. If the work to become our own district becomes untenable, we are confident in our ability to recognize that and take action to pursue a different path.

Steve Cash,
Ripton School District Board Chair