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SBE Testimony (Small Schools Grants)
6/8/18

In 2011 Act 153, section 21 tasked the (then Commissioner) of Education to identify small schools that are geographically isolated. A study was conducted and released (“Study on Small School Grant Eligibility Due to Geographic Necessity”) which established a list of 23 schools for which “either the driving times or distances, along with the travel route, were an obstacle in transporting students.”

Barnard Academy was on that list. I can safely say that our school sits in the same location, along the same roads which traverse the same topography. I only assume that this is likely true of the other schools on the list. There is no compelling reason to change the metrics for geographic isolation of small schools - unless the express intention is to make small schools untenable.

The 2011 list and its concomitant metrics should be a baseline from which to add other schools, and/or more inclusive metrics. To disavow the list, or to create narrower metrics would appear punitive and would further discriminate against already vulnerable school districts. In that regard, insulating more schools, not fewer, from the pressure to close or consolidate should be the goal. When students are struggling, the humane thing to do is to support them. The same holds true for schools.

Sadly, we are transitioning to a time when rather than help those that are struggling, we help those that are not. This appears to be the path we are on with Small Schools Grants. Merged districts will receive SSG’s rebranded as “Merger Support Grants” in perpetuity without having to beg year in and year out for the money. So larger districts with more resources, are given further advantage over their less advantaged neighboring communities. This is wrong. It is inequitable. The SBE has an opportunity to establish metrics that could partially alleviate this disparity of power. The work has already been done for you - please use the 2011 metrics as the starting point for your work to fight educational inequality.