



October 11, 2021

Dear Mr. Trabert;

This correspondence is in response to the October 8, 2021 request by KPI to the following question: *"With grade level being the court's target, how long do you think it will take USD 443 to get all high school students to at least grade level?"*

USD 443 is focused on the wellbeing and education of all of our students. Our community and school's diverse make up is a strength. We have over 7,200 preK-12th grade students, 49% are English Language Learners, 81% are Economically Disadvantaged, 5% are Migrant Students and 20 different languages spoken by our students. Over the past 3 school years USD 443 has undergone a strategic overhaul on our alignment of district goals to increase student learning in the presence of new restrainers outside of our control. In addition, the district is working through the residual effect of multiple years of substantial budget cuts, politicized pressures on schools and declining numbers of college education program graduates.

The advent of the pandemic was and continues to be a new challenge not only on school safety/wellbeing, staffing, budgets, instruction modalities, but also the impact the politicization of this topic has had as a diversion of district efforts. Yet another diversion of district efforts is the Critical Race Theory debate even though it is not part of the Kansas Social Studies standards.

A concerning reality in meeting the needs of our students is the increasing difficulty to fully staff our classrooms. This is not unique to USD 443 but the supply to demand inequity is particularly impactful to rural school districts in Kansas. Educational research clearly indicates a strong corollary between the quality of instruction and student educational outcomes. Anecdotally, our recruitment efforts are way too frequently met with adamant aversion to teaching. When probed further individuals respond they would not teach due to many reasons such as the negative perception created by years of underfunding, regular political intrusion, continued voucher discussion, low pay and feeling that their profession is attacked and devalued.

The above information is critical to provide a truer response to what is a fair yet simplistic question. Over the past three years USD 443 has undergone a system wide and systemic continuous improvement redesign. We continually review our budget to best serve our students, staff and to provide focused professional development. We completed a comprehensive review and alignment process for PreK-12 English Language Arts, Mathematics and English Learner. We overhauled our professional development plans to align with these district goals and are evolving to meet the need of increasing numbers of transition to teaching candidates. This past summer we had over 300 certified and classified staff attend a 4 week literacy instruction institute. We have also provided intensive science of reading and

instructional training to over 150 staff members. Our plans are to train all elementary teachers and secondary English Language Arts teacher by the end of the 2022-2023 school year. All of this is essential but takes money, support and time. Far too often over the past decade funding and support have been variables whereas prior to this stretch, time was the variable and now all three are.

While this response has not provided a direct response to the question posed it is a fair response as educating students is way too complex. USD 443's goal is to have all students at grade level in literacy and math as measured by the KAP. We are committed to this goal for all students whether they entered at or above grade level or if they have not had any formal education, primary language is not English, are not literate in their home language, are classified as Economically Disadvantaged, have experienced significant trauma in their lives or whose goal is to comply with compulsory attendance laws so that they can eventually work at one of the beef packing plants in our community. There are many stories like this in USD 443 and other western Kansas school districts.

Providing for adequate and equitable learning environments and supports for all USD 443 students is different than most other districts in Kansas. Money matters to meet the needs of our students, staff, parents and community but so does the consistency of knowing these funds are secure to allow for long-term planning.

Respectfully,



Dr. Scott Springston

Deputy Superintendent of Schools

USD 443 Dodge City

cc Dr. Fred Dierksen, Superintendent USD 443
Kerri Baker, USD 443 Chief Public Information Officer