

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**August 30, 2023**

**Contact: Jim Howard**  
**(620) 214-9447**  
[jim.howard@jhcobras.net](mailto:jim.howard@jhcobras.net)

**School districts request formal mediation to settle land transfer dispute**

TOPEKA - Today, three school districts jointly petitioned the Kansas State Board of Education to initiate a formal mediation process and appoint a mediator as the next step in an ongoing dispute over school district boundaries.

The request, submitted to the State Board by Kriegshauser Ney Law Group on behalf of USD 115, USD 335, and USD 380, comes after months of stalled negotiations with USD 113. In January, the USD 113 school board voted 5-2 to close the Wetmore Academic Center at the end of the 2022-2023 school year. Of the roughly 125 students who attended that school, the majority have chosen to attend public school in adjoining districts while others have left the public school system altogether.

USD 335, in particular, is experiencing extraordinary enrollment growth as a direct result of the school closure. At the start of the 2023-2024 school year, USD 335 welcomed more than 100 new students who formerly attended school in Wetmore.

“We have gladly accepted the responsibility of educating these students within our district,” said USD 335 Superintendent Jim Howard. “We have added bus routes, hired new drivers and teachers, and anticipate substantial increases in a number of other costs, including fuel, food service, and educational materials. Unfortunately, we haven’t received any of the base state aid to educate those students this year and we don’t currently have the property tax base to support that increase long term.”

Kansas law provides a process for school districts who have experienced a substantial and material change in circumstances to petition for transferring land from one school district to another when it is in the best educational interest of the affected school children. Like most other states, a significant portion of Kansas’ funding for schools comes from local property taxes.

“In April, we initiated good-faith negotiations with USD 113 to discuss the transfer of land to USD 115, USD 335, and USD 380, respectively,” said USD 115 Superintendent Tavis Desormiers. “Together, we have thoughtfully presented a uniform proposal for new boundary lines that accurately reflects the educational needs of the students and preferences of the landowners. Unfortunately those interactions haven’t brought us any closer to an agreement with USD 113 and we are hopeful that formal mediation will produce an outcome all four involved districts can accept.”

###