

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of our rural school and the challenges we face as a result of annexation. While growth and progress are inevitable, it is critical to address the profound and lasting impact these changes have had on the heart of our community—our schools.

In recent years, the annexation of surrounding areas has significantly altered our student population. One of the most notable changes has been the shift in student demographics. We now serve a much more diverse student body, which we celebrate as an opportunity for our students to grow in understanding and empathy. However, this change has also brought with it an increase in the demand for specialized services. Most strikingly, we have witnessed a 25% rise in English Language Learners (ELLs) within our classrooms. This surge has necessitated additional staffing, specialized training, and resources to ensure every student receives the quality education they deserve—pressuring an already stretched system.

Moreover, our enrollment numbers have ballooned to unprecedented levels. In the 2004-2005 academic year, our school served 948 students. By the 2014-2015 school year, enrollment had grown to 1,031 students—a manageable increase over a decade. However, today, in the 2024-2025 school year, our enrollment has more than doubled from its earlier levels, reaching an overwhelming 2,064 students. Such rapid growth has placed immense strain on our infrastructure. Classrooms are overcrowded, common spaces are stretched thin, and we are being forced to try to afford near-constant construction just to keep pace with demand. Not to mention increased demands on transportation services in a time when bus drivers are in short supply and the cost of buses are increasing.

These challenges are a direct result of annexation, which has brought about significant changes without regard for the capacity of our rural school to adapt and sustain its operations. Annexation has shifted the identity of our school, diluting the close-knit character of our rural community, while introducing challenges that threaten to undermine the quality of education for all our students.

We respectfully urge our leaders to reconsider and halt further annexation of land into our school district. This is not just about managing resources; it is about preserving the essence of our rural school, ensuring that our educators can focus on teaching rather than merely coping with the pressures of exponential growth. It is about protecting the community and legacy that our school represents.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Rachael Kiplinger

Bethel Local School Board Member