

My name is Heidi Budeau and I am the director of special education for the James River Special Education Cooperative. The Cooperative is made up of eight school districts: Edgeley, Ellendale, Kulm, Jamestown, LaMoure, Litchville-Marion, Medina and Montpelier. James River is centrally located along Interstate-90 and covers a large area, both rural and urban, but are, and continue to be, affected by special education teacher shortage along with the need for high quality paraprofessional training. I believe HB1188 can help the Cooperative in both of these areas.

In terms of paraprofessional training, the special education technician would entail additional training above the 20-hour paraprofessional training required by the state of North Dakota. The most vulnerable student requires a paraprofessional that needs specific training in order to meet the student's unique individual needs. The coursework and training to become a technician would increase the individual's base of knowledge in order to meet the student's needs.

A special education technician would be better prepared to assist the special education teacher in duties that need to be performed on a daily basis. A special education teacher is not only a teacher, but tends to wear many hats: case manager, connection between general and special education and related service providers, direct supervisor to paraprofessionals, inclusion specialist, nurse, social worker, community outreach provider along with many other duties; especially in more rural areas. Because the special education teacher wears so many hats, the assistance of a special education technician would allow the special education teacher to transfer specific duties to the technician. This would free up time for the special education teacher to provide direct instruction to students on a more consistent and regular basis.

The special education technician credential would lay framework for a technician to pursue a degree in special education. People tend to get into education for the love of students and assisting them to reach their goals throughout K-12 education, but not all have completed or started formal higher education. After completing the technician training and working with students and fellow educators, a technician may choose to pursue a degree in higher education to become a special education teacher, school psychologist, counselor or any other education professional. The technician credential would be a stepping stone for the individual to obtain a degree in higher education.

People that are invested in their local communities are the best people to educate young people in that community. The education technician credential would allow local community members who work in the school system to receive specialized training that directly benefits the community in which they live and work. Offering a special education technical credential is an investment in students, staff, and the local school district and community.

I strongly support the addition of a special education technician credential. I believe this credential can only enhance the services students in special education receive in our state.