

**TESTIMONY ON HB 1083
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

March 10, 2021

**By: Jim Upgren, Assistant Director, Office of School Approval and Opportunity
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Chairman Schaible and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jim Upgren and I am an Assistant Director in the Office of School Approval and Opportunity with the Department of Public Instruction. I am here on behalf of the department to speak in favor of House Bill 1083.

As you all know, school buildings in North Dakota were closed to in-person instruction on March 15 of last year as a result of Executive Order 2020-04. Starting on April 1, schools across the state began the process of distance learning for all students in grades K-12. This was a very quick transition, as schools only had a couple of weeks to plan for and begin to deliver virtual instruction. This quick transition was also difficult for many students, as many who had never taken an online class were now in a situation where all of classes would be delivered virtually. For some students, this quick transition to virtual learning and having to put much of the focus on adjusting to a new way of learning may have resulted in lower grades than usual during the second semester of the 2019-2020 school year.

One of my roles with NDDPI is to administer the Academic and CTE Scholarship program, commonly referred to as the state scholarship. One of the

requirements for either scholarship, is to earn a grade of “C” or higher in all courses that are required for the scholarship. With the quick adjustment that students had to make to distance learning last spring, a student that received a grade lower than a C in a class they might have otherwise attained a C or better would no longer be eligible for the scholarship. On May 21, Governor Burgum issued Executive Order 2020-32.1, which waived the C or better requirement for the scholarship for any courses taken during the spring semester of 2020 during the quick transition to distance learning, as long as they passed the course. Students that graduated in 2020 that earned a “D”, as well as any students that earned a grade of “satisfactory” or “passing” were able to have those classes count towards the scholarship, provided that they did not have any grades below a C in any of their previous semesters of high school. On December 18, Governor Burgum rescinded this executive order, meaning any student that was a junior, sophomore, or freshman last spring (our current seniors, juniors, and sophomores) are no longer eligible for the scholarship if they earned a grade lower than a C during the quick transition to distance learning last spring.

House Bill 1083 would waive the C or better requirement for the Academic and CTE Scholarship for any classes taken during the spring semester of last school year, during the quick transition to distance learning. This would allow students that were a junior, sophomore, or freshman that earned a grade below a C last spring to be

able to have those courses count for the scholarship when they graduate in 2021, 2022, and 2023 respectively. This bill does not waive the C or better requirement for any classes during the current school year, as we are no longer in a quick transition to distance learning. The only way that a student could qualify for the scholarship under this bill is if he/she had a grade below a C last spring, but he/she must have grades of C or higher for required courses taken during any other semester. We feel this would ensure that the students who would benefit from this bill are students that most likely would have received C's or better last spring had the pandemic not happened. We are supporting this bill because we don't want to see students miss out on the scholarship simply because they may have had a challenging adjustment to distance learning last spring.

Chairman Schaible and Members of the Committee that concludes my prepared testimony and I will stand for any questions that you may have.