



Tuesday, January 26, 2021

The Honorable Donald Schaible, Chairman
North Dakota Senate Education Committee

Testimony in Support of SB 2196, the establishment of a North Dakota competency framework and to waive instructional time requirements.

Submitted By: Lillian Pace, Vice President of Policy and Advocacy, KnowledgeWorks

Chairman Schaible and members of the Senate Education Committee, I am Lillian Pace, Vice President of Policy and Advocacy for KnowledgeWorks. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of SB 2196, which would establish a North Dakota Competency framework to guide student mastery in place of traditional instructional time requirements.

KnowledgeWorks is a nonprofit organization with 20 years of experience exploring the future of learning, growing educator impact and working with state and federal policymakers to advance personalized, competency-based education systems. We are especially proud of our partnership with the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction and the North Dakota Personalized Competency-Based Learning (PCBL) Cohort, a group of four districts - Northern Cass, Oakes, West Fargo, and the Marmot School within the Youth Correctional Facility – that are pioneering a five-year vision to transform student-centered teaching and learning.

The guiding vision for these districts is a strong commitment to personalized, competency-based learning systems that elevate student voice and emphasize mastery of academic knowledge and skills over time-based structures that make acceleration challenging, or worse, allow many students to advance with significant learning gaps that widen over time.

Thanks to the forward-thinking educators in these districts, along with community partners, business leaders, and postsecondary institutions, North Dakota is receiving national recognition for its vision to create a more student-centered education system. This was fueled by passage of SB 2186 in 2017 to create an innovative education program and continues today thanks to the ongoing support and visionary leadership of North Dakota's policymakers.

By establishing a North Dakota Competency Framework and enabling districts to emphasize student mastery in lieu of traditional instructional hours, SB 2196 is an important next step in this work. Stakeholders across the education system would have access to a learning continuum with a transparent set of grade level expectations aligned to state standards and critical skills.

This emphasis on mastery of essential knowledge and skills would give North Dakota graduates a strategic advantage in today's rapidly changing economy. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, most students graduate without the career readiness competencies that employers deem necessary for success. For example, just 56% of graduates nationwide are proficient in problem solving, 43% in work ethic, and 42% in communication.

To this end, a growing number of North Dakota stakeholders recently collaborated to identify seven essential attributes for North Dakota graduates. These include valuable skills such as critical thinking, perseverance, empathy, collaboration and a learner's mindset. SB 2196 would build on this important work, providing every district access to a competency framework for integration into K-12 classrooms and learning environments.

In addition to elevating essential knowledge and skills, SB 2196 would remove the seat-time barrier around the state's instructional hours requirement. This policy change would help participating districts elevate the goal of mastery over time-based policies that restrict learning innovation by moving students through the education system at the same pace. This not only empowers educators to design authentic learning experiences that may occur outside the classroom with business leaders and community partners, but also gives educators greater opportunity to personalize learning supports through acceleration or additional time.

Like every state, the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted North Dakota's education system. School schedules were disrupted, instructional hours decreased, and maintaining student engagement has been challenging. While policymakers moved quickly to respond to these challenges with emergency waivers and stimulus funds, long-term solutions to address these challenges are needed. This includes revisiting what high-quality instruction and learning look like, including how we deliver it, how much time it takes, and how credit is awarded. North Dakota should seize this moment to pass legislation that empowers districts to design high-quality student-centered learning experiences.

The state is well positioned to take this step because of the strong foundation and leadership of the North Dakota PCBL Cohort. These educators are ready to serve as a learning network to support other interested districts. As a partner in this work, KnowledgeWorks is also committed to the growth and sustainability of high-quality practice across North Dakota.

I encourage the committee to pass SB 2196 and thank you for your time. I am prepared to answer questions, but respectfully request to pass to my colleague, Lori Phillips, KnowledgeWorks' Director of Teaching and Learning who will address the progress of the ND PCBL Cohort and the ongoing work to create a state level competency framework.
