

Testimony for Senate Education

Tuesday, January 26, 2021

Nicole Poolman

Good morning, Chairman Schaible and members of the Education Committee, my name is Nicole Poolman, state senator from District 7 here in Bismarck and Lincoln. I am here to introduce and offer an amendment to SB 2269.

SB 2269 applies to students between the ages of 18-21 with intellectual or developmental disabilities who are on an IEP (Individualized Education Plan). These students are educated in our districts until the age of 21 in accordance with federal law and are included in district ADM (Average Daily Membership) numbers. The programming from the ages of 18-21 focuses on transitioning students to adulthood by teaching them independent living and job skills.

This bill creates open enrollment opportunities for students in this age group to include not only transitional programming in another district, but also transitional programming associated with a postsecondary program. There is currently only one of these programs in North Dakota: ASTEP on the campus of Minot State University.

Students enrolled in ASTEP pay full tuition and room and board to Minot State, and families pay an additional \$4,000 fee to support the ASTEP programming and resources. In the past, the rest of ASTEP's transitional and life skills programming was paid for with federal grant dollars. Recently, the federal grant requirements changed, and now those dollars can only be used to create new programs at other postsecondary schools. This bill is an attempt to create a reliable funding stream going forward, but more importantly, it is an attempt to ensure students have access to the transitional programming that best suits their needs and goals.

You will hear from students and parents who have been part of the ASTEP program today, and they will fill you in on the many benefits of the program, so I will stick to the content of the bill and why it needs to be amended.

When drafting the bill, I believe I did not make it clear that these would not be new students, so you will notice that a weighting factor was added to the funding formula. My amendment removes that because these students are already counted in their home districts. Once amended, the bill will only contain the language you see in Section 2, which clarifies that a student enrolled in their home district can choose a program like ASTEP and have their per-pupil payment follow them to this program. These dollars will not be paying for college credits, they will be paying for the life skills programming specific to ASTEP. It is important to clarify that these are not new dollars. The bill just shifts the funds from a student's home district to ASTEP, so the fiscal note should also disappear when the bill is amended.

I respectfully request your endorsement of this change because it gives students more and better opportunities to gain independence and reach their career goals without spending additional state dollars.