

1 **Testimony on SB 2019 – CTE Budget**

2 **Dr. Jeff Fastnacht, Superintendent, Bismarck Public Schools**

3 Chairperson and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to
4 speak today. I am here in opposition to SB 2019 as amended in the Senate.

5 For those who may not know me, I am Dr. Jeff Fastnacht, Superintendent of
6 Bismarck Public Schools. I have served as a Superintendent in North Dakota for
7 nearly 25 years and had the privilege of serving on the North Dakota Career &
8 Technical Education Board from 2018 to 2022, including as its President. During
9 that time, I helped lead the board in distributing Capital Project Grant Funds to
10 create the most advanced CTE educational opportunities in the country.

11 **The Impact of Capital Projects Funding**

12 This funding has enabled communities across North Dakota—including Dickinson,
13 Watford City, Mandan, Jamestown, Grand Forks, and Bismarck—to construct
14 state-of-the-art career education facilities. These projects were built with the
15 understanding that once the facilities were in place, operational funding to
16 support qualified educators, equipment, and supplies would follow.

17 That is why I am here today.

18 **Bismarck’s Commitment to CTE Growth**

19 Bismarck Public Schools is in the process of constructing a **new Career Academy**
20 **at Silver Ranch**, which will provide advanced training in construction, HVAC,
21 electrical, plumbing, agriculture, and, in the future, commercial equipment
22 operation and precision agriculture. These programs will launch in the fall of
23 2025.

24 Beyond this, BPS has taken a **leadership role in establishing the Central Region**
25 **Area Career & Technical Center (CRACTC)**. While many assume that Bismarck
26 already operates a CTE center, our existing Career Academy has primarily served
27 BPS students. The surrounding communities—stretching from Garrison to Steele
28 to Linton—have lacked a true regional CTE center. That changed last fall when
29 BPS partnered with these districts to formally establish the CRACTC, expanding
30 CTE opportunities throughout the region.

This expansion—both within BPS and through CRACTC—requires **investment in the New & Expanding Program funding within the NDCTE budget.**

A Funding Shortfall for New CTE Programs

The new and expanding programs funding in the current budget is will not address the increasing programs in Bismarck or other new CTE Centers. Schools have built the facilities and launched programs, yet now, the critical funding needed to launch or sustain these efforts **is absent.** Please reinstate funding to meet the needs of these new programs.

The Need to Expand CTE to Middle Schools

For decades, NDCTE funding has been restricted to high school programs. But ask yourself—**when do students discover their passion for their future careers?** The answer is not in high school; it should be much earlier.

That is why BPS and CRACTC are pioneering a **first-in-the-nation middle school CTE model** at the Hughes Education Center. This initiative will provide every 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade student the opportunity to explore all six career clusters—helping them discover their interests early and setting them on a focused path through high school.

Despite the significance of this initiative, **BPS is funding it without any support from NDCTE.**

A Call for Targeted Investment

The Bismarck Career Academy became the model that inspired communities across North Dakota to develop similar programs. We are prepared to lead again—this time in middle school CTE education.

However, leadership requires investment. I urge you to consider **targeted New & Expanding funding** to support this middle school model. This is an opportunity for North Dakota to once again be a leader in innovative career education, ensuring that students engage in hands-on learning **before** they reach high school.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your support in making this vision a reality.