

Testimony in Support of SB 2019 – Career and Technical Education Funding

Chairman Nathe and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in strong support of SB 2019. My name is Pat Phillips, and I am the director of the Central Regional Area Career and Technical Center as well as the CTE director for Bismarck Public Schools.

Not only is CTE essential to BPS's mission of empowering every learner to thrive, it is essential to learners and communities across our state. Our CTE programs prepare students for future success by connecting high quality core academic experiences to students' passions and interests and then providing them with real-world learning opportunities and career pathways. Not only are these experiences essential to our learners and communities, but they are vital in preparing students for high-demand careers that address key workforce shortages. Through hands-on learning and industry-aligned curriculum, these programs ensure students graduate with the skills and confidence needed to contribute to a thriving North Dakota economy. SB 2019 provides critical funding to sustain and expand CTE at both the middle and high school levels.

Supporting High School CTE Growth

CTE centers across the state, including CRACTC, serve thousands of students in fields like health sciences, trades, precision agriculture, and aviation—areas directly tied to workforce needs. Yet, funding gaps threaten program sustainability. The \$22 million allocation for new and expanding programs is critical to maintaining and growing these opportunities, especially for rural and underserved students. These monies not only represent growth in student opportunities, they are an investment in the future of North Dakota.

Additionally, work-based learning (WBL) strengthens connections between education and industry, providing real-world experience and a direct pipeline to employment. The \$1.5 million request for WBL coordinators will expand these valuable partnerships, helping students transition into the workforce in meaningful and productive ways.

Expanding CTE in Middle Schools

Research tells us that students develop career interests before high school, making middle school an ideal time for career exploration. The pioneering middle school CTE model at Hughes Education Center is a prime example of how early exposure can set students on the right path. However, current state funding does not support these efforts. SB 2019 would allow more schools to offer hands-on, career-focused learning at an earlier age.

Conclusion

SB 2019 is an investment in North Dakota's workforce and economy. Expanding CTE in middle and high schools, strengthening work-based learning, and ensuring sustainable funding for new and existing programs will not just equip students for success, it is the fuel that feeds the growth and development of our communities and economy.

I urge the committee to reinstate the necessary expansion funds that make SB 2019 vital to the growth and success of our state. Thank you for your time and consideration.