



North Dakota Small Organized Schools

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2 Testimony in Opposition to HB 1333
3 Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,
4 My name is Michael Heilman, Executive Director of North Dakota Small Organized Schools and I am here
5 to express my opposition to HB 1333 mandating a 30-minute lunch break for all schools. While I
6 appreciate the intent to ensure students have adequate time to eat and recharge, I believe this
7 legislation undermines the principle of local control and the ability of school boards and administrators
8 to make decisions that best meet the unique needs of their communities.

9 Importance of Local Control

10 Local school boards and administrators are best positioned to make decisions regarding the daily
11 schedules of their schools. They work closely with educators, parents, and community stakeholders to
12 develop schedules that reflect the specific needs and priorities of their districts. Mandating a uniform
13 30-minute lunch period at the state level removes the flexibility necessary to tailor school schedules to
14 diverse student populations and local circumstances.

15 For example, in rural districts, long bus routes often dictate earlier start times and later end times.
16 Adding a mandated 30-minute lunch break could force these schools to extend the school day further,
17 creating challenges for families and students involved in after-school activities or those who rely on
18 transportation services. Conversely, in urban districts, where schools often operate on staggered
19 schedules to accommodate limited facilities, a rigid mandate could lead to logistical challenges that
20 disrupt the flow of the school day.

21 Balancing Academic Priorities

22 Mandating a 30-minute lunch period could inadvertently impact instructional time, particularly in
23 schools that already struggle to fit all necessary subjects and activities into the day. Local administrators
24 are tasked with balancing state-mandated instructional requirements with the need to provide
25 enrichment opportunities, intervention services, and extracurricular programs. Imposing a uniform
26 lunch break may force schools to reduce time allocated to these critical areas, ultimately hindering
27 student success.

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The mission of NDSOS is to provide leadership for the small/rural schools in North Dakota and to support legislation favorable to their philosophy while opposing legislation that is harmful.

Existing Efforts to Address Student Needs

Many districts already prioritize sufficient lunch periods through locally developed procedures, policies and schedules. These policies take into account factors such as cafeteria capacity, staffing levels, travel to career academies and student schedules. Furthermore, local administrators are responsive to concerns from parents and students about lunch breaks, making adjustments as needed without the need for a one-size-fits-all mandate.

For instance, some districts incorporate flexible scheduling that allows students to engage in unstructured time during lunch or provide grab-and-go options for those involved in concurrent activities or needing to travel to a different facility for a class. These creative solutions are possible because of the autonomy granted to local decision-makers.

Potential Unintended Consequences

State-mandated schedules may lead to unintended consequences, such as:

- **Increased Operational Costs:** Extending lunch periods could require additional staffing or facilities adjustments, particularly in schools with limited cafeteria capacity.
- **Reduced Elective Opportunities:** Schools may need to cut back on electives, arts, or physical education to comply with the mandate.
- **Logistical Challenges:** Implementing a standardized lunch period could complicate scheduling for students who participate in dual enrollment programs, internships, or work-study opportunities.

In conclusion, while the goal of ensuring students have adequate time for lunch is commendable, this legislation undermines the principle of local control and imposes unnecessary rigidity on schools. Local school boards and administrators are uniquely qualified to design schedules that reflect the needs and priorities of their communities.

I urge you to respect the autonomy of local districts and allow them to continue making decisions about school schedules, including lunch periods, in collaboration with their stakeholders. A more effective approach would be to provide guidance and support to districts, rather than imposing a statewide mandate.

Thank you,

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