

Hello Chairperson, members of the committee, and fellow North Dakotans. My name is Kelsy Achtenberg, and I serve as the Dean of Students and an educator at The Innovation School, a project-based, hands-on private school in Bismarck. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 1472, which seeks to create a pathway for microschools in North Dakota.

I have spent over a decade in education, working with students across grades K-8, with a focus on STEM and project-based learning. At The Innovation School, we pride ourselves on fostering creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration in a setting that prioritizes hands-on, personalized learning. Our school operates as a microschool, serving a small population of students, many of whom thrive in nontraditional educational environments.

As an educator, I am deeply passionate about providing students with options that meet their unique needs and learning styles. I have seen firsthand how smaller, more flexible educational models can transform lives. Microschools align with my philosophy of education: that every child deserves a tailored learning experience that empowers them to succeed both academically and personally.

At The Innovation School, we believe education should not be confined to the traditional standardized model but should instead reflect the skills and knowledge students need to succeed outside the classroom. Our approach includes hands-on projects, presentations, and collaborative problem-solving activities that mirror real-world scenarios. Many microschools have similar models, focusing on preparing students for life, not just exams. At The Innovation School, we witness firsthand how nontraditional educational settings can transform students' lives. House Bill 1472 allows families to take a more active role in their children's education. This collaboration strengthens communities and supports the broader goal of raising engaged, capable citizens.

Microschools represent an innovative and flexible approach to education that can fill critical gaps in our current system. By design, microschools serve a smaller number of students, allowing educators to tailor instruction to individual learning needs. This model is particularly effective for students who thrive in environments with personalized attention or who struggle in traditional classrooms. House Bill 1472 provides options for parents seeking alternatives to public and nonpublic schools without compromising academic rigor. North Dakota communities, especially rural ones, often face challenges such as limited school options, teacher shortages, and long commutes. Microschools can address these challenges by creating hyper-localized learning environments.



House Bill 1472 Testimony

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A key aspect of microschools is that they are privately funded and operate independently of state and federal funding. This independence allows microschools to remain agile and responsive to the needs of their students and families. It is vital that the structure, operation, and choice of educators remain in the hands of the school operators and parents. House Bill 1472 respects this autonomy, ensuring that microschools can innovate without being burdened by unnecessary regulations or external control. Keeping decision-making local ensures that the unique needs of each community are met without a one-size-fits-all approach.

House Bill 1472 represents a bold and necessary step toward diversifying North Dakota's educational landscape. By supporting microschools, we empower families, offer school choice, foster innovation, and address the unique needs of our communities. I urge you to vote in favor of this bill and help North Dakota lead the way in educational choice and innovation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Kelsy Achtenberg
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