

TESTIMONY ON SB 2213
HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
March 17, 2025
By: Ann Ellefson, Director of Academic Support
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Chair Heinert and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ann Ellefson, Director of Academic Support with the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI). I am here to provide supportive testimony on Senate Bill 2213, a critical piece of legislation aimed at improving mathematics education outcomes for students across North Dakota.

Mathematics is a cornerstone of academic success and a vital skill for the workforce of North Dakota's future. However, many of our students face significant challenges in mastering math concepts, and these challenges have been compounded by the pandemic, gaps in curriculum alignment, professional development for educators, and early intervention systems. In 2013, 48% of students in grade 4 and 40% of students in grade 8 were proficient or above. In 2024, those percentages dropped to 43% in grade 4 and 29% in grade 8. The attached charts illustrate these trends. It took the unprecedented impact of a global pandemic to cause such a significant decline in our math scores. Regaining that ground and starting the climb back will require an equally transformative and substantial effort.

In 2024, North Dakota's students participated in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often referred to as the Nation's Report Card (about 5.7K 4th graders and 6.7K 8th graders). Students performing at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level on NAEP assessments demonstrate solid academic performance and competency over challenging subject matter. It should be noted that the *NAEP Proficient* achievement level does not represent grade-level proficiency as determined by North Dakota Academic Content Standards. The NAEP is built to allow a large-scale state-to-state comparison. North Dakota's performance on the math sections of NAEP were positive in comparison to other states, but we still performed lower than our own historical self. The 2024 NAEP results showed that only 43% of North Dakota's fourth graders and 29% of eighth graders performed at or above the proficient level. From 2019 to 2024, North Dakota dropped 6 scale points. Though these results outpace national averages (39% for 4th graders and 28% for eighth graders), they reveal a pressing need to accelerate improvement and ensure all students have the support necessary to reach their full potential in mathematics.

I wanted to address this topic as it has made headlines across the state of North Dakota, and to also provide more clarity on how it relates to and impacts SB 2213. This recognition of how North Dakota performed compared to other states in our nation is encouraging, but it cannot overshadow the fact that significant work

remains. Closing these proficiency gaps requires more than isolated efforts — it demands a comprehensive, statewide approach to strengthen math instruction, empower educators, and provide students with the tools they need to succeed. Senate Bill 2213 represents this kind of bold action, laying the groundwork for meaningful change that reaches every classroom, teacher, and student across North Dakota.

Senate Bill 2213 is that substantial effort. It addresses this challenge through a comprehensive approach, providing a framework for improvement in five key areas:

1. **Mathematics Curriculum:** This bill ensures that math curricula are aligned with our newly revised, rigorous standards, equipping students with the skills they need to succeed in workforce and college. A cohesive and research-based curriculum is essential for fostering mathematical understanding and critical thinking. Texas Policy Institute's recent study discovered that only 19% of nationally produced curriculum daily assignments in classrooms are at or above grade level standards.
2. **Professional Development:** Teachers are the backbone of student success. This bill empowers educators with the tools and strategies to deliver effective math instruction tailored to diverse learning needs by providing robust, ongoing professional development opportunities.

3. Screening and Intervention: Early identification of students who struggle with math is crucial. This bill establishes evidence-based screening protocols and targeted interventions to support students before they fall behind, ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities and provides transparency regarding ways to help their student.
4. Administrative Rules and Reporting Requirements: Transparency and accountability are vital for systemic change. This bill enables stakeholders to monitor progress and make data-driven decisions to enhance math education outcomes.
5. Mathematics Instructor Competency: Lastly, this bill underscores the importance of ensuring that math instructors possess the necessary content knowledge and instructional skills. Competent, confident teachers are essential for inspiring students and fostering a love of learning.

As referenced during the joint House and Senate Education meeting on January 8, 2025, the NDDPI prioritized discretionary federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to respond to the significant decline in achievement referenced in 2022. The next part of my testimony is to share about two of these investments and how they have informed this draft legislation.

The first of these efforts is the Greater Math in North Dakota grant program. Beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, this pilot program assisted schools with implementing blended learning structures utilizing existing online tools/software, monitoring progress, and making adjustments through a continuous cycle of improvement. Blended learning combines face-to-face teaching with online learning by leveraging technology to assist educators in understanding students' prior knowledge, designing different learning plans for each student, and adjusting lessons and assignments. Eight districts (Glenburn, Grand Forks, Lone Tree, McKenzie County, Minot, New England, St. John, and Wahpeton) began this work, and seven districts have continued into this final year of support. The grant brings together a variety of educational stakeholders to support North Dakota schools and districts, including the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL Central) and representatives from North Dakota's Regional Education Associations (NDREAs).

After working with the Greater Math Districts for a year, the need to scale broader mathematics professional learning was recognized. The NDDPI began its work on "ND Effective Math Instruction," which is also known as "ND Science of Math." This is a partnership with the NDREAs and NDDPI to provide in-person and online training for K-12 educators focusing on the North Dakota state standards, and instructional strategies that are evidence-based, explicit, systematic, diagnostic, and cumulative. The NDDPI and NDREAs meet regularly as a workgroup to continue

to guide the ND Effective Math Instruction professional learning offerings and the development of tools, resources, and guidance regarding best practices in mathematics.

The NDDPI also has provided schools and districts with supports specific to the newly revised 2023 Mathematics Standards including Standards-Based Learning professional development, resources and tools; family and community guides on math standards, ND Educational Hub courses in math, as well as other standards guidance documents, tools and resources used by schools and districts as they review and align their curriculum. These investments are a good start to scaling mathematics supports across the state and this legislation will ensure more schools and districts have access.

Through these grant opportunities to work closely with schools and districts, we have learned the following:

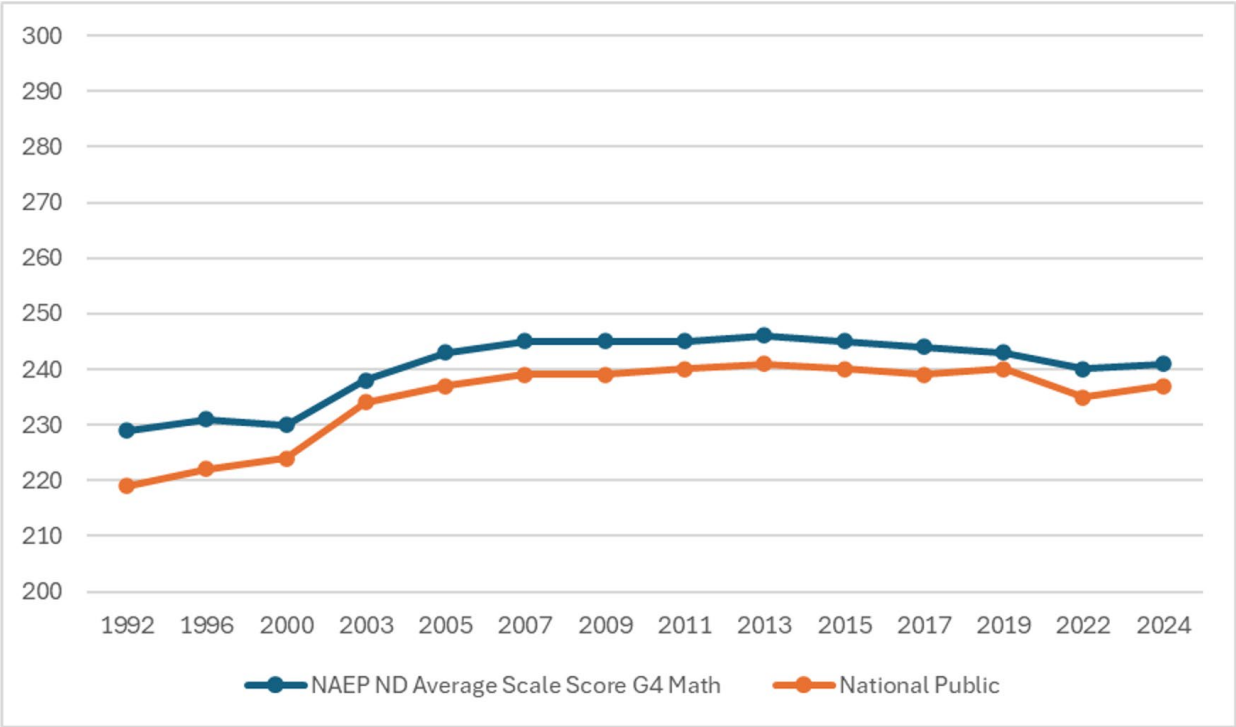
- Teachers having high-quality, research-based teaching materials for their lessons or responding to individual student needs are critical. In these grant opportunities, at times, teachers had tools and resources that were not addressing their needs, or the curriculum provided had gaps in content and grade-level instruction.

- On-going, high-quality professional development is critical. In some cases, this has been the only “math” professional learning an educator has experienced since their college coursework.
- Online tools and resources can be part of the solution but not the sole solution. The greatest impact in the classroom is the quality and readiness of the teacher.

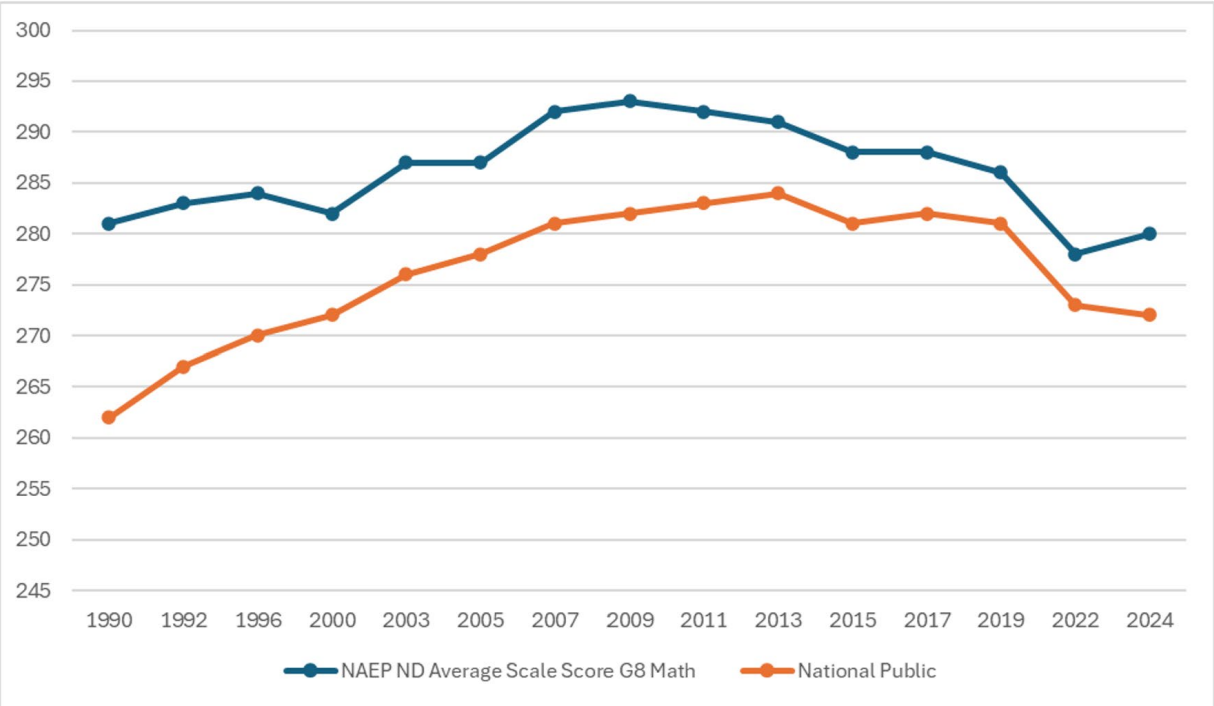
Senate Bill 2213 lays the foundation for a brighter future for our students, teachers, and communities. This legislation is not just an investment in math education—it is an investment in the success of North Dakota and its youngest citizens.

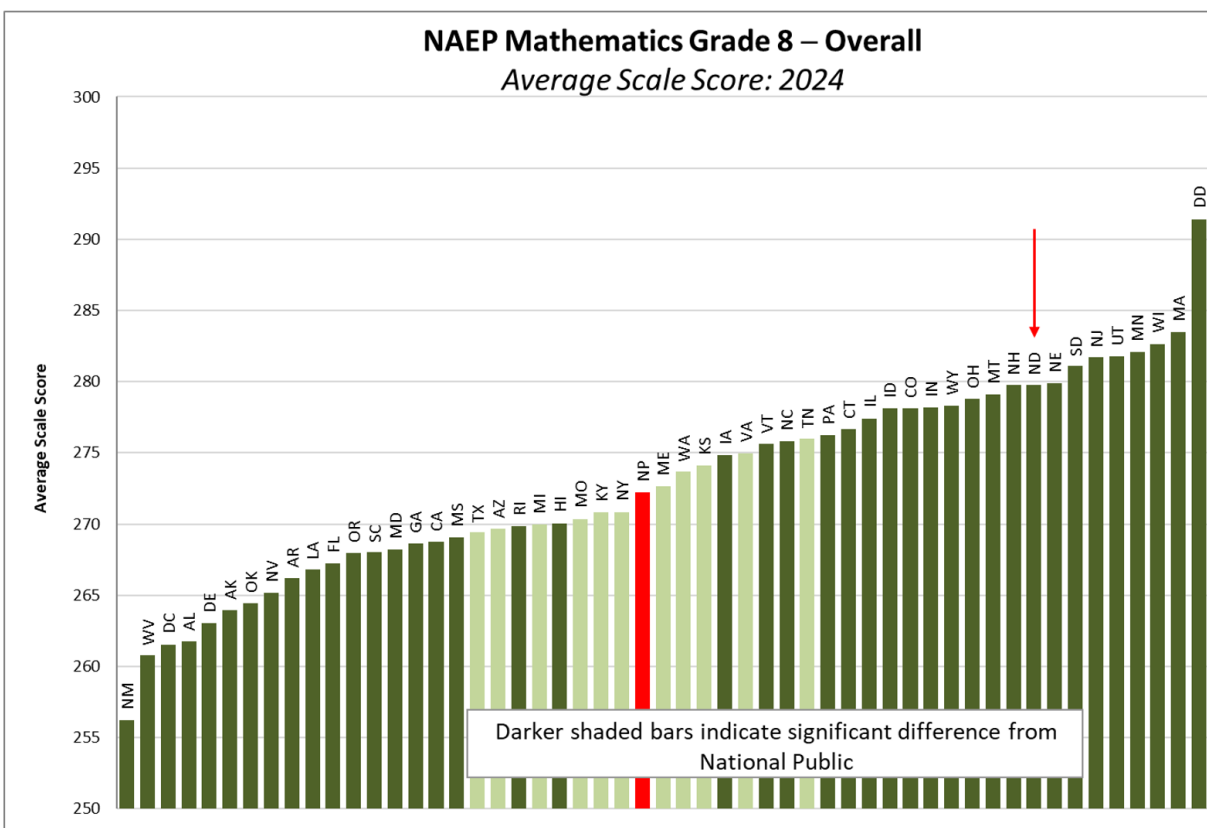
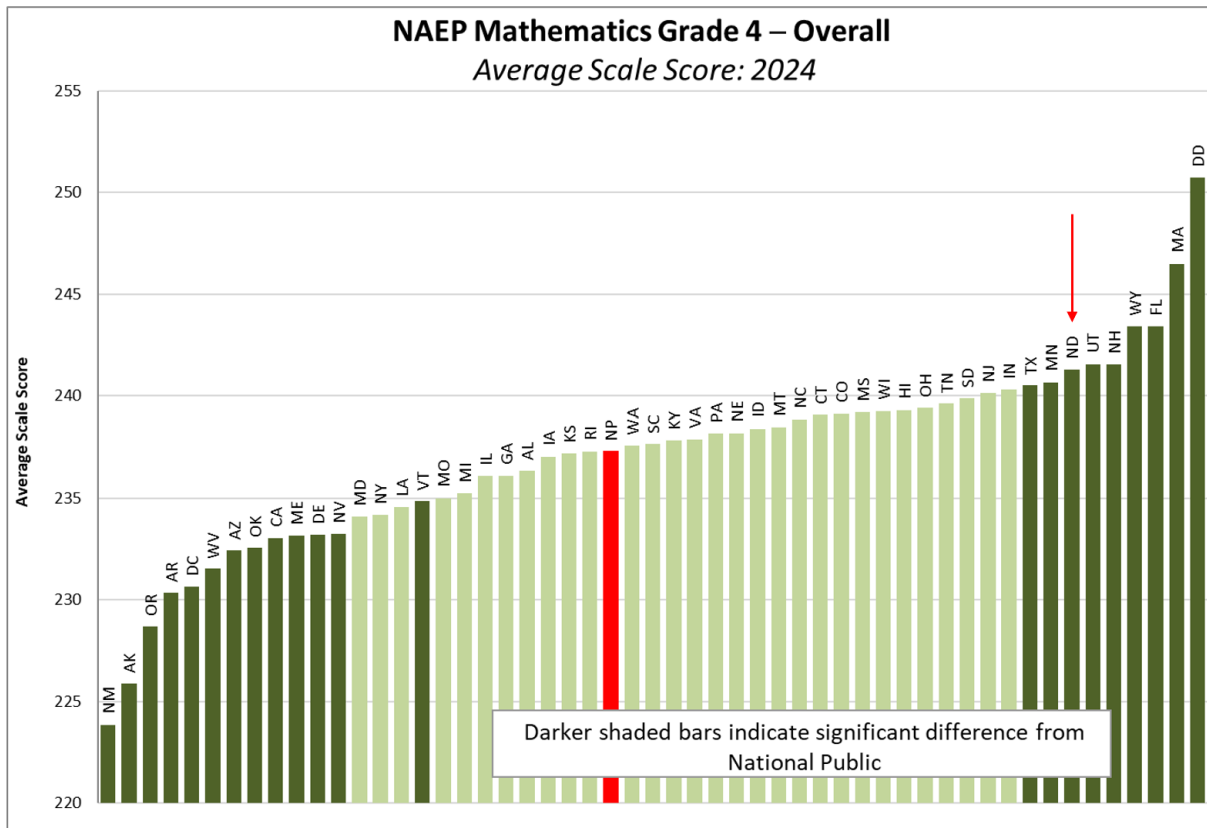
Chair Heinert and Members of the Committee, thank you for your leadership and for your commitment to improving educational outcomes for all students. This concludes my testimony and I stand for any questions.

NAEP North Dakota Grade 4

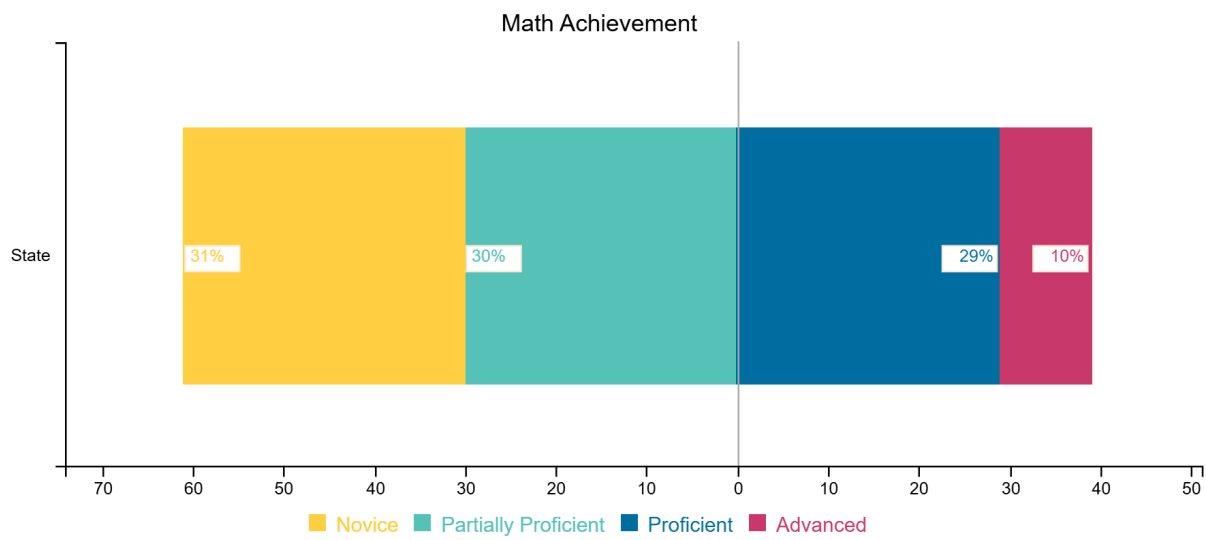


NAEP North Dakota Grade 8





2023-2024 North Dakota State Assessment Grade 4



2023-2024 North Dakota State Assessment Grade 8

