

**North Dakota House Education Subcommittee
SB 2362**

Presented by Dr. Ben Johnson

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Chairperson and esteemed members of the North Dakota House Education Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about a critical issue that directly impacts our schools, our educators, and most importantly, our students. I stand before you to advocate for the option to allow local school districts the choice to use Marzano's **High Reliability Schools (HRS) Framework** as an alternative to Cognia for accreditation.

At its core, accreditation is about ensuring quality and fostering continuous school improvement. But the question we must ask is: **How do we make accreditation not just a compliance exercise but a meaningful driver of progress?** This is where the **HRS Framework** stands apart.

HRS: A System That Works for Schools

The **HRS framework is not just a label—it is a process** that fundamentally shifts how schools approach improvement efforts. It **operationalizes** school improvement efforts by providing a **clear roadmap** for continuous improvement that is **actionable at the building level**. Unlike traditional accreditation models that often focus on broad institutional compliance, **HRS embeds improvement directly within the daily practices of teachers and leaders**.

1. A Practical, Research-Based Approach:

HRS is rooted in decades of educational research and focuses on five progressive levels that schools work through—from ensuring a

- 1. Safe, Supportive, and Collaborative Culture,**
- 2. Effective Teaching in Every Classroom, and**
- 3. A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum to**
- 4. Standards-Referenced Reporting of Student Progress, and**
- 5. implementing Competency-Based Education.**

This step-by-step process creates **a culture of striving to sustain excellence**.

2. Empowering Schools with Data-Driven Improvement:

The HRS framework provides **clear, measurable Leading Indicators** for each level, empowering schools to think about, self-assess, and **take ownership of their growth**. **HRS measurement process ensures there are programs and practices in place for each Leading Indicator through Lagging Indicators within each level**. The emphasis is on **evidence-based progress** that produce their desired effects rather than external validation alone.

3. Alignment with North Dakota's Vision:

Our state values **local control and accountability**. HRS aligns seamlessly with this philosophy by allowing districts to **own their improvement efforts** while still meeting

rigorous standards. It is a **process** – not about requiring a **specific program**. It **ensures consistency in quality and measuring the effectiveness of your local initiatives all while allowing flexibility to meet local needs**.

4. **Operationalizing Continuous School Improvement:**

Perhaps the most significant advantage of HRS is that it **operationalizes the process of improvement** within schools. This means teachers, principals, and district leaders are continuously working on improvement **in real time, not just in preparation for an accreditation visit**. Accreditation becomes a **living, breathing process**—not a once-every-five-year event to ensure we are improving our systems and programs.

Why Choice Matters

Currently, Cognia remains the sole accreditation pathway, but school districts should have the **option** to select another research-based framework that best aligns with their improvement efforts. It allows districts to **select a model that is embedded in school operations and the daily teaching-learning process rather than merely an external compliance check**.

Bismarck Public Schools, and many others across the state, have already embraced HRS as a guiding framework to improve our systems because **it works**—for our schools, our teachers, and our students. Our work with Dr. Phil Warrick, here at BPS and across many other North Dakota school districts, has been invaluable to **empower** our teachers and leaders to guide a systematic path forward. Giving LEAs the ability to **choose HRS for accreditation** means recognizing the **effectiveness of a model that directly connects accreditation with daily school building level improvement efforts**.

In closing, I urge this committee to support **district flexibility** in selecting HRS as an accreditation option. By doing so, we ensure that our local schools are not just accredited but are **actively improving every single day**.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.