

1 HB1105 – Virtual Learning – by Dr. Jeff Fastnacht, Superintendent, Bismarck
2 Public School District.

3 I am here today to provide continued support for HB 1105. Long before my present
4 position I had the privilege of chairing the Education Technology Council (ETC).
5 The ETC was the governing board for the ND Center for Distance Education. During
6 that time I watched the NDCDE transform from a paper-pencil and packet school to
7 one that embraced online learning. The NDCDE then transitioned to be led by the
8 ND Department of Career and Technical Education, which I also was part of as a
9 member of the board and eventually their president. Again, I watched the NDCDE
10 grow and provide learning opportunities to children in North Dakota and around the
11 country. Our rural schools and schools like Bismarck Public School District, which
12 I represent now, all benefitted from the services NDCDE provided.

13 During the 2023 Legislative Session, I watched the legislature pass a law to expand
14 NDCDE programming reasonably and responsibly to all children. However, the
15 rules implemented to expand access to students and families have caused great
16 concern to educators and school leaders for the past two years. That is why I testified
17 in support of HB 1105 on the House side and am again here today.

18 Let me begin by having you look back upon the testimony of Mr. Steve Madler,
19 Principal of Century High School, Bismarck Public Schools. His testimony is in the
20 record. I am quoting Mr. Madler “*we had 444 course completions in calendar year*
21 *23-24(15 withdrawals/drops). 356 of these enrollments resulted in a passing grade.*
22 *The average number of days these students actively engaged in the 140 day*
23 *enrollment window was 29 days.*” This means they only took 29 days, on average,
24 to complete an entire semester course. This made him, and our team within BPS

1 raise a skeptical eye. The BPS team has also raised concerns about registration
2 timelines that allowed any student to add or drop at any time. This rule has resulted
3 in some instances of teacher shopping—challenging rules associated with course
4 selection and no pre-requisite restrictions. We shared concerns about challenges
5 supervising courses and instances of academic dishonesty. I fully support CHOICE
6 for families and students to access NDCDE coursework but like many things in our
7 world, we need guardrails. We impose volumes of laws and rules that put guardrails
8 on everything from how we drive, mowing our lawns, when we can hunt, and even
9 on sports. *BTW – Bismarck Public Schools did really well at WDA this past weekend.*
10 *(CHS B&G, BHS B, and LHS G)*

11 I am here today to also acknowledge the work and partnership of Dr. Alyssa Martin
12 and her team to address many of our concerns. This bill has helped drive changes to
13 the rules implemented after last session, and BPS has been working with her, DPI,
14 and legislators including **Rep. Heinert, Rep. Schrieber-Beck, and Rep. Jonas** to
15 craft policy guidance for schools that are aligned with HB 1105, which would
16 reinstate reasonable guardrails. I would ask for passage of HB 1105, reasonable
17 administrative rule change built upon this legislation, and policy guidance provided
18 to schools to ensure implementation.

19 *Note: Bismarck Public Schools in FY 2023, the district paid NDCDE \$0.00 for*
20 *tuition. That increased to \$292,158.84 in FY 2024. This year, we have spent \$98,847*
21 *on CDE tuition as of 11/30/2024.*