



NDCEL Testimony in Support HB 1105 – Virtual Learning Policies

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1105, which amends Section 15.1-07-25.4 of the North Dakota Century Code to grant school districts greater authority over their virtual learning policies. This is important for a number of reasons – for the well-being of the student, for appropriate fiscal stewardship of tax dollars, for the financial control of their local budget, for assurance of the student being in their best placement for learning, among others.

Currently, districts are required to fund virtual courses even when equivalent in-person instruction is offered locally. The local district has no authority to have influence when a student wishes to drop a course at whatever time for whatever reason and to wish to switch to a virtual course most often being the NDCDE. Having been involved in the adjustment to this language last session, we do not believe the end interpretation of the bill was the intention of the conference committee. This double payment system has strained district budgets, diverting resources from other educational priorities. HB 1105 addresses this issue by allowing districts to establish reasonable policies for virtual instruction that ensure efficient use of taxpayer dollars while supporting student learning. To be clear – last session NDCEL supported the intent of the legislature which was that if a district did not offer a course the student wanted to take that the district would cover the cost of that course. Further, at times a district formally would elect to cover a course to provide schedule flexibility for a student to ensure they could take the coursework locally they otherwise would not be able to. However, this past biennium the interpretation of this bill has not resulted in positive outcomes – we’ve had an inordinate amount of money spent in the double payment of courses – in the millions.

While in the house, the bill was amended based on agreed upon middle ground between the field and NDCDE and we believe that what is represented here is reasonable.

These provisions empower school boards to make informed, context-specific decisions that balance student choice with fiscal responsibility. By prioritizing local instruction when available, the bill also reinforces the vital role of North Dakota educators in student success.

I respectfully urge your support for HB 1105 to promote responsible educational policy and ensure that district resources are used effectively to meet student needs.

Thank you for your consideration.