

**TESTIMONY ON HB 1200
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

March 18, 2025

**By: Jim Upgren, Legislative Liaison and Assistant Director of School Approval
and Opportunity**

701-328-2244

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

Chairman Beard and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jim Upgren, Legislative Liaison and Assistant Director in the Office of School Approval and Opportunity for the Department of Public Instruction. I am here on behalf of the department to provide information related to HB 1200, specifically what is currently allowable in law regarding our high school graduation requirements.

NDCC 15.1-21-02.2 lists the minimum coursework requirements that must be met to graduate from high school in North Dakota. Some schools set their own local graduation requirements that go above and beyond what is required in NDCC, but each school's graduation requirements must at least meet the minimum state requirements.

There is currently nothing in law that gives either the school district or the Department of Public Instruction the authority to waive or modify the minimum high school graduation requirements. This means that, if we are asked by a school if a required course can be waived, we are obligated to give them the information that is in NDCC, which does not allow for coursework to be waived. In addition, it is the local

high school that approves the student's high school diploma and transcript, and we at NDDPI do not formally approve individual students for high school graduation. If a school reaches out to us with a question about the graduation requirements, it is our duty to tell them what the requirements are, and the school's duty to implement it correctly for their students. Should HB 1200 pass and become law, we at the Department would be able to tell any school that contacts us during emergency situations that up to one credit could be waived if the school determined that there was an emergent circumstance.

We do have an optional high school curriculum, which is described in NDCC 15.1-21-02.3. The optional curriculum is designed to assist students that have struggled to earn a high school diploma. The optional curriculum requires 21 credits instead of the normal 22 credits, and also provides more flexibility regarding which courses could count for each content area. However, this option is limited to students who have either failed three or more classes or are ranked in the bottom 25% of their class. This means that a student in the top 75% of their class that has not failed at least three classes would not be able to use this option, even in an emergent circumstance.

Chairman Beard and Members of the Committee that concludes my prepared testimony and I will stand for any questions that you may have.