

Good morning, Chairman Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Kalli Scherbenske, and I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today. I am here to share my testimony in support of public-school funding, particularly for English Language Learners (EL) students.

I work as an interventionist at Wishek Public School in Wishek, North Dakota, my alma mater, where I graduated from high school. This district holds a special place in my heart, and I am passionate about its future. Today, I want to share my experiences teaching English Language Learners (ELs) and highlight how crucial public funding is for schools like Wishek Public.

My teaching career began in 2018 at Bismarck Public Schools, where I spent five years as a classroom teacher. In the spring of 2023, I made the difficult decision to leave teaching and return home to help with my family's cattle ranch. At that time, I had no plans to return to the classroom. However, everything changed when I received a call from Mr. Shawn Kuntz, the superintendent at Wishek Public Schools. He asked me to apply for a position at Wishek, and while I wasn't seeking full-time teaching opportunities due to my ranching responsibilities, I agreed to take on a part-time role. Little did I know, that decision would profoundly impact both my career and my life.

I started in the fall of 2023 as an interventionist, working with a diverse group of students across multiple grade levels, including English Language Learners from kindergarten through 12th grade. At the start of the school year, this group included nine EL students, and I had the privilege of working closely with them, including students such as Regina and Juan. Although I had worked with EL students before, this was my first experience in a more individualized, one-on-one setting.

As the school year progressed, my passion for working with these students only deepened. Teaching English Language Learners is unlike any other teaching experience. Each student presents unique challenges and needs, which makes it hard to always have the right resources at hand. But the resilience these students show, overcoming daily obstacles, is nothing short of inspiring.

Having taught both in traditional classrooms and now in small-group or one-on-one settings, I've gained a deeper appreciation for the importance of specialized teachers, particularly English Language instructors. In every classroom, students have diverse strengths and weaknesses. But for EL students, particularly newcomers, the challenge is even greater. Imagine entering a classroom where you cannot communicate effectively, these students can quickly feel lost and isolated. That is why having specialized English Language teachers, whether full-time or part-time, is absolutely essential. EL students deserve the support, time, and services necessary to help them succeed academically.

One critical issue that demands attention is the disproportionate emphasis placed on state standardized tests for English Language Learners (ELs). These tests fail to capture the true depth of an EL student's progress. Their growth cannot and should not be reduced to a single test score. Real achievements occur in the day-to-day advancements that are often invisible in standardized testing. The success of EL students is not confined to the narrow window of test periods; it is

evident in their continuous development, through the steady increase in their language proficiency, the growing self-confidence they exhibit, and the new opportunities they create for themselves both academically and socially.

In March of 2024, I made the decision to further my commitment to supporting these students by applying to graduate school to pursue my Master's in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). Every day, my goal is to ensure that I, along with my fellow educators, meet the individual needs of each EL student.

In closing, public-school funding is not just an investment in schools, it is an investment in the future of every student, including English Language Learners. With the right resources, training, and support, we can empower these students to thrive, not just academically, but in every aspect of their lives. Thank you for your time, and for supporting the future of our students.