



HB 1369 – The Need for Increased Per Pupil Funding, SPED, and EL Support

Chair and Members of the Committee,

I come before you today to urge this body to reconsider the proposed **2% per-pupil increase** in HB 1369 and the **lack of growth in funding for Special Education (SPED) and English Learner (EL) services**. Our public schools are among the best in the nation, yet they are operating under significant financial strain—struggling to meet the needs of students with increasingly limited resources.

A History of Underfunding

In 2013, when North Dakota’s school funding formula was revamped, the legislature recognized that **per-pupil funding should increase by at least 3% annually to keep pace with inflation**. Yet, the reality has been starkly different:

- Over the past **12 years, per-pupil funding has increased by an average of only 1.85% per year**—well below inflation and far from what was projected to sustain quality education.
- Over the past **10 years, teacher salaries have grown by an average of just 1.68% per year**—a rate that lags significantly behind other sectors and makes recruitment and retention an increasing challenge.
- Meanwhile, **SPED funding remains stagnant at only 35% of actual costs, and EL funding continues to be severely underfunded**, leaving districts struggling to provide critical services.

The Funding Disparity in HB 1369

While K-12 public schools are being asked to **operate under a 2% per-pupil increase**, the conversation around state funding includes:

- **State employees projected to receive a 4% increase,**
- **Higher education receiving a 4% increase,**
- **A push to fund ESA (Education Savings Accounts) or voucher programs, which would direct public funds away from the 93% of North Dakota students who attend public schools.**

If public schools receive **only 2%**—with no increase for SPED or EL—while other areas of government and education receive **double that amount**, it sends a clear message about our priorities. Adding to this concern, **the same legislature that rejected funding for school meals for children is now considering shifting money toward ESAs, while claiming that public schools are not being harmed in the process**. That is a difficult narrative for the voters of North Dakota to align with.

NDCEL is the strongest unifying voice representing and supporting administrators and educational leaders in pursuit of quality education for all students in North Dakota.

Executive Director: Aimee Copas-----Government Lead and Special Projects: Kevin Hoherz



The Urgent Need to Act

North Dakota's public schools have consistently delivered **outstanding results** despite these funding constraints. We rank **#2 in the nation for math achievement in grades 4 and 8** and have demonstrated **incredible innovation in education**. But **excellence cannot be sustained on inadequate funding**.

- **We cannot continue to expect great educators to remain in this profession when their pay increases lag behind other sectors year after year.**
- **We cannot meet the diverse needs of students if SPED and EL programs remain painfully short on funding.**
- **We cannot ask public schools to do more with less while simultaneously diverting public dollars elsewhere.**

A Call to Invest in Public Schools, Not Just Talk About It

Public education is the backbone of our communities, workforce, and economy. If we believe in its value, we must fund it accordingly. A **2% increase** simply does not reflect the reality of inflation or the growing needs of our students and educators.

I respectfully urge you to:

- ✓ **Increase the per-pupil funding beyond 2% to reflect inflationary needs.**
- ✓ **Commit to additional funding for SPED and EL services** so students receive the support they require.
- ✓ **Prioritize public school investment over ESA programs that divert funds from the 93% of students in public schools.**

Voters in North Dakota understand the value of strong public schools. They will also recognize when the funding narrative does not align with the realities in their communities.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to North Dakota's students and educators.