
Katie Wood

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Senate Education Committee
North Dakota Legislative Assembly
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

Subject: Support for HB 1530 – Special Education Teacher Recruitment and Retention Study

Dear Chair Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 1530, a bill that seeks to address the ongoing challenges in the recruitment and retention of special education teachers in North Dakota. As a dedicated special education teacher with over 16 years of experience, I have firsthand knowledge of the increasing demands placed on educators in this field. Without targeted legislative action, these challenges will continue to negatively impact our students, teachers, and the quality of special education services across the state.

HB 1530 proposes a much-needed legislative study to examine critical issues affecting special educators, including workload disparities, student and staff safety, paraprofessional management duties, and excessive paperwork requirements. These issues have long contributed to high turnover rates and difficulty attracting new professionals to the field. By conducting this study, the state can take meaningful steps toward ensuring equitable working conditions for special educators while enhancing the quality of education for students with disabilities.

Key concerns addressed in this bill include:

- **Workload Disparities:** Many special educators are burdened with overwhelming caseloads, making it difficult to comply with students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and meet federal and state requirements. A standardized formula for caseload assignments is crucial to maintaining compliance and ensuring students receive the support they need.

- **Student and Staff Safety:** Special education teachers frequently encounter challenging behaviors in the classroom. Increased training in de-escalation techniques, access to protective measures, and additional paraprofessional support are essential to maintaining a safe learning environment.
- **Paraprofessional Management:** The responsibility of training, scheduling, and evaluating paraprofessionals often falls on special education teachers, despite a lack of compensation and support. Addressing this issue is vital to improving teacher retention and ensuring paraprofessionals receive adequate guidance.
- **Paperwork and Administrative Burden:** The excessive paperwork requirements for special educators result in uncompensated time spent outside of contractual hours. Providing additional administrative support and compensation for required meetings and compliance-related tasks is necessary to prevent burnout and retain qualified professionals.

By advancing HB 1530, the North Dakota Legislature has an opportunity to take proactive steps toward improving special education services and retaining qualified teachers. I urge you to support this bill and ensure that the needs of special educators and the students they serve remain a legislative priority.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to improving education in North Dakota and look forward to seeing HB 1530 move forward.

Sincerely,

Katie Wood

Special Education Strategist

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