

**TESTIMONY ON HB1013
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS
EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENT DIVISION
Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2021
By: Kirsten Baesler, State Superintendent
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Department of Public Instruction**

Chairman Monson and members of the House Appropriations Division on Education and the Environment:

For the record, my name is Kirsten Baesler. I am the superintendent of the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. I am here to provide information about the Department's budget bill, House Bill 1013, and the department's optional budget requests.

The North Dakota Constitution emphasizes the importance and value of a strong public education system. It says the Legislature must establish a uniform system of free public schools throughout the state that are open to all children. It says an educated citizenry is necessary for prosperity and happiness.

With that said, the superintendent of public instruction does not have any constitutional powers. This is true of most of our statewide elected offices. The Constitution says this: The superintendent of public instruction has as much authority as the Legislature allows.

This authority can be found in North Dakota Century Code 15.1-02-04.

We have two divisions in the Department of Public Instruction. They are Student Support and Innovation, and Information and Administration. These are shown on the organizational chart in your binder, on Page 2.

Under Student Support and Innovation, we have seven offices:

- Academic Support
- Educational Equity and Support
- Early Learning
- Indian and Multicultural Education
- School Approval and Opportunity
- Assessment (and)
- Special Education.

Under Information and Administration, we have five offices:

- Fiscal Management
- Human Resources
- Management Information Systems
- Child Nutrition and Food Distribution
- Outreach and Engagement

The Superintendent of Public Instruction is also responsible for supervising:

- The North Dakota State Library,

- The North Dakota School for the Blind and Vision Services in Grand Forks, and
- The North Dakota School for the Deaf and Resource Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Devils Lake.

You will hear from these institutions tomorrow.

Again, these are listed on the organizational chart on page 2 of your binder.

On page 3 are the audit findings from the state auditor's recent audit of the Department of Public Instruction. Our responses are also listed. We can answer your questions about any of these findings. None of them have financial implications.

Finally, I will share on our agency's accomplishments and challenges in the last two years.

Accomplishments

- Administered the delivery of over \$90 million in federal aid to schools for Covid 19
- Over 400 hours of focus group meetings during first months of pandemic to learn needs of students, teachers, administrators, and families
- Partnered with Department of Human Services on behavioral health support needs for schools

- Created school safety partners working group with other state agencies education stakeholders and law enforcement
- Created Healthy Return to Learning team to bridge the needs of public health and education during this pandemic
- 12 schools have been approved for Innovation Education programs with another nine schools interested and working on plans

Challenges and Goals for Upcoming Biennium

- Accelerate the learning recovery for students impacted during pandemic
- Streamlining our assessment system to reduce tests and add more value to tests
- Continued focus North Dakota K-12 Strategic Vision goals (Chart is page 1 in your binder)
- Address mental health needs of students, teachers, and administrators caused by the stress of the pandemic

We are not asking for additional positions. Our budget request is for 89.25 full-time equivalents, the same as the previous biennium.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for your time. We have several presenters today to provide information to you, and we stand ready to work with you at any time to make good education policy for the people of North Dakota.

I would welcome your questions.

Thank you.