



MARCH 5, 2021 – 10:00 AM

Members of the North Dakota
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS – EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

RE: Support for SB2019 – Dr. Denise Jonas
Director of Career and Technical Education

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of SB2019. Your “YES” vote is critical to the Department of Career and Technical Education to sustain current programming for career education, technical training, and workforce development. I also respectfully ask that you safeguard the \$45 million earmarked for Career Workforce Academies, as there are several regions ready to launch this proven model, along with consideration to restore funding for new and expanded programming, TrainND, and Adult Farm Management, as they will serve as supports to career and technical education in North Dakota.

As Cass County Director of Career and Technical Education, I am approached almost daily by business and industry inquiring about opportunities to connect with our K12 teachers and students. These requests are not limited to high school students, but extend to elementary and middle school learners. With our State’s low unemployment, workforce demands, and natural employee attrition, K12-business partnerships are viewed as a mechanism to create company awareness, expose students to future careers, and provide experiential learning.

In Cass County, we are pleased to offer a variety of career and technical education programs and pathways in our current K12 educational systems, yet in a 2018 Career Workforce Academy Program and Curriculum study, it revealed program gaps in agriculture education, construction, manufacturing, and transportation. In our region, there is also a growing demand in medical careers, information technology, transportation, and biomedical technologies influenced by Sanford Health, Microsoft, and Aldevron. Despite K12 efforts, schools are challenged to meet local school district demands, along with workforce demands, without collaborative efforts to scale, support, and grow opportunities through a hub for coordination and expanded learning such as the CWA.

Cass County Career Workforce Academy collaborative discussions began in 2016. Sparked by a shared vision to create a systemic pipeline; the CWA is a collective network of business partners, K-12 schools, post-secondary leaders, the cities of Fargo and West Fargo, the Cass County Commission, FM Economic Development, FMWF Chamber of Commerce, and local legislators. All driven to improve education, and the local and State’s economy.

Over the past five years, concerted efforts have moved a vision to action with these committed stakeholders:

- 2017-2018 - Phase I – Career Workforce Academy Strategic Plan complete (attached)
- 2018-2019 – Phase II - K-14 Program Priorities and Curriculum audit complete (attached)
- 2019-2020 - Fundraising, operational budget and governance planning to support Strategic Plan
- 2020-2021 – Phase III - architecture selection, design input, renderings, bids, and groundbreaking
- 2021-2022 – Phase IV – Build and program development for opening Fall 2022

As one of the fastest growing communities in North Dakota and serving as a diverse economic engine for the state, workforce development is critical Cass County. Manufacturing to information technology, agriculture to medical sciences, entrepreneurship to the trades, technical training is at the forefront of our discussions. Magnifying this need is projected regional growth, along with 8,000 jobs anticipated for the Fargo Diversion and Amazon alone. With this current need and anticipated demand, I respectfully ask for your support of SB2019 to leverage career and technical education programming and Career Workforce Academies to create a systemic workforce pipeline for the state and future of North Dakota!