

**Testimony of Dr. Cory Steiner  
Northern Cass Superintendent  
Support of HB 1135  
Wednesday, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. It is my privilege to testify in support of HB1135. My name is Dr. Cory J. Steiner and I'm the Superintendent of Schools at Northern Cass School District in Hunter, North Dakota. We are a PK-12 district with 660 learners located 25 miles northwest of Fargo. We are an innovative school district which is in the midst of a transformation to personalized, competency-based learning.

The issues in education are profound, but more importantly, they are urgent. The structure and function of our schools today must change to meet the needs of our society. We continue to operate with an industrial model of education. It is important to understand that every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets. Our system is getting the results it is supposed to get. Unfortunately, what is being asked of schools has changed since the design of the system. In schools, we have been tasked to prepare learners to be productive members of society. We have been asked to prepare learners for college, career, and military. We are asked to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. We must develop academic, social, and emotional skills while making sure to develop long-lasting relationships in a safe environment. In other words, we must prepare learners to be choice ready for a future which is constantly changing. The list of things to do and accomplish is never-ending. However, it is our collective job to transform education. It must be our mission moving forward.

To accomplish this challenging work, we must begin to remove the barriers which have traditionally been held in high regard in K-12 education. One of these barriers is a traditional grading system. At Northern Cass, we committed to implementing standards-based grading PK-12 during the 2019-20 school year. For any courses we deliver on-site, we no longer utilize letter grades or percentages. Our 'grades' are based on a proficiency score where a '4' is extended learning, a '3' is proficient, a '2' is foundational knowledge, and a '1' is emerging. Learners work towards achieving a '3' in the identified priority standards in all courses. From these scores, we calculate an overall score for a course and a GPA with a

framework we created. Learners are always able to ‘fix’ a grade at any time during their high school experience. For the first time in my career, learning has become the focus instead of earning a grade.

During the fall of 2019, our Director of Personalized Learning (Tom Klapp) and I visited with administration and admission representatives at the University of North Dakota, North Dakota State University, Minnesota State University-Moorhead, Concordia University—Moorhead, and Mayville State University. In addition, we also had conversations with representatives from the North Dakota legislature, the North Dakota University System (NDUS), and representatives from the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (ND DPI). During these meetings, we shared our model, our GPA calculation framework, and our ‘why’ for this change. In each instance, the colleges pledged their full support for this change. They all agreed our system of ‘grading’ would provide the colleges will actionable data and a realistic view of what a learner does and does not know. I have attached the letters of support with this testimony.

Today, I ask you to support a recommendation of ‘do pass’ for HB 1135 allowing for an equivalent course proficiency score if the student was enrolled in a school district participating in an approved innovative education program under section 15.1-06-01.1. I would ask this be applied to both the North Dakota Academic Scholarship and the North Dakota Career and Technical Education Scholarship. It is essential for the learners of not only my district, but other innovative districts, to have the same opportunity as other learners throughout the state. When SB 2186 passed, we opened up possibilities for a different type of education. It is now time to make sure the various requirements that accompany the previous system, such as the scholarship requirements, are flexible. By keeping the scholarship requirements linked to a letter grade, it defeats the purpose of what SB 2186 hoped to accomplish. SB 2186 had almost unanimous support which demonstrates the legislature’s commitment to changing education. As a leader of an innovative school district, one of the biggest concerns shared with me by parents and learners is our learners not having the same opportunities as those who attend a more traditional system. This bill is a step in the right direction to recognize education can and will look different across the state of North Dakota. Your support for this bill will indicate your commitment to local control, innovation, and doing what is in the best interest of all learners throughout the state of North Dakota.

We have boards, administrators, and educators ready to change the model into one which promotes authenticity through a personalized approach. At Northern Cass, we have submitted multiple waivers including, but not limited to a seat time waiver, a dual credit waiver, and a scholarship waiver. We have received a waiver (attached Northern Cass proposal) to allow our learners to receive the scholarship even with a proficiency-based 'grade'. However, I visit with many of my colleagues who are fearful of making a change if it could potentially impact a learner's ability to attend college due to losing the scholarship. This bill would eliminate this concern and provide districts with permission to innovate on a larger scale. Over the past few sessions, the legislature has been an advocate for education by reducing barriers to implementing change. You have supported innovation. This bill is a logical next step in moving our state. I don't speak to you today asking for funding, but simply making sure our system is equitable for all. Every learner deserves the same opportunities.

I ask all members of this committee to recommend a 'Do Pass' and do so knowing it will provide every learner with a path towards success.



January 7, 2020

Cory Steiner, Superintendent  
Northern Cass Schools  
16021 18 St SE  
Hunter ND, 58048-9730

Dr. Steiner,

Thank you for making time to share an overview of North Cass School's personalized, competency-based learning model with NDSU. Our time together was informative and helped to fully understand the changes happening in the classroom and the ensuing changes to students' grades and transcripts.

As an outcome of our conversation we understand that when necessary Northern Cass will still be able to provide NDSU with a transcript and GPA for all applicants, and that the transcript will provide the information necessary for us to make an admission decision—courses, grades, credits. (NDSU's admission process allows students to self-report grades and test scores, eliminating a need for official transcripts and test scores at the point of admission. These documents are typically required after a student commits to NDSU.)

It is understood that the grading scale may deviate from the traditional model (4=A, 3=B) but it still follows a scale with a 4.0 being the highest GPA a student can earn. As with other schools that employ their own scale to assign grade bands, we will not convert the GPA for these students. We recognize that the grading system employed by Northern Cass reflects your standards, expectations and outcomes. We work with various schools that employ their own grading scales and respect that they may require stronger performance for outstanding grades. This is also the case with schools that weight classes for rigor and use weighted GPAs—NDSU uses unweighted GPAs.

Please recognize that students from Northern Cass who are proficient in classes will not be disadvantaged in our current scholarship process as we currently award scholarships to students who earn a GPA of 3.5 or higher. Based on your GPA conversions, students will meet our current GPA requirement for merit scholarships.

We would be happy to revisit this process as you continue implementing changes. Congratulations to you and your staff on this transformation!

Sincerely



Merideth Sherlin  
Director of Admission





January 31, 2020

Cory Steiner, Superintendent  
Northern Cass Schools  
1602118 St SE  
Hunter ND, 58048-9730

Dr. Steiner,

Mayville State University enjoyed meeting with you for the overview of the Northern Cass School's personalized, competency-based learning model.

MSU understands that Northern Cass will still be able to provide a transcript and GPA for all applicants, and that the transcript will provide the information necessary to make an admission decision.

It is understood that the grading scale may deviate from the traditional model (4=A, 3=B) but it still follows a scale with a 4.0 being the highest GPA a student can earn. As with other schools that employ their own scale to assign grade bands, we will not convert the GPA for these students. We recognize that the grading system employed by Northern Cass reflects your standards, expectations and outcomes.

The students from Northern Cass who are proficient in classes will not have a disadvantage with MSU's current scholarship process. Based on your GPA conversions, students will meet MSU's current GPA requirement for scholarships.

MSU will continue to welcome Northern Cass graduates and pledge to work with you during this conversion process so the present and future graduates have opportunities to be admitted and eligible for scholarships.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Keith Stenehjem', is written over a circular stamp or seal that is partially obscured by the signature.

Dr. Keith Stenehjem, VPAA  
Mayville State University







**VALLEY CITY**  
**STATE UNIVERSITY**

January 31, 2020

Dr. Cory J. Steiner,

I want to first thank you for coming to Valley City State University (VCSU) to share how Northern Cass High School is preparing its students to be choice ready for college, career or military. Transforming from the traditional system to a personalized, competency-based learning model is a great undertaking and one that we are happy to collaborate with and learn more about this innovative way of teaching students.

VCSU Enrollment Services Office works with high schools from across the United States and Canada who use a variety of grading systems to help determine if a student meets the guidelines set by the university for admittance. As Northern Cass High School transitions to a course proficiency scoring model and away from the traditional grading system, discussions will continue between the two schools to assure that all students who wish to attend the university are able to, by submitting the standards-based transcript.

Regarding how a student's scholarship opportunity would change with a course proficiency score is one that the Enrollment Services team does not feel would differ from all the other districts in which we receive applicants from. With the development of a grading comparison shared by Northern Cass High School, your students will be given the same chance at scholarships afforded by the university.

I wish you the best and very much look forward to working with Northern Cass on this innovative way of preparing learners for the future.

Sincerely,

Charlene Stenson  
Director for Enrollment Services  
Valley City State University  
[c.stenson@vcsu.edu](mailto:c.stenson@vcsu.edu)  
701/845-7105



MOORHEAD  MINNESOTA  
**CONCORDIA**  
**COLLEGE**  
Office of Admission

March 11, 2020

Dr. Cory J. Steiner  
Superintendent of Schools  
Northern Cass School District  
16021 18<sup>th</sup> St. SE  
Hunter, ND 58048-9730

Dear Dr. Steiner,

Thank you for the opportunity to meet you and Mr. Klapp to learn more about the innovating teaching and learning happening in the Northern Cass School District. I commend you, your faculty, and most importantly, the learners within the district for the creativity and courage it takes to make change in the academic and community setting.

After review of the materials presented and the conversation following, I can offer Concordia College's support for, and acceptance of the standards-based transcripts that would be submitted by a learner from Northern Cass in the admission process to Concordia College - Moorhead. Additionally, I can offer assurance that Concordia College will accept and use the standards-based transcript from Northern Cass to evaluate a learner for merit scholarships and other financial aid from the College. It is understood that a 3.0 grade for a Northern Cass learner is not equivalent to a 3.0 grade from a traditional grading system. Concordia College – Moorhead does reserve the right to contact either a principal, guidance/academic counselor, or teacher to assist the College in accurately assessing a standards-based transcript provided by a Northern Cass learner. That said, Concordia College will officially accept such a transcript for evaluation of both admission and merit scholarships.

I offer my congratulations for the positive changed you've realized in the District and Concordia's ongoing support in this effort. Concordia looks forward to enrolling highly-qualified graduates from Northern Cass in the coming years.

Most sincerely,



Dr. Karl A. Stumo  
Vice President  
Enrollment and Marketing  
Concordia College – Moorhead, MN



## Office of Undergraduate Admissions

MSUM Box 67 • 1104 7th Avenue South • Moorhead, Minnesota 56563  
Phone: 218.477.2161 • Fax: 218.477.4374 • mnstate.edu



January 30, 2020

Cory Steiner, Superintendent  
Northern Cass Schools  
16021 18<sup>th</sup> St. SE  
Hunter, ND 58048

Dr. Steiner,

Thank you for coming to MSUM's campus to share with us Northern Cass School's structure for its personalized learning initiative and standards-based grading model. We appreciate you reaching out to MSUM as one of the local universities at which Northern Cass graduates attend. It provided us the chance to inquire about and fully understand your school's innovative programming.

It was very helpful for us to know at the start of the meeting that, even with an alternative grading scale, a GPA will still be provided on your students' transcripts to be reviewed by colleges. This allows us to review all applicants for college readiness, as well as for scholarship eligibility at our school. We understand how the student's Course Proficiency Score will be translated into a GPA equivalent for those purposes, and that a 4.0 is the highest GPA a student can earn.

MSUM will make use of this GPA to evaluate for admission into the university. We will not convert the GPA stated to a separate scale. MSUM has worked with students from high schools with alternative grading scales, and we will continue to utilize the GPA as stated on your students' transcripts. (Specifically, MSUM uses a student's weighted GPA where that is provided.)

Additionally, MSUM will use the provided GPA to determine eligibility for our scholarships. Northern Cass learners will not be disadvantaged in the scholarship process as compared to other learners with traditional grading systems.

We commend the Northern Cass educators for their work in getting their learners ready for college. Please reach out to MSUM if you have any additional questions or updates as you transform your school.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Reburn'.

Tom Reburn  
Director of Undergraduate Admissions





# Northern Cass School District No. 97

## Home of the Jaguars



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Dr. Cory Steiner, Superintendent  
 Doug Margerum, Secondary Principal  
 John O'Day, AD/Dean of Students  
 Crysta Schenck, Elementary Principal  
 Paige Carlson, Business Managers

January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019

Superintendent Baesler,

Northern Cass was granted a waiver as part of Senate Bill 2186 in 2017. Northern Cass School District has engaged in a transformation from a traditional system to a personalized, competency-based learning (PCBL) model. As part of this transition, Northern Cass has implemented the use of standards-based grading PK-12. In grades 9-12, learners are assessed based on a four-point scale: 4 is extending, 3 is proficient, 2 is foundational, and 1 is emerging.

Northern Cass has made a deliberate decision to focus on learning rather than grades. Northern Cass educators have identified priority standards learners must demonstrate proficiency on which will be linked to high school course credits. In our system, Northern Cass will be able to guarantee our learners have demonstrated proficiency in all required standards necessary for graduation. However, Northern Cass had decided not to convert standards-based scores to a percentage or letter grade. A grade point average (GPA) will be calculated and shared with colleges. Every Northern Cass graduate will have a minimum GPA of 3.0. Any learner above a 3.0 has taken the initiative to extend their learning beyond the standard.

Course Proficiency Score	GPA Equivalent
3.75-4.00	4.00
3.26-3.74	3.75
3.0-3.25	3.5
2.75-3.0	3.00
2.26-2.74	2.75
2.0-2.25	2.50

**Note:** Advanced Placement and Dual Credit courses are weighted at a factor of 1.25.

In addition to the GPA, a Northern Cass transcript will include Habits of Work (HOW) grades. They will also be on a four-point scale. The categories are preparedness, engagement, and respect.

For this transformation to be successful, our community, parents, educators, and learners need assurance our learners will be afforded the opportunity to receive the state scholarship. system will work in collaboration with the district by participating in discussions to make the transition seamless as learners enter college. It is important Northern Cass learners are afforded the same opportunities as learners from other districts. We have met with North Dakota State University, University of North Dakota, Valley City State University, and Mayville State University. They will be writing letters of support for our use of standards-based grades in their institutions in terms of entrance and scholarships.

Northern Cass is requesting an addendum to our wavier to allow standards-based grades to be considered equivalent to the requirements of a 'C' when applying for the ND Academic or ND CTE Scholarship.

This is an exciting time for education. We can fundamentally change the experience for our learners and better prepare them to be choice ready for college, career or military. With your support, we can continue our transformation to provide the highest quality experience for our learners.

Sincerely,

Dr. Cory J. Steiner  
 Superintendent of Schools

*The Northern Cass School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, natural origin, gender, or disability.*

