

2196 - ND learning continuum
Bismarck Public Schools Testimony in Support

Chairman Owens and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Bill 2196.

My name is Pat Phillips, and in my role as a Systems Innovator in the Bismarck school district, I have the privilege and responsibility of working collaboratively with many departments both within and without Bismarck schools to ensure the systemic conditions necessary to empower each of our learners to thrive. For me, these efforts have manifested most recently in the opportunity to support and encourage innovation as a contributing member of the design team of the second NDCEL Innovation Academy, which, in our district, grew into the Bismarck Career Academy's Innovation Pathway - our instance of the ND Innovative Education pilot program.

The great educators of this state have long understood that instructional time is merely one among many factors that impact student achievement. It makes little sense to measure the effectiveness of any system based on inputs rather than outputs, and instructional time is an input to our learners' educational experience, not an output of it. At its core, the option for learners to earn credit through showing mastery represents an insightful shift towards the use of instructional time as a *resource* to empower learners rather than a one-size-fits-all requirement in the best cases, or - in some of the worst case scenarios - a *limiting* factor to growth and achievement.

It is often hard to envision the changes in practice that might emerge from a change in policy. Our Innovative Education pilot implementation is anchored in multiple areas of Bismarck Public School's strategic plan. It represents only one of the ways that the educators in Bismarck are responding to our community mandate to provide authentic and personalized learning experiences that are rooted in inclusion and equity while maintaining the level of academic rigor and excellence that our stakeholders and students expect and deserve. I am sharing this because this opportunity for our learners is enabled by our innovative education waiver, which is tantamount to the change in policy represented by this bill, and so I find myself in the unique position of having the ability to share with you a glimpse of the kind of learning experiences that might be engendered on a much more efficacious scale if this bill were to pass. In doing so, I would like to present evidence in all three of the elements called for in the Innovative Education Pilot implementation proposal. These being (1) the improvement of the delivery of education, (2) the improvement of the administration of education, and (3) increased educational opportunities.

I. In the area of the improved delivery of education, the shift to mastery-based credits presents the opportunity to leverage connections between learners' personal goals and interests and mastery of ND state standards in multiple subject areas. The improvement in

delivery here is that teachers and learners are able to make the experience more personalized by taking advantage of the learners unique abilities and interests. Currently, learners in the Innovation Pathway are benefiting from opportunities to practice and display mastery of core credit competencies in the context of their CTE classes, community partnerships and individual passion projects.

In just the first short semester of our pilot these changes have taken the form of a learner working towards mastery of ELA speaking and listening standards through leading discussions in his auto tech classes. Learners are working towards mastery of writing standards through researching relevant personal topics ranging from whether or not to accept a scholarship based on a college program's accreditation history, to whether GMO agriculture will yield sustainable results for a family farm. These learners then apply and refine their communication skills through authentic communication with community partners. It appears as a learner showing mastery of math standards by demonstrating and applying his understanding of logarithmic functions in the context of electronics. And a learner showing her mastery of the concepts of congruence and geometric relationships through her personal passion for art and design.

These are only a few of the ways that our educators are collaborating with each other, our community and learners to leverage mastery-based learning to increase both the efficiency and relevance of student experiences.

II. In the area of the improved administration of education we strive to increase the efficiency and responsiveness of our systems. I will tell you of a learner who is progressing in mastery of literacy and communication skills through the seamless matriculation to 12th grade English standards immediately after showing mastery of the 11th grade standards. In an administrative structure with instructional minutes as the metric for credit, that learner would have been waiting around, and "putting in the time" to earn their English 11 credit. Instead, this capable and motivated young adult is leveraging the increased efficiency to deepen their ELA skills in authentic contexts while adding value for multiple community partners in the Bismarck area.

Conversely, I can share the story of a learner on an IEP, who is similarly adding value through community partnerships, and working in the same authentic contexts while simultaneously leveraging those experiences to meet developmentally appropriate learning targets and building a sense of efficacy and agency over his education. Without a mastery-based framework in which to implement these interventions, this learner would not have these opportunities as his schedule would have been filled with intervention classes leaving little room for electives or enrichment experiences.

Perhaps most importantly in the realm of school administration, our short pilot implementation has spurred an increased level of interdisciplinary collaboration between

teachers. This has resulted in an increased capacity to leverage and support the mastery of core course standards in career and technical education courses. More broadly, it represents the opportunity for our entire district to cultivate a more aligned and integrated curriculum that is not only guaranteed and viable, but flexible enough to meet the 21st century educational challenge of designing personalized experiences that honor who learners are, how they learn best, and what they aspire to be.

III. In the area of increased education opportunities, I would encourage you to consider how the examples I have already shared represent increased educational opportunities for the learners involved in our pilot. Then, I would ask you to consider these opportunities not just in terms of their number or diversity, but also the quality and relevance thereof for our learners.

I am proud to share with you that the disruptive climate of the first 18 weeks of the 2020-2021 school year represented increased rather than decreased learning opportunities for our Innovation Pathway learners. The mastery framework of our innovative education waiver has facilitated collaborative work with community partners including: Northern Plains Dance, Dakota Zoo, Lincoln Park District, Global Neighbors, State Historical Society Archives, Adult Learning Center, Bismarck Parks and Recreation and the Heaven's Helpers Soup Cafe.

The youth that this waiver has helped to empower have delivered, or are currently working collaboratively on products including a cost and materials estimate for and the construction and installation of a sprung dance floor, a municipal dog park re-design and budget proposal, an interactive GIS map to help families new to our communities locate and access resources, Historical biographical sketches for the ND manuscript collections, materials for the support of family literacy, and a job safety analysis for stage construction at Sleepy Hollow Arts park.

You needn't take my word for it, however, as I have included a [handout of student testimonials](#) from our Innovative Education Pilot. I would ask that you take some time to explore the student experience in their own words, and reflect on whether all learners deserve to feel this way about school. The Innovation Pathway is housed less than 2 miles from where you are right now; If you'd like to know more, we invite you to come talk to our teachers and learners, or reach out to our community partners.

Chairman Owens; members of this committee, I hope you share my belief that the youth of our state have too much creativity, energy, and capacity to be relegated to punching the proverbial educational clock in order to earn a HS diploma. This bill represents the potential removal of a systemic barrier to high quality, equitable personalized and authentic learning experiences for every

learner in North Dakota. I urge you to take advantage of the opportunity that you have to invest in our state's most precious and valuable resource by supporting this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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