

**HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
REPRESENTATIVE MARK S. OWENS, CHAIRMAN
MARCH 9, 2021**

**DR. PENNY VEIT-HETLETVED, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS & REHABILITATION
PRESENTING TESTIMONY SENATE BILL 2196**

Chairman Owens and members of the Education Committee, my name is Dr. Penny Veit-Hetletved, and I am the Director of Education for the North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR) and the Superintendent of Marmot School also known as the ND Youth Correctional Center. Today, I am here to testify on behalf of the department in support of Senate Bill 2196.

Senate Bill 2196 is intended to offer flexibility in how learners choose to access and engage in learning as well as gathering artifact of students' mastery according to a set of standards. The ND Youth Correctional Center feels privileged to be one of four innovation schools transforming to personalized competency-based learning. Certainly, compared to our counterparts, we are the smallest school. Our student picture and story; however, should not be minimalized by a census total. Our students come from any district and often can speak the language of an antiquated school system where seat time is the equivalency of them being done with their diploma journey.

Our students experience barriers in their education for a great deal of reasons to include not meeting them where they are to take them to the diploma finish line. Personalized competency-based learning is a great deal more work but is imperative to remove these barriers. Education can no longer be transactional. Education must be

student-driven and student-led. Education must prepare our students to not only be good citizens but be better informed in what will be their employability in the future. Currently, our educational structure intensifies the need for formal post-secondary pathways for students success. Though I have no issue in this pathway, we lose site of individualized instruction that customizes each student's pathway—truth be told many jobs in ND that are at high levels of wages are based in career and technical fields that lead our learners down other pathways—a fork in the road—to post-secondary.

Senate Bill 2196 will offer a competency framework, consisting of a learning continuum and clear guidance for implementation. This framework is ND education's next step to becoming progressive and intuitive to the needs of our learners. For districts to fully transform, districts that we serve at the ND Youth Correctional Center, personalized, competency-based systems must begin to happen across our state's districts. As a superintendent for students who are at-risk on many levels, I'm often challenged with the concerns from stakeholders regarding how education looks and is delivered from ND YCC...that it will not look the same to those who attend a traditional system. They are absolutely right, learners in our state must no longer follow the traditional system of learning...antiquated in its delivery. We owe it to our learners who are more diverse than ever before, to meet them where they are and develop them into empowered learners.

I'd like to end by telling a story of a student at ND YCC. This student is one of the first to spend an elongated period of time in the PCBL environment. When he was asked about learning in this environment, he said it made him think about leadership. "A

leader to me is someone who leads by example, someone who is knocked down and gets back up. Someone who comes over obstacles. I now understand, I am a leader.” He went on to explain, “In regular school, I know sometimes when a teacher is teaching and you have a question and there is at least 30 heads in the classroom it is not always easy to raise your hand in class and ask a question. At YCC there is a more comfortable connection with our teachers and classmates. Discussion is more open and is more elaborate. It is more fun and easier to learn something with hands-on projects rather than being lectured. I’ve learned more in six months here than I have in my whole high school time.” This young man was taught in a personalized, competency-based environment by exceptional teachers. All districts have exceptional teachers—it is the mode that significantly impacted this young man’s confidence that he could not only be an empowered learner but also a leader—a title he would not naturally bestow upon himself. This is the impact of passing Senate Bill 2196. Establishing a competency-based framework as an additional pathway for graduation requirements is not only good for ND learners but I would state is our duty.

Chairman Owens and members of the Education Committee, I ask that you support Senate Bill 2196 with a “do pass.” I will now stand for questions.