



Tuesday, March 9, 2021

The Honorable Mark Owens, Chairman
North Dakota House Education Committee

Testimony in Support of S.B. 2196, the establishment of a North Dakota competency framework and to waive instructional time requirements.

Submitted By: Lori Phillips, Director of Teaching and Learning, KnowledgeWorks

Chairman Owens, and members of the committee:

My name is Lori Phillips, Director of Teaching and Learning for KnowledgeWorks. I am here today representing KnowledgeWorks to provide supportive testimony for *SB 2196*, which would establish a North Dakota competency framework to guide student mastery in place of traditional instructional time requirements.

During the legislative assembly in 2017, SB 2186 set the stage for innovative education practices to occur across North Dakota, including personalized, competency-based learning. The flexibility provided under this statute, along with the strong relationship between KnowledgeWorks and the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, established the North Dakota Personalized, Competency-Based Learning cohort in 2018. West Fargo, Oakes, Northern Cass and The Marmot School within the Youth Correctional Center committed to a five-year partnership designed to support systems change and build capacity at the local level to scale personalized, competency-based learning statewide. The cohort districts intentionally represent diverse systems with unique experiences and needs, inspiring other districts in the state to learn from these pioneers.

- West Fargo representing a large district with 11,500 students, 70 leaders and 1200 staff spread throughout 21 school buildings and counting
- Oakes and Northern Cass representing medium districts, comprised of 500-660 learners, 3-4 leaders and 45-50 staff contained in one school building
- The Marmot School within the Youth Correctional center representing at-risk learners from across the state, their staff of less than 10 working to impact the whole child in the weeks, months, or years they have with each student contained in one school building

The cohort spent the first two years building trusting relationships, creating a local vision, deepening their understanding of personalized, competency-based learning and developing action plans to set goals, collect data and monitor progress. In year three the districts are establishing a collaborative network, strengthening leadership skills, increasing levels of transparent communication, and changing their systems to meet the needs of all learners.

A critical component of this work is embedding a culture of continuous improvement. Each district participates in Fall and Spring site visits from our National evaluation partner WestEd. WestEd, based in San Francisco, is tasked with collecting data through surveys, classroom walkthroughs and focus groups. Due to the pandemic, the Spring and Fall site visits were completed virtually. District specific data is shared individually, while cohort-wide patterns and trends are shared collectively. According to the Fall 2020 site visits,

- Districts with a clear vision are seeing higher levels of implementation
- Educators credit personalized, competency-based learning with helping them adapt to hybrid and remote learning models
- Several districts report increased student engagement with personalized, competency-based learning practices

As the cohort transitions from visioning and planning to implementation, it is critical to engage educators in the process. Between February and May, three learning opportunities, focused on personalized, competency-based learning basics, instruction, and assessment, will take place. Cohort members, representatives from the Department of Public Instruction and interested leaders and educators from the cohort districts will collaboratively learn, apply what they are learning and reflect on success and challenges. The goals are that leaders and educators will form a sustainable network of learning and collaboration that can serve as a model across the state.

For districts to fully transform to personalized, competency-based systems, the state's K-12 education system must begin to integrate engaging learning experiences that give learners the opportunity to master academic content and essential skills aligned to their postsecondary, career and military interests. SB 2196 is intended to offer flexibility in how learners choose to access and engage in learning as well as ensuring they demonstrate mastery of academic and 21st century skills.

A competency framework, consisting of a learning continuum and clear guidance for implementation, can serve as the foundation for competency-based systems, communicating common, high-level expectations for all learners. A learning continuum is a transparent document containing a progression of knowledge, skills, and dispositions (academic and 21st century skills), aligned to college- and career-ready pathways. Establishing a learning continuum, that is accessible to all members of the learning community (families, learners, educators, board members, community, etc.), creates an environment for learners to engage fully in the learning process and make decisions based on their needs, preferences and goals for the future.

KnowledgeWorks partnered with the Utah Department of Education in 2020 to convene stakeholders from K-12, post-secondary, business, and community to design a state level learning continuum. The continuum consists of PreK-Post-secondary, grade-banded competencies aligned to their portrait of a graduate. Example provided in Attachment A. I have also provided an example of work done in Farmington, MN focused on academic competencies (Attachment B)

The design of a state level learning continuum for North Dakota, including academic and 21st century skill competencies, will take place in June and July, with a draft completed by Fall of 2021. Twenty-six K-12 districts and eighteen higher education institutions (listed in Attachments C,D) as well as the Regional Educational Associations have been invited to participate in competency design committees as well as review councils; two introductory webinars, outlining the components of a learning continuum as well as the design process, were hosted by KnowledgeWorks and NDDPI last November. Access to the slides and recorded session can be found in Attachment E. The inclusion of diverse stakeholders and Native voice will be critical to the success of the learning continuum design and implementation.

The learning continuum may be adopted and implemented locally by ND districts who are interested in pursuing a personalized, competency-based system or utilized as a resource for districts to develop their own using local context. This transparent progression of learning expectations will support learner voice in how they access, engage, and express their learning.

Now more than ever there is a National urgency to rethink education, providing personalized opportunities that meet the needs of every learner. North Dakota can be a leader in this movement. We urge the committee to pass SB 2196.

That concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions.

Attachment A: Example of Utah Portrait of a Graduate Competencies



WELLNESS

Develop self-awareness, self-advocacy skills and the knowledge to maintain healthy lifestyles that provide balance in life and improve physical, mental and social-emotional well-being.

Pre-K	K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12	Postsecondary
Students will be able to identify emotions, recognize physical and social needs, ask for help and participate in guided wellness activities.	Students will be able to explore self-awareness, participate in wellness activities and develop self-advocacy skills to express physical and social-emotional needs appropriately with trusted adults.	Students will be able to develop self-awareness, participate in wellness routines and practice self-advocacy skills by asking for help with mental, physical and social-emotional needs from trusted relationships.	Students will be able to practice self-awareness and self-advocacy, set goals and build routines towards balance through mental, physical and social-emotional wellness.	Students will be able to apply self-awareness to assess and monitor needs, set goals and routines and self-advocate for the supports they need to develop balance through mental, physical and social-emotional wellness.	Lifelong learners will be able to evaluate and adjust self-awareness and self-advocacy skills, be adept in achieving goals, maintain wellness habits and seek out supports to create lifelong balance through mental, physical and social-emotional well-being.

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Attachment B: Example of Farmington Area Public Schools (MN) Science Academic Competencies

Academic Example: Farmington High School

Science: Questioning

The ability to generate and use questioning to investigate relevant phenomena.

K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
Learners will be able to ask questions that will help them guide and design investigations, test ideas, and provide evidence to support their learning.	Learners will be able to generate questions which leads to development and use of models to represent their understanding of phenomena.	Learners will be able to plan and carry out investigations to answer student-driven questions about phenomena.	Learners will be able to design and conduct investigations, using appropriate technologies, to collect and organize data to evaluate ideas, answer questions, and explore phenomena.

Attachment C: ND Districts invited to participate in Learning Continuum Design and Review

Beulah	Marmot School: Youth Correctional Center
Bismarck	Midway
Dakota Prairie	Minot
Devil's Lake	Minto
Dickinson	Northern Cass
Fargo	Northwood
Grafton	Oakes
Grand Forks	Rugby
Hillsboro	Solon-Cannonball
Jamestown	Tate Topa
Langdon	West Fargo
Mandan	Williston
Manvel	Wilton

Attachment D: ND Public, Private and Tribal Higher Education Institutions invited to participate in the Learning Continuum Design and Review

Bismarck State College	Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College
Cankdeska Cikana Community College	Sitting Bull College
Dakota College at Bottineau	Turtle Mountain Community College
Dickinson State University	United Tribes Technical College
Lake Region State College	University of Jamestown
Mayville State University	University of Mary
Minot State University	University of North Dakota
North Dakota State College of Science	Valley City State University
North Dakota State University	Williston State College

Attachment E: Introductory Learning Continuum Webinar Slides and Recording

- [Webinar Slides](#)
- [Webinar Recording](#)