

**Testimony for Senate Bill 2269
House Education Committee
Representative Owens, Chairman**

March 17, 2021

By Amy Armstrong

**Minot State University's North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities
(NDCPD) - Advancing Students Toward Education and Employment Program (ASTEP)**

Good morning, Chairman Owens and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Amy Armstrong and I am the Assistant Director at Minot State University's North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities (NDCPD). For the past nine years, I was the project director for MSU's Advancing Students Toward Education and Employment Program (ASTEP).

ASTEP is an inclusive transition and post-secondary education (PSE) program for students with intellectual and developmental (I/DD) disabilities. Coordinated by NDCPD, ASTEP is located at Minot State University (MSU) and partners with both MSU and Dakota College at Bottineau's Minot campus to support young adults with I/DD to attend college. Fifteen to twenty students, between the ages of 18 and 26, attend annually from all over the state, as well as some neighboring states. Eligible students must have an I/DD and be currently or formerly eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

ASTEP began in 2010 through a five-year Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) grant from the U.S. Department of Education to develop a model comprehensive transition and PSE program for students with ID. In 2015, NDCPD applied for and received a second five-year TPSID grant from the U.S. Department of Education. This funding was used to continue to develop and build a sustainable transition and PSE program at MSU.

In an inclusive and supportive environment, ASTEP students attend college to earn credentials, taking college courses with student without disabilities. In addition, students complete community employment internships and learn important independent living and social skills while engaged in campus and residence life. ASTEP students receive additional supports from ASTEP staff and peer mentors for all areas of campus and community life. ASTEP's goal is to make college a reality for students with I/DD and prepare students to live increasingly independent lives and pursue meaningful careers in their communities. In a recent follow up survey, one hundred percent (100%) of ASTEP graduates who responded, had paid (minimum wage or higher) community, integrated employment in the past twelve months.

ASTEP is currently supported through braided funding including some MSU/DCB funds, final TPSID grant dollars, and program fees. These funds help to cover the cost of ASTEP

program staff and peer mentors, who together coordinate and provide direct services to students daily. Students who attend ASTEP are responsible for the cost of tuition, student fees, textbooks and room and board costs - if they live on campus. In addition, ASTEP students pay a program fee which helps to cover costs of the program supports that are provided.

Currently ASTEP is the only transition and PSE program for students with I/DD in North Dakota. However, recently, NDCPD received a third U.S. Department of Education - TPSID grant to implement the *ND Inclusive Model Pathways for College and Career Training (IMPCCT) Consortium* project. While this grant may not be used to fund ASTEP activities, the IMPCCT Consortium will provide training and technical assistance to other North Dakota colleges and universities to develop additional inclusive college programs for students with I/DD.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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