Testimony in Support of SB2229

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I am testifying in support of SB2229, the scholarship fund to support rural student teacher residencies to address the rural teacher shortage in North Dakota. This bill was collaboratively prepared by the 13 North Dakota teacher preparation programs with bi-partisan support from Senators Davison, Bakke, and Oban and Representative Pyle.

ND's teacher shortage is well-documented, and to-date, a solution has not been identified. Facing similar issues, the 2019 Washington State Legislature directed the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to produce a report with policy recommendations for increasing student teachers' field placement in rural areas. Among the barriers to field placement in rural districts identified by WSAC were insufficient funding and resources, geographic isolation, lack of networks and information sharing, and limited availability of cooperating teachers and field supervisors. Gagnon and Mattingly (2015) also found among the favored policy responses for rural school staffing were financial incentives and communities of practice. A **rural student teacher residency** (RSTR) administered by the North Dakota University System and supported by NDACTE can overcome barriers and help to address rural teacher shortages as detailed below.

1.) The **cost of moving to a rural community is prohibitive** for student teachers. Currently, most student teachers complete their student teaching in the community where their college or university resides. This scholarship will provide an incentive and the means for student teachers to leave their college towns and move to rural communities where there are documented teacher shortages. Moving is expensive, and in doing so, most student teachers would have to give up roommates who share living expenses and leave behind jobs used to pay those living expenses. In other words, currently, they can't consider a rural student teaching placement because they can't afford it.

2.) In addition to the financial constraints that keep many student teachers out of rural communities, there are also many **misconceptions and unknowns** about living in rural areas. The four months of student teaching can help these future teachers see the benefits of living in a rural community and teaching in a rural school. As Hill (2014) stated, "[there are] strengths of rural areas which might better serve teachers, such as a tighter, more transparent connection between community and schools."

3.) The rural schools that host the student teachers will help them **become members of the communities**, making it more likely the new teachers will either stay or be open to accepting a position in another rural community. Adam and Woods (2015) found new teachers who are encouraged to become active in the community are more likely to be retained and have a higher sense of self-efficacy.

4.) NDACTE will provide **on-going connection, formative assessment, and support** through the collaborative efforts of member institutions, making use of communities of

practice to ensure the student teachers do not feel isolated or unsupported. A combination of in-person and technology-enabled remote assistance will be provided. Communities of practice will be formed among the student teachers with rural placements to provide content, pedagogical, and social support.

5.) Our aim is to **ensure all students have access to well-prepared teachers**. Although permits and provisional licenses allow individuals to fill open positions, they do not have the preparation needed for those classrooms, and some have no content or pedagogical training. The RSTR program will provide rural schools with well-prepared educators who have both relevant content and pedagogical training.

6.) A partnership between NDUS and NDACTE will enable a **study of the RSTR program**. We will track participants in their first three years after graduation to document where they are teaching to determine the impact of the initiative. We will also collect perceptions of the participants, cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and rural school administrators to learn about the effectiveness of the program including strategies and practices they viewed as positive as well as areas for improvement.

7.) There are several **programs around the nation currently using similar approaches** (Education Commission of the States, 2016; Washington Student Achieve Council, 2019) including in Washington, Kansas, Montana, Colorado, Minnesota, Mississippi, and Iowa. NDACTE is following these programs to learn from them as well.

In closing, the members of NDACTE support the $500,000 allocation recommendation in the current version of the bill. Although, it is important to note that student teachers do not sign contracts with districts, and they do not draw a salary from a school district during student teaching, so this wording in the current version of the bill will need to be adjusted to enable implementation of the scholarship.

References

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