

March 15, 2021
Senator Don Schaible
Senate Education Committee
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck ND, 58505-0001

**Subject: Testimony on North Dakota Education Funding Formula – HB1388
David Sjol, Superintendent Dunseith Public School District
Paul Frydenlund, Superintendent St. John Public School District**

Senator Schaible and Education Committee Members,

This letter is testimony for St. John and Dunseith School Districts. My name is David Sjol Superintendent at Dunseith Public. Paul Frydenlund Superintendent of St. John Public School District also represented in this letter. It is most efficient when Federal, State and Tribal governments work together to improve the lives of all students with quality educational opportunities.

Education is the vehicle that equals the playing field for all students. Therefore, it is imperative that the opportunity for quality education also is leveled for students being educated on Indian Lands. Research has shown socio-economic conditions are the number one factor in determining student success in education ventures, regardless of race. Socio-economic conditions are also a strong determination in student attendance rates. That is the reason it is so important to have students who want to attend school opposed to have to attend. Adverse socio-economic conditions are a hindrance to educational success for all students who experience them. Students who are educated in low-income areas face adversities, more frequently, than students in high-income areas. Many of our students are dependent on teachers and schools for more than teaching. Our students rely heavily on school lunch programs. This is why Dunseith, St. John and other districts in the same economic environment delivered meals all summer to all children in our area, and continue to do so to this day. The appreciation for this effort is huge. Teachers and staff have stepped up to make this undertaking happen. We have also solicited several community members in this effort creating a sense of purpose for some individuals.

This is just one reason why it is essential for our schools to attract and retain dedicated teachers, staff members, and school administrators who work hard to overcome the challenging situations and conditions faced by economically disadvantaged school districts. It is very difficult to attract teachers to our type of district it is even more difficult to fill positions such as English, Math, SPED, and Music.

Housing is another issue faced by District Administration and new incoming teachers. To attract and retain quality educators, we must offer competitive compensation and fringe benefits, a rewarding job experience, adequate housing, safe and opportunistic communities, and avenues for personal growth. Our students face many obstacles yet their desire to succeed is undeniable. Our Native American students have a strong determination to succeed, that is inspiring. Helping them to navigate the obstacles that reduce the chances for success is our mission. Teaching students to remove, navigate, perceive through roadblocks, hurdles, and other life circumstances takes resources.

Specifically, concerning House Bill 1388 which relates to the North Dakota Education funding formula. Our testimony will be on the "Transition Maximum" portion of HB1388. Transition Maximum primarily pertains to school districts receiving less funding than calculated by the funding formula.

Transition Maximum was established in the North Dakota Education funding formula in the 2013 biennium as a funding formula a mechanism to allow school districts that were not on formula, based on formula calculation, to "get on formula" at a reasonable pace; which was anticipated then to be no more than 6 - 8 years. In the 2013 biennium, Transition Maximum affected forty-one Districts. As of the 2020-21 school year, there are 11 Transition Maximum Districts remaining, of which 10 primarily Indian Land Districts, the system worked for thirty districts which is great. Eleven districts are still below formula. These districts receive a considerable amount per pupil less than the on formula districts. For example Dunseith receive \$7,613 per pupil, the State Funding Formula delivers \$10,036 per pupil to districts on the formula. This is a total difference of approx. \$1,400,000 in 2010-2021. This reduction in per pupil allocation has been taking place since 2013. These are funds sorely needed for opportunities to expand and accommodate increased enrollment. Districts on or near Indian Land have a severely reduced the ability to increase revenue through taxation because much the district land is not taxable. Without being on the state funding formula these districts have no way of raising money for expansion.

Three of the aforementioned Transition Maximum Districts primarily serve students of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa; they are the Belcourt, St. John and Dunseith School Districts. These three school districts account for \$7,481,749.37 of the State wide grand total transition maximum amount of \$9.8 million.

We are pleased that interim committee recognized the length of time it is taking to get the Transition Maximum Districts to get on formula. There is language in HB1388 to include a revenue addendum on them calculation component specifically for the Transition Maximum Districts. This is much needed funding.

In closing, our testimony supports this "add-on" language as it allows a mechanism in the formula for the Transition Maximum Districts to gain revenue not provided in the formula due to Transition Maximum.

In addition, we would like to mention HB 1388 was adjusted in the House of Representatives prior to "crossover"; in the adjustment, HB1388 is to have no increase in the per pupil payment. We ask for consideration that the original form of the bill, which included a 1% increase on the per pupil payment be reinstated. The increase is necessary for school districts to be able to negotiate with teachers in offering sustainable salary and benefits.

Thank you very much for you time and service.

David Sjol, Superintendent Dunseith Public School District
Paul Frydenlund, Superintendent St. John Public School District