

Good morning Chairman Schiabe and members of the Education Committee. For the record, I am Dr. Jennifer Fremstad, principal at West Fargo High School and I would like to thank this committee for the opportunity to speak to Senate Bill 2147 today.

High school principals in North Dakota work hard each and everyday to ensure opportunities for all students that will lead to success in their learning. At the state level, we appreciate having legislators that continue to support and provide opportunities for schools to leverage options that assist students when alternatives to the traditional pathway are needed. State resources like the Innovation Waiver and the Optional Diploma Pathway have encouraged schools to adjust teaching and learning in an attempt to reach all learners. The changing of instructional strategies has shifted learner outcomes from not only knowing the content but to be able to apply a learned skill. These shifts have increased engagement, provided more relevant and meaningful learning, and connects that learning to “real world” experiences. As we continue to shift, schools are learning about personalized, competency-based learning that allows students voice and choice in classes to create meaningful, relevant, and applicable skills for college, workforce, and military pathways beyond high school.

We are happy to see that our state leaders continue to look for meaningful ways to address student needs and create pathways for all students to succeed. This bill provides one more tool to leverage as schools continue to provide opportunities for students to succeed.

However, in its current form, there are several questions and outcomes that should be addressed or considered:

-What impact does this bill potentially have on staffing in school districts? For example: If a student can take a GED subtest after grade 10 and pass, that student no longer needs to attend any courses in that content. If the minimum number of credits (1/2) is all they earned in the first 2 years of high school, that student would not need to take the other 3.5 credits of ELA or 1.5 credits of Math or 1.5 credits of science or 2.5 credits of Social Studies including US History or Government. Could this option be available to students during their 8th semester of school rather than after the 4th? With decrease in student enrollment, there is a potential of decreased staffing needs. Furthermore, the best scenario for student learning and preparation for the future is taking full advantage of the options available to them and to utilize a route such as suggested in the bill as a stop-gap option to dropping out. As a principal, I feel we must be careful encourage our students to stay in the pathway of content mastery and completion as much as possible.

-Who would be responsible for the materials needed for students to prepare for the test and who would be responsible to pay for the test that students take? Is there a limit to the number of attempts students can have? Do schools pay for each attempt or just one attempt? And how is this funded?

-How would the GED subtest be calculated into the GPA for that student? Is it calculated for each credit it replaces or is it calculated one time?

-How will this pathway be denoted on the official transcript for the student?

-Is it better for districts to provide classes to prepare students to take the GED rather than adjust the requirements for obtaining a high school diploma?

-Is this pathway an option already available for districts to submit through the Innovation Waiver, and would not need an adjustment to century code?

Again, I want to restate how valued the work of our state leaders and this committee are to education in our state. Your continued efforts to create meaningful opportunities for districts to meet the needs of students is outstanding. This bill provides another example of that commitment. As a practitioner, I believe it is important that we continue to place a high value on our diploma. We support options for success, but I do not want it to diminish the work of our schools, our teachers, our students, and value of our diplomas. I think there may be a scenario in which this option may be advantageous to a small number of students, but we hope you'll work with school leaders to adjust the language so that the opportunity presented here isn't misused for the wrong population of students.

I want to again thank Chairman Schiabe and the Education committee members for allowing me time today to address Senate Bill 2147. If there are any questions, I will be happy to answer them.

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