



A New Dawn for
Every Learner

Date: January 26, 2021

To: North Dakota Senate Education Committee, North Dakota Legislative Branch

From: Fred Jones, Jr., Policy Director, Aurora Institute

RE: SB 2196

Chairman Schaible, Vice-Chairman Elkin, and Members of the Senate Education Committee thank you for the opportunity to provide brief testimony today.

For the record, my name is Fred Jones, and I am the Policy Director for the Aurora Institute. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization focused on developing research on K-12 competency-based education (CBE) and advancing personalized, competency-based learning in K-12 education systems.

Aurora Institute's mission is to drive the transformation of education systems and accelerate the advancement of breakthrough policies and practices to ensure high-quality learning for all students.

We would like to voice our support for the intent to encourage more K-12 schools and districts to implement competency-based learning by way of supporting policies that promote student advancement based on mastery of content, not seat-time policies.

Today, the prevailing traditional, one-size-fits-all K-12 education model is not meeting the unique needs of diverse learners. For instance, according to the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, less than 50 percent of 3rd-grade students have met grade-level standards on the state reading assessment. To prepare all students for success in the future economy requires whole-system transformation through thoughtful, but deliberate, student-centric policy efforts.

Background

In 2017, North Dakota SB 2186 was signed into law. Our understanding is that this bill allowed districts and schools to submit a waiver request to the Department of Public Instruction, allowing for innovation, such as flexibility from seat-time for learning outside regular school

hours or off school premises, and flexibility around total instructional hours, the number of school days, and school years.

In January 2019, the North Dakota state legislature repealed the [North Dakota Century Code Sec. 15.1-06-05](#). The passage of [SB No. 2265](#) appears to have removed the waiver application for districts seeking flexibility from instructional time and seat-time structures.

No matter where a state is starting from, there are various entry points along a continuum for policymakers to support and build CBE systems and seat-time flexibility.

State examples

- **Arkansas's** [Act 601](#) creates the Districts and Schools of Innovation program through which districts can request flexibility from seat-time requirements.
- **Kentucky** passed HB 37 in 2012, creating Districts of Innovation. Some of the policies that were waived for the innovation zones include seat-time policies, average daily attendance calculation, and learning opportunities in communities, afterschool programs, and other experiences outside of school walls.
- **North Carolina's** [NC Implementation Guide for Credit by Demonstrated Mastery](#) allows "Credit by Demonstrated Mastery" shall be available for all North Carolina students in grades 9-12 for high school courses and in grades 6-8 for high school courses offered in middle school."
- **Wisconsin's** [WS 118.33\(1\)\(d\)](#) enables a school board to grant a high school diploma to a student who has not completed traditional credit hour requirements if the student is enrolled in an "[alternative education program](#)" and the school board determines the student has demonstrated a level of proficiency equivalent to that which he or she would have attained if he or she had satisfied the requirements under traditional high school requirements.

Conclusion

The goal to move away from seat-time towards supporting mastery-based or CBE is critical. Aurora Institute applauds the advancement of state policy to move away from language that locks in seat-time policies in regulations toward CBE systems, to ensure all students graduate with the knowledge and skills to prepare them for future success in higher levels of learning, future-focused careers, and civic engagement.

Thank you.

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