



**Testimony**  
**Senate Bill 2332**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
**February 2, 2021 9:00 a.m.**  
**Education Standards and Practice Board**  
**Dr. Rebecca Pitkin**

Good morning Chairman Schaible and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Rebecca Pitkin and I am the Executive Director of the Education Standards and Practices Board. I am here today to provide neutral testimony on SB 2332.

During the 66<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly HB 1287 became law. Both in-state and out-of-state alternative programs are now permissible. I will first provide information on the results of the American Board online certification program which is an out of state alternative program, available in 14 states. Applicants with a 4 year degree pay a fee of approximately \$1900.00, receive a packet of information to study, pass the test, and receive an initial license from ESPB; there are no courses, no contact with students, and individuals upon completion receive an initial 2 year license. Unlike other states which have the American Board option, North Dakota has additional requirements listed in the bill. Since last session, 17 individuals have completed the American Board program (information attached). Information gathered through principal and superintendent interviews last spring indicates these individuals were successful and filled a need. An example is a South Heart parent, trained as a nurse who is currently teaching science.

Many of the individuals who completed American Board were sought out by their district as they are already involved in the school and perhaps “missed their call” to teach.

An in-state alternative program has also been developed, Certification Central. Certification Central completed all program approval requirements and last March received ESPB approval as the first in state alternative program, offering a behavior intervention specialist endorsement as well as approval to offer special education (see enclosed letter of approval).

The addition of just two words “special education” greatly alters the conversation around American Board licensure. This addition is giving “permission” to take a test to “qualify” to work with our highest need students with no requirement for field experiences where individuals experience the IEP meetings they will soon be leading. They are not experiencing team teaching, working with a paraprofessional, seeing multiple interventions modeled by an expert, writing an IEP, special education law, or classroom management, often an increased challenge for special education teachers. Perhaps only individuals who already have knowledge of special education in a related 4-year degree would seek out this test. A white paper released by the Fordham Institute on Sunday states “an uncontroversial and powerful element of NCLB was that students deserved to be taught by someone certified in their field. In practice, special education students have been exempt from this common-sense reform and in many districts a student with an IEP is far likelier to get extra help in reading, math or other from an untrained paraprofessional, rather than from a certified teacher, Students with disabilities deserve highly skilled and trained teachers”.

It is no secret there is a shortage of special education teachers in our state and nation. ESPB currently has several pathways for already licensed teachers to teach special education: a plan on

file, which is additional coursework, and taking the Praxis test. The additional of special education to the list of American Board options may indeed increase the number of teachers, but I cannot answer the question regarding consequences, either intended or unintended.

The question at hand is whose responsibility is it to provide relief for the shortage? Rarely does lowering the standards accomplish the intended outcome; yet if those who missed their calling to become a special education teacher and are gifted in this area take the test, then it is a win for all. Last session ESPB testified in opposition to the American Board alternative programs, yet we have seen American Board as well as Certification Central filling a need in our state. The two-word addition describes our most vulnerable students, thus the conflict of “doing what is best for kids”, an ESPB non-negotiable, and removing potential barriers for those who may make excellent teachers leaves my testimony presented as neutral.

This concludes my testimony and I will answer any questions.

American Board 2019-2020 - 5 Total

Teacher	License #	Administrator	Location	Content
Lynette Silbernagel	428368	Calvin Dean	South Heart	Science
Sonja Tinjum	425637	John Gruenberg	Powers Lake	Elementary
Brandy Flegel	428477	Steven Guglich	Missouri Ridge MS (Williston)	Elementary
Tabitha Schneider	423643			Elementary
Amy Jacobs	425486			Elementary

New 2020-21 American Board - 12 New

Teacher	License #	Content
Jared Obering	429663	History
Amanda Richardson	423342	Elementary
Mandy Cleem	427502	Elementary
Kallie Knutson	423697	Elementary
Lee Jacobson	424902	Science
Kortney Arnold	429952	History
Lester (Jay) Reinke	419352	English
Todd Selle	421752	Math
Shawn Alvarez	422794	Elementary
Laura Mastel	427854	Science
Angela Eckelberg	428656	Elementary
Shane Wetzel	426395	Biology

American Board Summary: 5 + 12 = 17 Total

March 30, 2020

TO: Dr. Katherine Terras, Certification Central

FROM: Dr. Rebecca Pitkin, ESPB Executive Director

Congratulations! At the March 26, 2020 Program Approval Committee meeting, the committee motioned unanimously to approve both the Behavior Intervention Specialist Special Education Endorsement program of study and the Certification Central Preparation of Special Education teachers request. Congratulations on being the first North Dakota alternative licensure program.

We look forward to seeing how both the endorsement and the Special Education program are utilized. Thank you for your work on these and your continued efforts to prepare teachers with excellence, to benefit our North Dakota children.

Please contact me with any questions.

Respectfully,



Becky Pitkin