

Written Testimony: SB 2332

Good Morning, Chairman Schaible and Senate Education Committee,

For the record, my name is Jaylia Prussing, and I am testifying on behalf of the North Dakota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (NDACTE) Special Education Ad Hoc. Comprised of former special education teachers now serving as faculty preparing future special education teachers, the NDACTE Special Education Ad Hoc recognizes the need for innovative ideas and incentives to produce more special education teachers. However, our experiences and feedback provided to us by administrators, current professionals, and our graduates do not support reducing the standards to become a special education professional. **We oppose SB 2332, subsection 7c, as it relates to special education. More specifically, providing a means for an individual with any 4-year degree to test into the profession of special education through an alternative certification program that does not meet North Dakota's approval standards and requirements.**

IDEA 2004, teacher licensing bodies, national education associations, and other organizations dedicated to improved educational outcomes recognize special education professionals' need to hold a specialized knowledge and skill set that transcends general education teachers' knowledge. As it stands in North Dakota, candidates may enter the field without any field experience, coursework in methodology, or assessment by completing a special education minor at the undergraduate level or through an alternative path already offered by the state of North Dakota. Professionals entering into special education employment through these minimized standards often express being overwhelmed, unprepared, and requiring professional development in basic skills of the profession. As Senate Bill 2332 stands, special education teacher candidates would now be eligible with potentially even less preparation.

Again, we recognize the need to address the shortage of special education teachers across the state and nationwide; however, reducing professional standards is not the answer. Reducing the standards of a special education teacher suggests special education teachers need less training to serve students underperforming or unable to perform within the general education environment. Students receiving special education services and interventions by special education teachers deserve professionals capable of providing individualized instruction and support of trained professionals. In this regard, a valid argument exists to increase North Dakota's standards of the profession. To address the special education teacher shortage, we suggest a continued focus on incentives to enter the field, mentorship for new teachers, and considering options to reduce workplace stress due to high case numbers, resources, and significant student needs.

Respectfully Submitted,

NDACTE Special Education Ad Hoc