

1 SB 2012
2 Testimony in Support

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4 Chairman Nelson and members of the House Appropriations – Human Services Division
5 Committee. For the record my name is Dr. Michael McNeff – I serve as the superintendent of
6 schools in Rugby, ND. I come to you today to provide some feedback on SB 2012, more
7 specifically on the Best In Class Grant, a preschool funding stream established during the last
8 legislative session.

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10 I believe we have a unique program that we have developed over the years within Rugby, ND and
11 I'd like to share a bit about it with all of you. The Rugby Public Schools and Early Explorers Head
12 Start developed a partnership to offer pre-kindergarten services in the fall of 2014. This is a
13 universal preschool program for the community of Rugby, ND. The district provides two
14 classrooms located on the campus of the Rugby High School in the vocational arts building next
15 to the football field. The classrooms operate Monday–Thursday from 8:30 am – 3:00 pm. The two
16 classrooms are blended with children who qualify for Head Start or Pre-K slots. The goal of the
17 partnership is to target children who are at risk or have the greatest need for school readiness
18 services. Each student is screened for developmental delays and if we are at capacity we will take
19 the neediest children. The program is not first-come, first served. School district slots are reserved
20 for children who turn four by August 1st each year (the year before kindergarten). The program
21 averages around 35 students each year and is free for families and runs the length of the school
22 year.

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24 I support the expansion of early childhood education and providing high-quality preschool
25 experiences for all students across the state. Since the fall of 2014, our school district has allocated
26 a portion of our general fund budget to support a preschool experience for children ages 3-5 within
27 our community. Up to this point, we have not turned away families with four-year-old child within
28 our school district boundaries. Our school board has been extremely supportive of early childhood
29 education and has seen the payoff with increased levels of kindergarten readiness due to this
30 financial commitment. The program costs the Rugby Public School District approximately
31 \$150,000 to operate our preschool program annually. The majority of these funds come from our

1 general fund budget and we continue to find ways to ensure we ear mark funds to keep the Rugby
2 Early Learning Center operating.

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4 We are always on the lookout for additional grant opportunities to support this program to make
5 our funds stretch a little further. Fortunately for our school district and others, the state legislature
6 supported preschool funding through the Best In Class Grant Program last legislative session. We
7 were able to qualify for up to \$60,000 to support our preschool programming for our students who
8 will attend kindergarten the following year. The collaboration with the Early Explorers Head Start,
9 the Rugby Public School District, and Best In Class grant funding have helped us to continue to
10 operate a free preschool experience for all four-year-olds within the Rugby Public School District
11 boundaries.

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13 The Best In Class Grant funding has helped to fund our preschool program. It should be mentioned
14 that the funding also comes with instructional coaching and curriculum. We have been assigned
15 an instructional coach that works closely with our teaching staff at our preschool. They have been
16 extremely helpful in bringing best practices within early childhood to our preschool teacher. The
17 additional teacher support has been a wonderful addition to our program.

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19 As mentioned, our preschool experience operates four days a week, is a full-day program, and runs
20 the length of the school year. We recognize that parents lack quality childcare for their children in
21 Rugby and throughout North Dakota. Our preschool helps remove the barriers for parents by
22 aligning to a typical workday schedule and we help transport their children to daycare centers
23 within our community until they can pick them up after work. This ensures that parents have
24 minimal work schedule disruptions so they can provide for their families and also receive a high-
25 quality preschool experience.

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27 A state supported universal preschool program is needed within North Dakota. If we are to help
28 solve workforce issues in our state then we must first address childcare gaps. Funding early
29 childhood education programs like the Best In Class Grant can help provide childcare options for
30 families. We respectfully ask for an expansion of the funding for the Best In Class Grant Program,

1 our preschool program has helped improve kindergarten readiness within our community and
2 provides early intervention programming for students who need it.

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4 I ask that you provide additional financial support to the Best In Class Grant Program within SB
5 2012.