

**Testimony of Dr. Cory Steiner, Superintendent and Mackenzie Tadych,  
Director of College, Career, and Life Readiness  
Northern Cass Superintendent  
HB 1232: Support of Funding for an Appropriation within the Career and  
Technical Education Budget  
Wednesday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

Chairman Vigessa and members of the House Appropriation committee:

It is my privilege to submit testimony in support of HB 1232 for an appropriation of \$500,000 within the Career and Technical Education budget to make virtual reality career exploration available statewide through the RU Ready platform.

This letter is co-authored by Dr. Cory J. Steiner, the Superintendent of Schools at Northern Cass School District in Hunter, North Dakota and Mackenzie Tadych, Director of College, Career, and Life Readiness for the Northern Cass School District. -Northern Cass is a PK-12 district with 690 learners located 25 miles northwest of Fargo. We are an innovative school district which is in the midst of a transformation to personalized, competency-based learning.

The issues in education are profound, but more importantly, they are urgent. The structure and function of our schools today must change to meet the needs of a world which is changing at an exponential rate. Every educational system is designed to get the results it gets. Our system is no exception. It is getting the educational results it is supposed to get. -Unfortunately, what is being asked of schools has changed dramatically since the design of the system. In schools, we have been tasked to prepare learners to be productive members of society. We have been asked to prepare learners for college, career, and military. -We are asked to prepare learners of today for jobs that don't exist while also making sure learners have the skills for jobs in the workplace now.- We must develop academic, social, and emotional skills while developing long-lasting relationships in a safe environment. -In other words, we must prepare learners to be choice ready for the future. The list of important things to do and accomplish is never-ending and constantly expanding.

To address workforce shortages, schools must increase opportunities for career exploration and skill development. -Career exploration, however, it is not done with fidelity across our state due to a lack of resources. Barriers preventing access to career exploration are time, financial, safety, and perhaps the most significant barrier for a majority of schools is one of distance. -One effective solution we have

implemented across all grade levels is CareerViewXR, a career exploration platform built by North Dakota company, Be More Colorful.

Our district of 690 students shares access to 4 virtual reality headsets and 2 traveling carts across high school, middle school, and elementary levels to utilize in their classes along with one headset set up in the media center for learners to use at their convenience. The virtual experiences have opened learners' eyes to careers they did not know existed as well as created interest and a deeper understanding of career opportunities.

VR career experiences allow learners to see the career first-hand and opens doors to connecting them to real professionals in the community which leads to a deeper level of understanding. Through HB 1232, learners will have an opportunity no matter the school they attend to be exposed to authentic career exploration at all levels across the state. This appropriation is about equity and accessibility of career exposure for all North Dakota learners.

As part of this testimony, we want to share some of the reflections from our learners.

A senior learner said, "I think that the VR job shadows are a great opportunity for students that may not be able to actually shadow a career they are interested in. The VR job shadows allow for students to explore career choices if they are not sure about what they want to go into. By having the virtual aspect, the job shadows are more personal and real-life than just watching video about what the workers in those fields actually do."

Another senior said, "'It is pretty neat how I could be out on a wind turbine and back in school in seconds.'"

Finally, a sophomore stated, "It was surreal, thinking I could just witness a day-in-the-life of my possible future career. I wish I had more experience with it, or had access to it earlier, because knowing for sure what kind of things I'd do in so many different careers would help me figure out what I wanted to do so much quicker."

The impact this is having on our learners is significant and we can only imagine the impact it could have if every learner in our state had access to these authentic experiences.

We understand the financial commitment for this aspect of the bill is significant. However, we know first-hand that the value of implementing VR in our schools is exponentially greater than the costs incurred. By supporting funding for this initiative, the legislature will begin addressing the workforce shortage by investing in our PK-12 schools and learners. We ask for a 'do pass' on HB 1232 and further support for this appropriation.

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