

Mr Chairman and members of the house education committee,

My name is Lynn Carlson of rural Cooperstown. I live in District 29, in the Finley-Sharon school district. In June, I had the honor of being elected to serve on the school board for Finley-Sharon, the school that I graduated from and hold very dear to my heart. I'm here today about my opposition to HB 1251 and the negative effects that I believe this bill would have on not just my school district and community, but districts and communities across the state of North Dakota.

I would like to start by saying that as a new school board member, the last 6-7 months have been eye-opening on many fronts, but one that jumps to the top of the list is how important our administration, and especially our superintendent, is to the school. The work that our superintendent does on a day to day basis certainly goes unnoticed to those who aren't intimately familiar with the school, but that certainly doesn't mean that the work isn't vitally important. In many schools across the state, Superintendents wear multiple hats- for example, our superintendent is also elementary principal and IT coordinator, along with being the coordinator/director for several other programs. Each unique situation requires a unique compensation for a superintendent.

One very noteworthy downside of this bill is the loss of local control. If this bill were to pass, and we had to partner with AT LEAST one other district, potentially two or three, wouldn't that lessen the school boards authority? For example, if we were to then be paying our superintendent only 20% of their salary, wouldn't it stand to reason that their priorities would lie elsewhere? When patrons or parents currently come up to me with their concerns about something at the school, I listen and then refer them back to the superintendent who can answer their questions. What will happen when patrons and parents can't schedule a meeting with the superintendent because they are only in our building once a week, and when they are their schedule is already overflowing with the numerous meetings and tasks they hasn't been able to accomplish the rest of the week because they've been attending to another district's issues?

Something else that has gone unnoticed is how the teachers would feel about losing the superintendent from the district full time. My wife is a Special Education teacher, and she has numerous meetings with the superintendent every single week. Did you know that, by law, a member of the administration has to be present at every single parent meeting of hers to discuss student Individualized Education Programs? Before Christmas, I had a veteran teacher tell me, unsolicited, about how big of a difference having competent administration in the building has made in her career. It makes me think- Would teachers view teaching at a district without a full-time superintendent as a negative? I certainly don't speak for the teachers, but based on my conversations, I would say most definitely. So who will hurt the most if we are unable to fill out a staff of qualified, competent teachers? The answer is, of course, the students.

There are many ways in which we can save money in the state budget, or to be more frugal with the funds that we do have available. However, I can unequivocally say that this bill is NOT one of those ways.

I think in closing; I would ask you to think about who HB 1251 is supposed to be helping- school districts to save money. However, many of us here today are from both large and small districts, and we are pleading with you to listen to us:

HB 1251 is not something that we asked for.

HB 1251 is not something that we want.

I promise you that those of us involved in education in North Dakota have the best interests of our students in mind, so please heed our words. Thank you for taking the time to listen to my feelings about HB 1251, and I urge you to vote no.

Lynn Carlson  
Finley-Sharon School District Board Member