

Chairman Heinert and Committee Members -

I am here before you today in opposition to HB 1251. This Bill is a direct attack on local control, as well as a hit to small school districts, who are already struggling. The position of superintendent is part of the lifeblood of a school. The person in this position is essential to ensure that your school is functioning at the highest level possible. By removing local control in that decision, you are crippling the local school board from doing what is best for the learners within their buildings.

It is already extremely difficult to find quality citizens to run for school board. What will happen with the forced consolidation of superintendents? If school districts share superintendents, it will be even more difficult to fill those board positions. You will be eliminating local control and creating environments in which one district could overpower others, creating a monopoly on a superintendent's time, leaving the other school or schools without focused leadership. Who will suffer the most? The students.

Last year the Ellendale School District was selected to be part of the Be Legendary School Board Training. This state-funded training required a commitment on the school board's part, as well as administration, in order to develop goals for student outcomes, guardrails to ensure success and forward movement, as well as review of structures, teamwork development and advocacy. This training was intense, time-consuming and has created a change in culture in our school, as well as our school board meetings and our interaction and focus with administration. The state invested in this training, and we have just begun the process. An important key partner in this process is our superintendent, and his ability to connect the elementary and high school pathways, as well as ensuring that the Board is on the same page and directing funding where it is most needed to meet the needs of the students. We are already beginning to see some success in changing how we tackle the issues before us. Why are we not allowing this training and process to develop before getting our feet kicked out from under us?

Let me share with you my experience as a school board member: we have hired two superintendents in the last 5 years. I do not know why we would intentionally throw school boards into this process, let alone doing so within a hostile environment and adding in the challenge of co-oping with another district or two, and topping it all off with leaving ultimate control within the state's hands. The instability that such a proposal would create could cripple a district, especially any district (such as Ellendale) that borders another state. We would struggle to compete for quality candidates for these positions, which would also trickle down to principal positions, teachers, support staff, etc.

Our superintendent has been a member of our community for just over six months. He came into a less-than-ideal situation in which we were also in the process of hiring both elementary and high school principals. His experience allowed him to hit the ground running, and through our Be Legendary training we worked hard to create a better environment for both students and staff, as well as developing new ways in which our board can engage and ensure that we were focusing on student outcomes. He not only has been an asset to the board in creating a positive environment, but he has also stepped into many other roles to ensure that our school is functioning at as high of level as possible, whether be as a bus driver, janitor, lunch personnel or coach. I cannot imagine attempting to function and focus on the aspects that we have promised to make priority without having him as part of our team.

Again, I stand before you today in opposition of this bill. I cannot imagine the depths of the negative impact that this would have on our districts, especially our rural ones. It would definitely Be Legendary, just not in a way that would be a positive step for North Dakota and more importantly, for our students.

Sincerely,

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