

**TESTIMONY ON HB 1304  
HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**1/24/2023**

**By: Mary McCarvel-O'Connor, Director Office of Specially Designed Services  
701-328-4560**

**North Dakota Department of Public Instruction**

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Chairman Heinert and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mary McCarvel-O'Connor, and I am the Director of the Office of Specially Designed Services with the Department of Public Instruction. I am here to speak in favor of HB 1304.

In August 2022, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, Office of Specially Designed Services surveyed the 31 Special Education Unit Directors in the state regarding the number of unfilled or contracted (ex: long term subs) special education teacher positions within their special education units. Seventeen, or 55%, of the 31 Directors responded that there were 43 unfilled or contracted (ex. long term subs) throughout North Dakota.

A report titled, "ND Teacher Critical Needs and Shortage Areas 2022-2023" by a team of the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction staff and the North Dakota University Systems staff compared data for the 2022-2023 school year from Administrator Surveys and STARS data to determine Critical Need and Shortage Areas in North Dakota. By cross-referencing the data points, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction staff and the North Dakota University

Systems staff determined that Special Education was number one in the top five of Critical Need positions. Of the 1,685 licensed school-personnel position FTEs within special education in the state, 66 (3.9%) are filled by less than fully credentialed personnel with either a Plan on File or through an alternate access license and 74 (4.4%) FTE positions are entirely unfilled. In 2022-2023, ND schools statewide were short at least 140 regularly credentialed, licensed, special education personnel.

North Dakota has had a long history of special education shortages in public schools. As a result, North Dakota created fast-track programs as an attempt to get special education teachers into classrooms. The problem with fast tracking is that many of the options for doing so place teachers with very little special education knowledge into special education classrooms and create a revolving door. With a reduction in licensure has also come a reduction in the scope of practice. Underprepared special education teachers are less effective and most likely to leave the field.

While these solutions may have helped for a limited amount of time, North Dakota has seen even more shortages than in the past. HB 1304 brings about an innovative way to fast-track special education teachers into classrooms without reducing the scope of practice they need to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Through HB 1304 special education teachers will be required to

complete courses that will enable them to become fully prepared special education teachers. Not only do qualified special education teachers improve outcomes for students with disabilities, but research has shown that fully prepared special education teachers are more likely to remain in teaching than those who are not fully prepared.

Chairman Heinert and Members of the Committee, that concludes my prepared testimony, and I will stand for any questions that you may have.