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Chairman Representative Heinert and members of the House Education Committee:

I am Dr. Terry Brenner, Superintendent of the Grand Forks Public School District. I am here today providing testimony in support of HB 1349.


Our school district and the state share in the mandate of providing high-quality education to all students. For a number of reasons below, the resources required in meeting this mandate for special education students are growing; especially regarding local school districts that pay the majority share of those expenses.

The ever-evolving Federal Law - IDEA - continues to define how special education is provided in the school setting. Today, students with disabilities have many rights, and school districts are responsible for teaching these students in a manner that provides an educational benefit. Educators have a better understanding of how to teach students with disabilities. Teaching students in this way has a financial cost that school districts are responsible to meet.

In addition to regulation, the Grand Forks School District is seeing a greater percentage of its student population requiring special education services each year. The percentage of students who qualify as a student with a disability has gone from approximately 15% in 2015 to approximately 19.5% this year. For perspective, in 1990, 10% was a high threshold.

Furthermore, we are witnessing a diversity in the types of disabilities which require specialty positions and expertise. The types of disabilities that we serve have made it necessary to hire staff that has not been in traditional positions in special education. We now have three behavior facilitators and a mental health therapist to assist us with meeting the needs of students with disabilities. These people are necessary to provide comprehensive and individualized plans for our students. This is exacerbated by a more competitive-than-ever job market, and some of the positions needed to provide special education (e.g. school psychologist, speech-language pathologist) require advanced degrees. Further, and something I'd like to infinitely highlight, schools are being tasked with being clinical settings for students who, in reality, need twenty-four-seven attendant care as it relates to social, emotional, and behavioral health.

Before the holiday break and just last week, I met with three paraprofessionals who work in one of our classrooms for students with autism. While all three love their work, despite escalated behaviors that produce harmful results for them as adults, they show up each and every day. The compensation gap, however, has been magnified by the workforce shortage and market pay. Paraprofessionals such as the aforementioned make \$15-17 per hour, far short of fast-food chains at \$19 per hour. A new and adjusted weighted formula would allow us to compete with the market and retain staff who are committed to our students yet presently cannot make financial ends meet. We started the school year short 90 paraprofessionals and we have been unsuccessful in recruiting to fill a majority of those positions. You can well imagine the combination of special education teacher creativity in addressing student services all the while burning the proverbial candle at both ends.

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All of this has grown our special education budget which is shared with federal and state resources. Although shared, the local portion still carries 60% of that burden. For this reason, I am asking you to adjust the weighted daily average membership from 0.082 to 0.125 to support special education services across the state. This would share the responsibility of the service equally between state and local sources. The tables below show the current and proposed scenarios.

GFPS School Year 2020 - 2021 Special Education Expense (@ Current Rate of 0.082)			
Funding Source	Expense in Dollars	Percentage	Percentage of Non-Federal Sources
State	\$6,174,121.21	33%	33%
Local	\$12,707,813.59	60%	67%
Federal	\$2,359,737.79	11%	
Total	\$21,241,672.59		

GFPS School Year 2020 - 2021 Special Education Expense (@ Proposed Rate of 0.125)			
Funding Source	Expense in Dollars	Percentage	Percentage of Non-Federal Sources
State	\$9,411,770.13	44%	50%
Local	\$9,470,164.67	45%	50%
Federal	\$2,359,737.79	11%	
Total	\$21,241,672.59		

Within the last two school years, we have undergone a \$4 million budget reduction exercise which is just short of the special education funding gap we have experienced.

I laud and thank you for introducing HB 1349 and I am here supporting the bill.



Superintendent Dr. Terry Brenner
 Grand Forks and Grand Forks Air Force Base Public School Districts