

HB 1386
Chairman Heinert
House Education Committee
February 7th, 2023

Good morning. Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, for the record, my name is Steven Holen and I am the Superintendent of Schools for the McKenzie County Public School District #1 in Watford City. I am here to testify in support of HB 1386 and its intent to provide greater flexibility to individual school districts by allowing professional development decisions to be made at the local level and in the best interest of local students, staff, and community.

Professional development mandates currently included in NDCC are well intending and in reaction to events and circumstances prevalent during a particular legislative session. The challenge with mandates related to specific professional development topics is it can be limiting and inefficient or lack relevance for each of the approximately 170 school districts in North Dakota. Each school district has varying demographics in terms of new teachers versus veteran teachers and general retention rates. Professional development mandates do not take into account the various specific needs of an individual school district based on previous professional development offered or the actual needs of a school district related to their academic performance or general school climate. Each school district, school board, administration, and professional staff understands its needs, challenges, and opportunities to improve and grow in the educational experience offered to students. With limited school calendars and professional development opportunities, it is essential to maximize the impact of professional development days as determined in negotiated agreements and to focus on the specific areas of need for each individual school district. Mandated professional development requirements restrict the ability of a school district to meet the unique needs of its students and the individual demographics of its professional staff.

The McKenzie County Public School District #1 may have very different needs in terms of professional development compared to other North Dakota school districts. Sustained enrollment growth has brought a variety of challenges to our school district related to EL students, core curriculum, and intervention programs to address the varied academic backgrounds present with significant numbers of students migrating to our region. The ability to focus professional development efforts to specific areas of need is critical to making academic progress and providing professional staff with the resources to meet the unique challenges. Our high volume of new teachers to the profession also directs focus to specific areas of which may not be the priority for school districts with veteran professional staffs and minimal turnover rates. Each school district in North Dakota strives to meet the needs of its students on all levels and professional development is the essential tool to meet those goals. Without state mandates, school districts will continue to maximize their professional development opportunities and align them to their local school board and school administration priorities.

Quality professional development should be correlated to Cognia school improvement reviews and school district strategic planning processes. School districts will address areas such as mental health in their individual plans and as needed; the mandate of these efforts is not necessary to ensure important areas such as mental health training and identification are provided to professional educators. These efforts will take place regardless of mandates and as needed and prioritized by each school district as necessary; however, the timing and length of such training should be related to the needs and circumstances related to that particular school district and its previous history of professional development in an area.

Please consider a yes vote on HB 1386 and allow school districts the opportunity to identify and address the needs of their own students, staff and families by maximizing the limited professional development opportunities available and best meet the needs of all North Dakota students.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I will stand for any questions.