

Chairmen Heinert and members of the House Education committee,

My name is Kayla Rusten. I have had the opportunity and privilege to work at Warwick Public School for ten years. Through the state, we are identified as a CSI school. This is our second round of being identified.

I am writing you with a concern and opposition against SB 2254. I have worked at a CSI school since I earned my teaching license. I was a 3rd grade teacher and had the opportunity to grow and move into the principal position, so this is near and dear to my heart. My students, families, and colleagues have worked incredibly hard to improve our school. We have had areas improve, but there is still work to do. My concern is having the state step into a school and take control. As a CSI school, we have many check-ins with the state (we just had one in January) regarding what we are working to improve our school. We are working with our local Education Association, which is also in contact with the state, about our improvements. This alone has already helped to guide us and try new ideas. The state has worked to improve how CSI looks and check-ins work. Let's give this new system some time to work. As someone who has been through the CSI process a couple of times, the idea of taking over a school is incredibly intrusive and takes away local control. A quick google will show research from many states (and Canada) that have already tried this approach, and test scores stay the same or decline. There is nothing to prove that a state takeover improves a school.

A state takeover will hurt our families and students of North Dakota. They will lose trust in our local schools and the state. We are in a better place and continue to move forward. We need to take a look at the areas where these schools lay. Many schools serve Native American students with low socioeconomic status or areas with high immigration rates. These students have a higher poverty rate; as an educator, the research shows these students come to us with a more extensive vocabulary and knowledge gap. We have worked relentlessly to help our students close this gap and continue to do so. This is not just a school problem. This community problem is much more complex than just low test scores. Our students bring invisible baggage that they sometimes cannot carry and need help to unpack. There are not enough resources for them to get help with their traumas.

Another concern is the educator shortage continuing in the state. If this bill were implemented, why would anyone want to become an educator or work at an identified school? To know that the state could swoop in at any moment, and they could lose their job? No one would apply, and the educator shortage will continue to rise. It is asking for these schools to continue to fail.

North Dakota prides itself on giving the local government control, and within this legislation period, multiple bills have been introduced to take away local control. It is incredibly disheartening to have the people we voted for and trust make the best choices for the state turn and try to take control of our occupations and lives. Please listen to the educators in the schools that do the work. We know what is happening and work daily to improve our school, students, and families lives. As a school, we want our families and students to succeed just as much, if not more, than the state.

Thanks for listening,

Kayla Rusten
Prek-8th Grade Principal
Warwick Public School

Below is a few different data pieces showing our growth:

NWEA MAP Testing over 3 years:

Reading

2021- 16% of students proficient (Spring Scores/End of Year scores)

2022- 21% of students proficient (Spring Scores/End of Year scores)

2023- after winter testing- 25% (hoping to see more improvement by Spring and for these scores to reflect in our State testing scores)

Math

2021- 15% of students proficient (Spring Scores/End of Year scores)

2022- 19% of students proficient(Spring Scores/End of Year scores)

2023- after winter testing- 24% (hoping to see more improvement by Spring and for these scores to reflect in our State testing scores)

Attendance-Daily Attendance Percentage over 3 years

2021

Elem-81%

Middle-81%

2022

Elem- 86%

Middle- 85%

2023- most current

Elem- 88%

Middle- 86%