

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Education Committee:

Good Morning: My name is Viola LaFontaine-Slater.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding SB 2254. I will be speaking in opposition to this bill.

I currently work as the Professional Development Specialist for the Western Education Regional Cooperative, which is one of the 8 Regional Education Cooperatives in the state.

Our cooperative works with 15 schools in our region.

One of the schools I work with is Mandaree Public School District.

**Prior to working** for the Western Education Regional Cooperative, I served as school superintendent, so you might say I am a recovering superintendent. I worked as the superintendent at the Turtle Mountain Community School for 9 years and then as the Williston Public School Superintendent for 7 years and before I retired I moved to Mott/Regent and was the superintendent for 2 years.

The **reason** I share my background experience is simply to let you know that I have worked with schools that have experienced many **new challenges**.

However, the schools were **successful in goals** we established because we worked together and supported each other from the state level to the local level.

I serve the Mandaree Public School in the **capacity as the liaison** for the Mandaree school district and the Department of Public Instruction to assist, guide and support low performing schools.

The **Every Student Succeeds Act** specifies that state educational agencies, identify for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), which are the lowest-performing schools, to will **receive support from the NDDPI** and they will provide interventions for schools selected using a multifaceted approach. The **interventions include providing guidance and support** including training on requirements and opportunities, and an **NDDPI liaison to provide technical assistance**

The **NDDPI has partnered with the North Dakota Regional Education Associations (NDREAs)** to support NDDPI's implementation of comprehensive support. This partnership provides an opportunity for identified schools to receive assistance with federal requirements, which includes coaching, professional development, evidence-based instructional strategies, data-based decision making, and ongoing support to meet improvement goals using the School Renewal Process. ([School Renewal Handbook](#). They also customized training to understand the [STARS Data Reporting Platform](#) and how it can be utilized for school improvement and resource allocation.

DPI has priority points for NDDPI-sponsored opportunities, such as **Family Engagement**. I will receive training and certification in this area next week and provide this information and guidance to the school.

The CSI Grant Funding Period: **September 1, 2022 - June 30, 2025** (yearly contract with continuing renewal). Our work has **just begun**, the schools are working hard, but also smarter to increase student success and achievement.

Other requirements the school is doing include: School board and superintendent participation in the [Be Legendary School Board Institute](#) , Quarterly Claims/Status Reports on funding support, increased scrutiny of State and Federal monitoring and required reports. New educators or leaders in schools identified as Comprehensive Support and Improvement could check out the [TSI/CSI 101](#) recording that outlines TSI and CSI expectations through the fall of 2021.

In summary, allowing Senate Bill 2254 to pass will not allow the schools to exercise local control, in my professional opinion. .

The CSI schools have identified areas of insufficient performance and develop an improvement plan. The plan is being **implemented with fidelity**. There have been **numerous check points** of improvement already in the **school planning process**, as a school system, we have a Academic Success Team that meets regularly at the schools as well as formal **check points with the DPI**.

The staff who work at the school area live in the community or surrounding communities, The staff and parents have been involved in the improvement process. **We all want the best for our children.**

The administration and support staff have **accepted and welcome the help from DPI staff and administration**, but it is difficult to believe people who have never stepped foot in the school or community will have a better understanding of what needs are to make improvements in the success of the students and school community. The **written improvement plan in place now was written by people who are a part of the school community**. We are **committed to the success of**

**our students.** We are dedicated to the people we serve. We are **willing to accept guidance, suggestions and expertise from others,** but please **don't dismiss or dishonor those who give of themselves everyday to make lives better for the students we work with.**

This year is the first year in several years for which the school has **a full staff.** The school has staff turnover year after year. However the administration did not give up thinking strategically and turned to hiring teachers from other counties to fill their staff needs. This year the school hired 5 Filipino teachers to work in the classrooms and as interventionists.

The school has been under several different superintendents in the past 6-7 years. Mrs. Carolyn Bluestone coming out of retirement to help the school out and provide stable leadership.

The Mandaree school opened a **new school this year.** It is a beautiful facility that represents a respect for the local culture as a part of the architectural plan. It brings pride to the school, students, staff, and community.

The school deals with students who have experienced trauma. They have not been able to hire a school counselor. A new superintendent was hired this year.

The school is currently making changes to curriculum, adding training in instruction and assessment. They are on a 4 day school calendar. Students receive additional support on Fridays as well as Tuesday and Thursday after school, as well as many other intervention strategies and professional development opportunities for staff on these days.

Teachers and administrators have been cooperative, eager and excited to receive the support from DPI through the CSI process and liaison support. **The work being done is exceptional but changing curriculum, staffing, leadership, and instructional practices takes time. Continual coaching, support, training and professional practice of best practices is ongoing.**

I am speaking in opposition to SB2254. I have conferred with staff and administrators about the bill and we agree this bill is not a proactive way to approach our schools needs.

**Staff, families, tribal leaders, would be more than happy to meet with legislators, the state superintendent, and DPI staff to provide ideas and suggestions to address the issues at hand and make our school the best school possible.**