



**NDSBA**  
NORTH DAKOTA SCHOOL  
BOARDS ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 7128  
Bismarck ND 58507-7128  
1-800-932-8791 • (701)255-4127  
[www.ndsba.org](http://www.ndsba.org)

**SB 2254**  
**House Education | March 15, 2023**  
**Testimony of Alexis Baxley**

Good morning, Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Alexis Baxley, and I serve as the executive director of the North Dakota School Boards Association. NDSBA represents the elected school boards of all 170 public school districts and several special education units in North Dakota.

The North Dakota School Boards Association is here today in opposition to SB 2254. We all want success for all of North Dakota's students. While we are continually striving to better all student outcomes, NDSBA does not believe this bill is the right approach to do so. Instead, this bill gives significant new powers to the Department of Public Instruction that do not align with North Dakota's "local control" approach.

Each year my organization conducts a mandatory seminar for newly elected school board members. At this seminar we introduce them to NDDPI, and the superintendent often shares with them about the work her office does. We strive to impress upon these board members that NDDPI is an organization that exists to help them serve their students – not catch them in a "gotcha" moment. We believe it is important for board members to feel comfortable working with DPI and that a positive relationship is best for students. If this bill were to pass, it would be impossible to maintain that approach. DPI should exist to help districts be the best they can be, not punish them or take over.

Almost all of the schools currently receiving comprehensive support are Native American schools and/or schools with high rates of poverty. While every employee and board member in these districts does everything they can to support student outcomes, there are many challenges and factors contributing to their success or lack thereof. It is unacceptable that closure of some of these schools be on the table – forcing these students to attend school in a district further away from their home, potentially with less connection to their culture, will not have a positive impact. The decision to close or consolidate school districts should always be one that is made locally by a school board, in consultation with the students, parents, and community members it serves.

The way that we as a state calculate or determine which schools are CSI or TSI in any given year is problematic when we are talking about the changes in this bill. No matter what, there will always be a lowest-performing five percent. We do, however, understand the frustration of the Department when it comes to lack of improvement in some of these schools. If we are going to begin to give DPI further authority over these schools using additional indicators and data to guide the approach would be more acceptable

than the bill as it is currently written. SB 2254 is the opposite of local control and is unlikely to have the positive outcome it seeks without further work. NDSBA respectfully request the committee give the bill a do-not-pass recommendation. I will stand for questions.