

Chairman Heinart and Members of the House Education Committee

My name is Jeff Olson, Superintendent of Fort Totten Public School

When addressing SB 2254 in your committee please consider how it is currently written and how testimony was provided by ND DPI staff and discussion with the Senate Education Committee that they need a “hammer” for some schools. I was able to attend a meeting set up by Scott Davis for some CSI schools to meet visit with three of those who introduced the bill Senator

Beard, Senator Kreun and Representative Richter. Those legislators were up front with the frustration they were having with middle schools in their area school districts. They did not feel their local administrators and school boards were doing enough and felt this bill would help their situation. Their intent wasn't meant to be punitive, but they need to get the attention of those schools and school districts not making progress. Well, that is not how the bill reads now and I don't believe it will address the schools in their district.

My school district, Fort Totten Public School District, is a high school district located on Spirit Lake Nation. Like the vast majority of the other schools/districts on the CSI list, we are low income, property poor school district, serving Native American students, and are considered transition maximum by the ND DPI funding formula. We receive one of the lowest, if not the lowest, per weighted student payment within the State's 2021-22 foundation aid payment formula, our actual payment from the state is \$6931.44/per weighted student not \$7449 shown on the report because last year we received \$13,400 for our local general mill levy contribution not the \$114,249 deducted in the

formula. Reference: <https://www.nd.gov/dpi/sites/www/files/documents/SFO/8YearComparison.xlsx>

ND DPI 8-year comparison numbers are from row 106 columns M, N and O.

The bill states:”.... auditing and monitoring has revealed a consistent mishandling of process, reporting or funds resulting in inadequate educational services for the school district’s students and has had low-performing schools within the school district.” We operate under close ND DPI supervision, we already provide plans to ND DPI through Title funding requirements, which must be approved by them, and if we don’t spend the funds the way they approve, we are not reimbursed for them. Also, our reality of educational funding is different than most other ND districts. We rely heavily on grants to fund our education because we don’t get the same financial support from the state and local taxpayers. Thus, our budgeting and certainly our cash flow management is different. So, for a ND DPI person to come and evaluate our district through the same lens as a fully state funded property rich district is flawed.

Subgroups identified in the State’s ESSA plan are; low income, specific races, IEP, Foster care, Homeless, and English Learners. The subgroups identified are to be monitored and compared to the rest of the state or school, or district. If there is a discrepancy in student performance, interventions are to be implemented. The State’s data shows these subgroups are not achieving the achievement levels as the rest of the state (Insights.ND). The issue is our district’s whole student population is in one or more of the lowest performing subgroups in the state. The

State's plan identifies CSI as the lowest performing 5% Title I schools. So, with the expectation that these subgroups are going to perform lower it shouldn't come as any surprise extreme poverty districts, serving high Native American student populations, with elevated levels of Foster care, Homelessness and IEPs will get and remain on their "naughty list."

School districts should strive to meet their community's needs, which is why they have local elected officials. I believe the goal of not just our school, but every school is to prepare students for a fulfilling life after school. This pathway is not the same for everyone. As I mentioned earlier, we are a 9-12 school district, our school will be evaluated with the accountability frameworks, choice readiness and graduation rate. Our students will take their ND State assessment in the spring of their 10th grade year, so they will be in our school system for less than 2 years and that is all the time we have to get them to grade level. This does not give us much time if they enter our school below grade level, which most are. A high school diploma is the goal sometime thought of as a "ticket." If you do not have a ticket to get somewhere it makes life a whole lot more difficult. The high school diploma (or GED) is usually a minimum job requirement or needed for job advancement within a company. Our school provides many interventions, extended learning times and an Alternative High School program to assist our students to achieve a high school diploma. For some it takes more than 4 years, set as the exit criteria for CSI. We have had difficulty meeting the 3 consecutive years of 67% graduation rate in the 4 years. We have had better success graduating them in 5 or 6 years or the Completer rate (includes GED before 22 years old) shown on Insights.ND. In fact, our completer rate exceeded the state rate in 2020-21.

I hope you will consider my information and either vote do not pass on the bill or rewrite the bill to take away the “hammer” in the bill and direct the Superintendent of Public Instruction to work with these schools and districts to provide the direct help they need, because research shows state takeovers have not been successful.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jeff Olson, Superintendent

Jeff Olson
Superintendent
Fort Totten Public School
701-766-1400 ext 1427