

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding SB 2254. I am writing in strong opposition to this bill. As a high school instructor at the Mandaree School District, I can attest to the current growth of students' academic drive and the administration's integrity. While test scores provide the essence of student academic achievement, and consequently under the required proficiency level, the resources provided by North Dakota remain necessary for the continuation of critical programs, e.g., IXL, STAR Renaissance, Amplify Reading Program, and Envision Math.

Though my current teaching assignment at Mandaree is under two years, I am expressing my opinion regarding the recent proficiency scores. The low proficiency is NOT due to a lack of intelligence or instructional methodology. On the contrary, I found the children of the MHA Nation to be intelligent, hardworking, and strong in mind and Will (Spirit) - a credit to their ancestral people and tradition. It must be acknowledged that circumstances have impeded progress in recent years. In addition to the memory of historical abuses (boarding schools) and current poverty, COVID has wreaked havoc on the educational system. Distant learning due to COVID, as well as mortality rates in small populations, did not help students to achieve. This is not a rationalization but a cultural understanding. I have witnessed such an impact. However, not everything is bleak and lost. I also can attest to academic successes. Amid the struggles, we (Mandaree) have current students accepted to major universities and colleges. To them, as with all the youth of Mandaree, I will continue to be their advocate.

Lastly, as an anthropologist, I strongly suggest refraining from any draconian measures that could be construed as paternalism, cultural destruction, or infringing on the Rights of the MHA Nation, e.g., district annexation, school closure, and unconsented staffing. Besides the negative cultural impact, the proposed consequences would be detrimental to the students and cause undue stress to families already under duress. This is the most objectionable part of the bill. I ask the committee to reconsider this bill or, at the very least, consider the impact this would have on the people.

I stand by this testimony, as I do with the MHA Nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my objection to SB 2254.

Sincerely,

David Alexander Dominic Lukaszek, Ph.D.