



Testimony House Bill 2269 – House Education Committee

Chairman Heinert

March 14, 2023

Chair Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, for the record, my name is Dr. Alyssa Martin. I am the director of the North Dakota Center for Distance Education (CDE). I am here to support this bill and will focus my testimony today on why we believe this move is in the best interest of the schools and students we serve. I'll also provide some context on the efforts we've already been making to ensure this transition, if approved, is seamless and provide information on how CDE will be governed and operate under this new legislation.

CDE has been governed by several state agencies during its 88-year history, with each move intended to help the organization strengthen aspects of services or its overall operations. CDE is currently under the Department of Career and Technical Education (CTE), where it was moved in 2019 with the aim of CDE enhancing its CTE courses and identifying ways to partner with local CTE Centers. Then, in 2020, a pandemic hit. CDE shifted its focus to providing virtual education to nearly every school district in the state, adding a full elementary curriculum as part of the process and tipping the CDE course portfolio from 47% core courses, 3% electives, and 50% CTE courses to 55% core courses, 13% electives and fine arts, and 32% CTE courses. More recently, CDE has also been engaged in future planning and decided to focus on growth in our elementary and diploma programs, improving course quality through moving to standards-based learning and helping students become choice ready through efforts such as expanding our dual credit courses. These changes in our portfolio of course offerings and our goals for the next biennium align closely with DPI's mission and goals. Upon introduction of this bill, CDE also checked with one of its national affiliate organizations, the Digital Learning Collaborative, on which state agency typically governs state-funded virtual schools in other states, finding that departments of education govern the vast majority. It's for these reasons that CDE, though it strongly values its relationship with CTE, believes that SB 2269 rightly moves CDE under the appropriate parent agency, the Department of Public Instruction.

To help ensure that the bill would meet the needs of all our stakeholders, CDE worked with DPI and CTE to draft amendments to this bill to ensure appropriate accountability structures are in place, to ensure the superintendent of public instruction's scope of oversight over CDE paralleled that of her supervisory authority over the Schools for the Blind and Deaf, and to help clarify terminology throughout the bill. The Senate approved those amendments, and a detailed summary of them is included with my testimony submitted to the Senate Education Committee. In addition to ensuring we had stakeholder support on the language in the bill, CDE, DPI, and CTE prepared a joint FAQ document addressing common questions we received about the transition. I have included that document with my testimony. We held virtual information sessions for CTE center directors and all the CDE employees. Director Sick and I have also been fielding emails and calls to help provide additional information on the bill. The most

frequent question asked is how the transition will impact CDE's relationship with CTE. Many of our schools enroll students in CTE courses through CDE. Our answer is this—the relationship between CTE and CDE is strong and will remain so. Director Sick and I will continue to correspond on shared interests, and he has invited me to attend his director meetings, which I plan to do. We are working on a cataloging project to ensure all the virtual CTE courses are listed online in one place. That project continues. We will look for future opportunities to collaborate and work together efficiently wherever possible. However, because CDE is a school, governed by DPI and its administrative rules on virtual education, it makes good sense for CDE to move under the agency that regulates it.

Under DPI, CDE will continue operating under a director and maintain its own staff and budget—just like School for the Deaf and School for the Blind. The Superintendent of Public Instruction oversees the director. The Board of Public School Education—a board with many members who also serve on the CTE board (CDE's current governing board)—will oversee CDE's governance. In conversations with the School for the Blind, CDE will also institute an advisory board with members vested in our operations such as students, families, members of Small Organized Schools, CTE directors, and representatives from other state agencies. This board will provide input on our planning and strategic direction based on our assessment data and other metrics we use to measure our progress and success.

Due to its changes in services and its long-term goals, CDE believes that DPI should serve as its parent state agency. This alignment will help provide the support CDE needs to continue its growth and delivery of quality online education for years to come. CDE, DPI, and CTE are working in cooperation to ensure this transition is supported by our stakeholders and positions CDE well to continue to provide quality online education to the students of this state.