

Members of the House Human Services Committee,

My name is Bethany Gehrtz and I am writing in opposition to Senate Bill 2260. As much as I would like to be speaking in front of this committee today, I am submitting my written testimony as I will be teaching in my third-grade classroom at Prairie View Elementary School in Devils Lake. This is my fifth-year teaching at Prairie View and my eleventh year teaching. It is through my commitment to my job, my students, their families, and my family that I am urging you to consider the unnecessary burden that Section 2 of Senate bill 2260 would place on educators. I would like to share my personal story in hopes that it sheds some light on why parts of this bill would be so problematic for teachers.

Devils Lake used to have two elementary schools for grades 1-4. Half of the students from our district went to each school. There were, on average, three teachers per grade level at each building. Last year, it was decided to go through with a restructuring process and bring all six of the grade level teachers into one building. We now have a building that houses grades 1 and 2 and another building that houses grades 3 and 4. While we have had the same district provided curriculum, the two “teams” of third grade teachers taught the curriculum in different ways. This lends itself to the fact that boxed curriculums are not created by teachers and there are a lot of things that need to be supplemented, created, and tweaked to best meet the needs of our students. These needs change every year based on the students we welcome into our classrooms. As teachers and professionals, we take what the curriculum provides and make it best fit our students’ learning styles.

This year has been an incredible year of collaboration between our two separate teams that have now come together as one. Every Monday we plan together for the next week because as educators know, it is best practice to adjust teaching to align with and use data driven instruction. We have meaningful discussions using our formal and informal assessment data to determine what needs reteaching or extension activities. Every week we are adjusting to our student’s needs. We meet outside of our contracted hours to do what’s best for kids. After we bring all the ideas to the table, we work together to create a plan using the best ideas. Each of us spearheads one subject area and prepares the materials that will be shared with the entire team. We make sure that we make our lessons engaging, relevant to student’s real lives, and ensure that they are adjusted to better align with the specific state standards. On average, I personally spend a minimum of 10 hours per week outside of my contract hours preparing for my students.

When I read Section 2, 1.b, I don’t see how it would be possible to have all these items prepared 7 days before an elementary class meets. In Devils Lake this school year had 6 days of in-service before the first student contact day. I would imagine this is similar to all school districts in the state. It would be impossible to expect a teacher to be ready to hand over an entire year’s worth of “reading materials; handouts; videos; presentations; digital materials; websites; online applications... questionnaires; surveys; or other written or electronic materials that have been or will be assigned, distributed, or otherwise presented physically or virtually to students in a class or course” (Section 2, 1.b of Senate Bill 2260).

Teachers are prepared every day for their students but there is no way that this amount of preparedness is feasible. While this will be a problem for every teacher, I imagine the workload for a first-year teacher or one that is new to a grade level or district would be impossible. Teachers are constantly evolving their materials and resources as they find them throughout the year. There are thousands upon thousands of resources needed throughout the year.

While I would agree with a parent’s ability to know what their children are learning, I do not believe this bill is going to make that any more likely. I cannot imagine a case where a parent would approach a teacher, principal, superintendent, or school board to request the curriculum and be denied. Our curriculum is easily accessible to anyone who requests it. Forcing teachers to have every single thing they will use seven days before the start of the school year ties teacher’s hands in creating the best learning environment for their

children. It doesn't allow for flexibility to adjust, skip over things students have already mastered or provide enrichment or reteaching.

I would be curious to know the intention of this bill. Educators are required to follow state standards, district mandates, attend professional development requirements, pay for continuing education credits, keep licensure up to date and pass all licensing exams and requirements. We are professionals who are growing our practices every single day. It is placing an unnecessary burden on teachers, and it is not doing what is best for kids. I am going to leave you with one question: Would you be able to prepare every single thing you needed during the legislative session seven days before the session started?

I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 2260 in its current form. It is not sustainable for any teacher or student. There will be no flexibility or creativity in our classrooms because you will have our hands tied behind our backs.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Bethany Gehrtz
3rd Grade Teacher
Prairie View Elementary School
Devils Lake, North Dakota