

Hello, my name is Sarah Ricks, and I have been a resident of Dickinson, North Dakota for the past ten years. Since moving here in 2013, I have been involved with the public education system, first as a school board member and chair, then as a teacher, and now as an assistant principal. While I believe the intentions of SB2260 to be good, the implementation of this bill would result in less positive community involvement, less innovation, and additional burdens for school staff already stretched thin in the midst of teacher shortages.

The section of this bill which is most concerning is section 2,b(1) which states that parents have the right to “Review the syllabus, curriculum, and teacher training materials for each class or course that a parent's child is enrolled in at least seven days before the start of each class or course. The syllabus shall include a written description of all topics and subjects taught in a class or course, a list of all curriculum used in the class or course, the identity of all individuals providing in - person or live remote instruction in the class or course, and a description of any assemblies, guest lectures, field trips, or other educational activities that are part of the class or course;”

This section essentially requires that all decisions regarding materials, guest speakers, and educational activities are made before the school year begins for K-8 classes, or before each semester begins for 9-12 classes. Anyone who has taught knows that while teachers may spend their entire summer planning out their school year, there are always curveballs which require a teacher to adjust and adapt. While the broad knowledge and skills to be taught in any course are known before the year begins- as written in the North Dakota State standards- the how and the what of day to day are constantly in flux in response to the needs of the students and community. This bill would prevent a caring teacher, who, noticing some students are struggling to grasp algebra, would like to supplement the algebra math book with the hands on equations materials because it wasn't listed in the syllabus beforehand. This bill prevents the business owner who has newly relocated to North Dakota from presenting at career day because he wasn't listed as a guest speaker on the syllabus at the beginning of the year. This bill prevents the use of brand new high-interest books for struggling readers, acquired through a grant, to be used because those books weren't listed as materials at the beginning of the year. This bill prevents a teacher from using a better video to explain the water cycle than the one they used last year, because they came across it only two days before their water cycle lesson.

What proponents of this bill may not realize, is that there is no set materials list for a public education course, because good public school teachers are constantly refining their lessons, adjusting their plans based on student performance, and responding to the desire of their community to be involved in their school. Allow me to use a personal example to illustrate. This bill would have prevented me, as a fourth grade teacher, from taking my class to a nearby nursing home where students interviewed residents about their lives growing up. Students learned what it was like to grow up without electronics, or in some cases even running water. Students then wrote essays comparing and contrasting the experience of growing up then and now as part of a social studies unit and in order to practice informational writing skills. This was not something that was planned before the school year started. It arose out of meeting someone who worked at the nursing home at the same time I was trying to figure out how to better motivate my students in their writing efforts. Many of them were not doing well in their writing and I had identified the lack of authentic audience and purpose as a roadblock. Parents were required to sign a permission slip for the field trip- a common practice in schools. Parents volunteered to help walk students to the nursing home and supervise them while we were there. This sparked a year-long relationship between nursing home residents and 4th graders involving letter-writing, caroling, ornament and card-making, and even tears at the end of the year. What parent would not want such a positive, and community-oriented experience for their child? Yet, had this bill been in place when I taught 4th grade, it would have been impossible to implement.

In addition to stifling creativity and innovation for teachers, this bill creates a burden on schools to try and list every possibility when creating a course syllabus. Schools would need to create a syllabus so

all-encompassing as to be almost meaningless and unusable. If schools list every possible material, every possible substitute teacher who may teach the course, every possible educational video clip that might be shown, etc. then I doubt that much useful information could be gleaned by parents from such a glut of information. However, failure to list something which might make an appearance in the course and therefore could result in lawsuit according to this new legislation would inevitably lead to long and burdensome lists such as these.

Parents in North Dakota are already blessed with a great deal of local control through their elected school board officials. As someone who has lived in a few different states, the local control and small government structures of North Dakota are something I appreciate and am grateful for. Because of this local control, school board policies already protect the rights of parents to have a say in matters of safety and belief by requiring parental permission for many aspects of the educational experience. North Dakota curricular standards already provide transparency for what students are learning when they attend public schools. This bill ties the hands of educators and prevents them from doing their best in favor of doing what is written in a proscriptive document created at the beginning of each school year. It prevents public schools from adapting and changing to meet the needs of students and communities. It creates barriers to community involvement in schools. In short, please vote no on SB2260.