

Sandra Craig
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Re: SB 2260

Dear Representative:

I am a proud North Dakota educator writing today to express my concerns about SB2260. This bill will fundamentally change how teachers plan instruction, reducing our ability to respond effectively and efficiently to students in our classrooms. Removing the ability to see a need and take intuitive professional action will weigh heavily on a workforce already facing high rates of burnout and stress, resulting in an even greater exodus of high-quality teachers leaving the profession. Please do not further limit our ability to do our job.

Section 1 –prohibiting schools from using videos or surveillance without parental permission.

Schools rely on general video surveillance for a variety of reasons. In some instances, it may be necessary to provide remote instruction, remote interpretation services (as in the case of American Sign Language interpreters for students who need the service but for whom no local interpreter is available), for professional development purposes, as well as to aid with supporting or disproving conflicting student reports of what did or did not happen (on the playground, for example). Each student will see things from just one perspective and report pieces favorable to their own desired outcome. A video surveillance documentation provides an indisputable, objective, third-party view of an incident. As flawed as the system may be, it is the best we have, and to disregard the use of that technology would be ignorant.

Section 2 -parental involvement

The aim of all educators is to partner with families to maximize the learning of every student. We seek to engage families in as many ways as possible. The best ways to do that include parent-teacher conferences, family literacy nights, open houses, book fairs, read-a-thons, and other community events, not through adding bricks to the metaphorical wall that seems to have been built between school and home. This “us versus them” mentality is counterproductive.

This section would severely limit opportunities for differentiation and response to individual student needs and interests. Unlike mass producing objects in a factory, teachers are aiming to mold the future of our nation by warmly welcoming all students each fall and helping them make as many gains as possible before the end of their time together. Unfortunately, not every student arrives ready to learn, equipped with similar experiences and prepared for all that is to come. We must take time to get to know them as individuals, cultivate in them a curiosity, motivation, and desire, and for some, how to function in a group or society. Neither manners nor common sense are common in 2023!

I must stress to you that the playing field is not level! Teachers require the autonomy to adjust plans as needed, responding – sometimes moment by moment – to the needs of the students in front of them. These needs are not predictable. To ask that every possibility be planned out and provided in advance is unrealistic.

Additionally, the work hours required to prepare a syllabus, curriculum, and teacher training materials for each class at least seven days before the start of each class in addition to a written description of all topics and subjects taught in the class, a list of all curriculum used, and a description of any assemblies, guest lectures, field trips, or other educational activities that are part of the class is unfathomable, especially at the lower levels, where a single teacher would provide the instruction for all subject areas and where class periods are as short as 20 minutes. It would, sadly, eliminate the ability to say “yes” to a last-minute authentic learning opportunity! In addition, reviewing, copying, and recording all curriculum for each course offered and any teacher training materials at least three days before use of the curriculum or materials would require additional personnel.

While I know staff is willing to meet readily with any parent who asks, requiring the teacher, the principal, or other representative from the school to discuss the curriculum and teacher training materials seems to send a message to families that each of the 30 students in a classroom could possibly be receiving a completely individualized curriculum or course. By design, we are teaching students in groups/classes because time is a limited resource.

Lastly, this bill negates the professional training undergone by educators to prepare for this career. In some cases, this would result in relinquishing the ability to do what is in the best educational interest of the child, from the perspective of a trained and educated professional.

While I do believe parents should have a voice in their child’s education, I also feel that educators should be treated as the professionals they are trained and educated to be. Respect for this profession needs to be restored, and this bill is a step in the wrong direction. Yes, we are public servants, but we are already stretched incredibly thin. Teacher burnout is real. I anticipate existing teachers will quickly find an exit plan and recruiting new ones will only present additional challenges should this bill pass as written. I strongly encourage you to reconsider these portions of this bill, taking my “in the trenches” perspective into consideration.

I thank you greatly for your time!

Sincerely,

Sandra Craig