

TESTIMONY ON SB 2032
SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
February 1, 2023
By: Ann Ellefson, Director of Academic Support
On behalf of Laurie Matzke, Assistant Superintendent
North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

Chairman Bekkedahl and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ann Ellefson, Director of Academic Support with the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI). I am standing in for Laurie Matzke, Assistant State Superintendent with the NDDPI, who is unable to attend today. I am here to provide informational testimony, on behalf of the department, on Senate Bill 2032 relating to the paraprofessional-to-teacher program.

The NDDPI strongly supports this bill as it will provide the necessary funds to allow these programs to continue providing scholarships to teacher's aides and paraprofessionals currently working in our North Dakota schools to work towards and obtain a North Dakota teaching degree and help address the teacher shortage. Over the past two years, the NDDPI has funded three paraprofessional-to-teacher grants with the state's ESSER funds; however, the ESSER funds will be gone after September 30, 2024.

This program has two key priorities.

1. It targets individuals currently working in our North Dakota schools because they are more likely to remain in that school after obtaining their teaching degree.
2. It also targets individuals working as paraprofessionals or those with an associate degree allowing us to fast-track their path to becoming a teacher.

These programs allow the teacher-candidate to remain in their home community and continue to work in their school district to support themselves and their family while pursuing their teaching degree. The grant pays for their tuition and course materials. There is currently a tremendous need for these types of programs.

The teacher shortage is a pervasive problem that is affecting all states nationwide. There are approximately 9,000 teachers in North Dakota. Our most critical shortage areas include:

- Special Education K-12
- Career and Technical Education 9-12
- Counselor
- Science 9-12

The number of emergency licensure/teacher openings continues to increase across North Dakota.

- 2021-2022 school year: 497 emergency licensure/teacher openings
- 2022-2023 school year: 613 emergency licensure/teacher openings

The three paraprofessional-to-teacher programs funded with the state's ESSER funds include:

- Round One – Minot State University (awarded Fall 2020) – \$663,500
 - Focus on special education
 - Tuition fully funded
 - Currently enrolled: 108 candidates
 - Successfully completed and are now teaching in North Dakota Schools: 10 candidates
- Round Two – University of Mary (awarded Spring 2022) – \$575,000
 - Focus on general education and rural districts
 - Tuition partially funded (one-third)
 - Currently enrolled: 44 candidates
- Round Three – Valley City State University (awarded Fall 2022) – \$600,000
 - Focus on dual licensure
 - Tuition fully funded
 - Approximate Spring 2023 enrollment: 25 candidates

- Approximate Fall 2023 enrollment: 25 additional candidates

These paraprofessional-to-teacher programs provide an additional pathway for aspiring educators to become licensed teachers. The program's success is partly because these candidates are already working in a North Dakota school and invested in the community where they work.

“More than 60 percent of U.S. teachers work within 20 miles of where they went to high school.” (Greenberg Motamedi, Petrokubi, Yoon & Leong 2018)

These programs will help schools retain quality employees and fill critical positions to provide North Dakota students a high-quality education.

Chairman Bekkedahl and Members of the Committee that concludes my testimony, and I will stand for any questions you may have.