

1 HB1376– Relating to Virtual Education

2 Mandan Public Schools – Mike Bitz, Superintendent

3 Good afternoon Chairman Elkins and members of the Senate
4 Education Committee. For the record, my name is Mike Bitz. I
5 am fortunate to serve as the superintendent for Mandan Public
6 Schools. Dr. Aimee Copas had a conflict and she could not be
7 her so she asked me to cover for her. In that capacity, I am here
8 today to support HB1376 if it can be amended to address a few
9 concerns from the field. I will be brief.

10 The ND Funding Formula has a school-size factor. This factor is
11 in place because of the efficiencies associated with size. Schools
12 like Mandan are guaranteed \$10,237, per pupil. While schools
13 like Yellowstone receive an adjustment due to their size which
14 currently guarantees them over \$14,000 per pupil. We believe
15 this school-size factor adjustment is unnecessary for virtual
16 academies because the economy of scale is not a factor when
17 school are contracting with a third part. An amendment like this
18 will save the state dollars and still allow the flexibility parents want
to select the virtual option.

1 Another amendment that we feel is important is the direct
2 payment that is sent to parents enrolled in the Yellowstone Virtual
3 Academy. My understanding is that parents can receive up to
4 \$1,700 for qualified educational expenses. In other words they
5 can purchase a new MacBook Air Computer and then unenroll
6 from the school and keep the computer. - - - Mandan currently
7 operated a virtual academy, we have roughly 75 students enrolled
8 in grades 2-12 in our program. We do provide a device to all
9 students that allows them to fully participate in our program.
10 However, when the school year ends or they unenroll, the device
11 needs to be returned to the school. Adding language to this bill
12 that avoids the perception of a “kickback” to parents using state
13 dollars, seems like the right things to do. – Again this amendment
14 would not prohibit people from enrolling in a virtual academy or
15 from having a device provided to them. It would just provide
16 more accountability for state dollars by requiring the device to be
17 returned after they are no longer enrolled.

18 With these two small changes the North Dakota Council of
19 Educational Leaders could support HB1376. With that I would
20 stand for any questions.