



NDSBA
NORTH DAKOTA SCHOOL
BOARDS ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 7128
Bismarck ND 58507-7128
1-800-932-8791 • (701)255-4127
www.ndsba.org

SB 2254
Senate Education | January 24, 2023
Testimony of Alexis Baxley

Good morning, Chairman Elkin and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Alexis Baxley, and I serve as the executive director of the North Dakota School Boards Association. NDSBA represents the elected school boards of all 170 public school districts and several special education units in North Dakota.

The North Dakota School Boards Association is here today in opposition to SB 2254. We all want success for all of North Dakota's students. While we are continually striving to better all student outcomes, NDSBA does not believe this bill is the right approach to do so. Instead, this bill gives significant new powers to the Department of Public Instruction that do not align with North Dakota's "local control" approach.

Each year my organization conducts a mandatory seminar for newly elected school board members. At this seminar we introduce them to NDDPI, and the superintendent often shares with them about the work her office does. We strive to impress upon these board members that NDDPI is an organization that exists to help them serve their students – not catch them in a "gotcha" moment. We believe it is important for board members to feel comfortable working with DPI and that a positive relationship is best for students. If this bill were to pass, it would be impossible to maintain that approach. DPI should exist to help districts be the best they can be, not punish them or take over.

Additionally, the bill does not adequately define a chronically low performing district or inadequate educational supports. Much of the definitions are subjective, and this very concerning. When talking about granting powers so extreme as to force school closure, there needs to be much more specificity. Additionally, many of the schools and districts in our state that are currently considered low performing are Native American schools and/or schools with high rates of poverty. While every employee and board member in these districts does everything they can to support student outcomes, there are many challenges. It is unacceptable that closure of some of these schools be on the table – forcing these students to attend school in a district further away from their home, potentially with less connection to their culture, will not have a positive impact. The decision to close or consolidate school districts should always be one that is made locally by a school board, in consultation with the students, parents, and community members it serves.

SB 2254 is the opposite of local control and is unlikely to have the positive outcome it seeks. NDSBA respectfully request the committee give the bill a do-not-pass recommendation. I will stand for questions.