

1 HB1105 – Virtual Learning – by Dr. Jeff Fastnacht, Superintendent, Bismarck
2 Public School District.

3 I am here today, providing testimony in support of HB 1105. If I may provide a short
4 history lesson to the members of the committee. Long before my present position I
5 had the privilege of chairing the Education Technology Council (ETC). The ETC
6 was the governing board for the ND Center for Distance Education. During that time
7 I watched the NDCDE transform from a paper-pencil and packet school to one that
8 embraced online learning.

9 The NDCDE then transitioned to be led by the ND Department of Career and
10 Technical Education, which I also was part of as a member of the board and
11 eventually the president. Again, we watched the NDCDE grow and provide learning
12 opportunities to children in North Dakota and around the country. Our rural schools
13 and schools like Bismarck Public School District, whom I represent now, all
14 benefitted from the services NDCDE provided.

15 During the 2023 Legislative Session, I genuinely believe the legislature passed a bill
16 to expand NDCDE programming reasonably and responsibly to all children within
17 the great state of North Dakota. However, the rules that were desired to expand
18 access to students and families disregarded the vital role of educators in molding and
19 guiding the learning experience of our children. The guardrails that had existed in
20 many schools were abruptly disbanded, leaving open the opportunities to game the
21 system, cheat with little recourse, and put the burden of those follies on districts that
22 were already strapped to provide the same brick & mortar courses in their school
23 buildings.

1 Before this legislation, BPS allowed students to engage in virtual instruction through
2 Edgenuity or other platforms at the district's cost. Many students also engaged in
3 NDCDE coursework, but the parents paid for it. Commonly, this was for health or
4 fitness classes, which freed up students' schedules. With the change in legislation in
5 FY 2023, the district paid NDCDE \$0.00 for tuition. That increased to \$292,158.84
6 in FY 2024. This year, we have spent \$98,847 on CDE tuition as of 11/30/2024. The
7 removal of the guardrails for NDCDE has cost BPS resources that could have been
8 used for nursing, which the district cut three nurses last year, or other equally needed
9 programs.

10 I believe you have testimony submitted from Mr. Steve Madler, Principal for
11 Century High School. He is the expert on the impact of this legislation on students,
12 families, and our educators. I would ask you to strongly consider his words. I trust
13 him and his team to make sound educational decisions for our students each and
14 every day. Before the legislation, CHS and all high schools within BPS were
15 providing opportunities for students to engage with NDCDE.