

## Testimony House Bill 1105 - In Opposition

January 13, 2025

Chair Heinert, members of the committee, and fellow stakeholders:

Thank you for allowing me to provide written testimony opposing House Bill 1105. This bill seeks to amend section 15.1-07-25.4 of the North Dakota Century Code, and while well-intentioned, it risks compromising the quality and accessibility of virtual education in our state. I am Kaitlyn Allen, the Curriculum Director at the North Dakota Center for Distance Education (NDCDE), and I am writing to emphasize the importance of preserving the current policies that have successfully fostered rigorous and equitable virtual learning.

As Curriculum Director at NDCDE, I have witnessed firsthand the positive impact of virtual learning on students across diverse communities. My background includes over a decade as a classroom teacher, during which I taught students with varying needs. I have also worked as a curriculum designer, building resources to engage learners and support teachers in delivering high-quality education. These experiences have given me a deep appreciation for the challenges students and educators face and the importance of accessible, rigorous educational opportunities.

At NDCDE, we utilize vendor-provided courses that are carefully reviewed and adapted to align with North Dakota Content Standards. In addition, our team provides in-house enhancements to tailor these courses to the specific needs of our students. This ensures that every learner has access to relevant, engaging, and high-quality educational content.

**Intentional Course Design:** Every course undergoes a thorough vetting process to ensure it delivers not only academic depth but also opportunities for practical application. For instance, project-based assignments in math and science allow students to develop critical thinking skills while tackling real-world challenges.

**Student-Centered Learning:** Our virtual learning model prioritizes flexibility and personalization. Students have opportunities to work at their own pace, supported by tools like scaffolding and interactive content. In our elementary competency-based education (CBE) initiatives, students' progress is demonstrated by mastery of standards, ensuring they build a strong foundation before moving forward. This thoughtful design helps meet the diverse needs of our learners and empowers them to take ownership of their education.

**Qualified Educators:** Our courses are supported by North Dakota-certified teachers who bring a wealth of expertise and experience to their roles. These educators provide direct support to students, ensuring that virtual learning is interactive and meaningful.

Unfortunately, HB 1105 threatens to disrupt these effective practices. Specifically:

- **Barriers to Access:** The proposed changes could create new obstacles for students, particularly those in rural or underserved areas who depend on the flexibility that current virtual learning policies provide. Limiting these options diminishes opportunities for equitable access to high-quality education.
- **Inconsistent Standards:** The bill's provisions could lead to variations in how virtual education is managed across districts, weakening the accountability and consistency that are hallmarks of programs like NDCDE. A strong statewide framework is crucial to maintaining quality and ensuring all students benefit equally.

Virtual learning is not a shortcut; it is a pathway to meaningful opportunities for students. Programs like NDCDE have demonstrated their ability to provide rigorous, flexible, and effective education. Introducing policies that undermine these efforts risks harming the very students we aim to serve.

I respectfully urge the committee to vote against House Bill 1105. By preserving the current policies, we can continue to support equitable and high-quality virtual learning opportunities for all North Dakota students.

Thank you for considering this testimony. I am available to provide further information or answer questions as needed.

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Director of Curriculum

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