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3 Support for HB 1160

4

5 Good morning Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee. My
6 name is Rachel Bachmeier; I am the head principal of West Fargo High School. I am here
7 today to speak to you in support of House Bill 1160.

8 In the fall of 2022, under the direction of our teacher leadership team, West Fargo High
9 School and all West Fargo secondary schools implemented a cell phone policy
10 restricting cell phone usage during instructional times. The official language is “out-of-
11 sight and out-of-use from bell-to-bell.” Learners are allowed to access their phones in
12 between classes, during lunch, as a part of Open Campus periods, and before and after
13 school. They typically carry their phones on their person or in their backpack and are
14 building their self-restraint to ignore alerts and other notifications during class time.
15 Consequences for violating the policy escalate from a turning the phone into the office
16 for a period of time to family meetings and behavior plans. Very rarely do situations
17 escalate beyond the first consequence. Now, two and a half years into the policy’s
18 implementation, our staff regard it as both necessary and effective. In fact, on a larger
19 scale, many students have even reflected on how this policy has positively impacted
20 their educational experience at West Fargo High.

21 I firmly believe educational decisions are best made by those closest to our students-
22 particularly our teachers. However, I also acknowledge the role of our state’s legislature
23 to address issues regarding student safety and health. All anyone needs to do is read the
24 data or studies about the impacts of screen time and social media access to confirm that
25 this is a public health crisis for children. For example, a 2019 study by Twenge et al.,

1 published in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, demonstrated that adolescents who
2 spent more than three hours daily on social media were at significantly higher risk for
3 anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances. Restricting cell phone access during
4 instructional time not only enhances focus and learning but also mitigates these broader
5 health concerns. Subsequently, I support the legislature in taking this stance to restrict
6 cell phones during instructional times and within instructional spaces.

7 Research on restrictive cell phone policies during instructional times indicates
8 widespread parental support. A 2024 survey conducted by Pew Research Center found
9 that 68% of adults supported limiting cell phone use during class time, citing concerns
10 about academic distractions and the negative impact of social media on student
11 wellness. However, research indicates that support declines when policies extend to
12 prohibiting phone access throughout the entire school day, as parents often value the
13 ability to communicate with their children during emergencies or for logistical
14 purposes. In the Pew Research Study mentioned above, support for a school day ban
15 drops to 36%. A daylong cell phone ban also poses a series of significant logistical
16 hurdles practical enforcement challenges that would take energy away from other
17 valuable responsibilities.

18 When it comes to managing student cell phone use, strength comes from a unified front.
19 A single teacher, grade level, or school implementing such a policy in isolation will
20 struggle to maintain consistency and fidelity—much like a single family prohibiting a
21 child’s access to Snapchat when peers within the friend group are unrestricted. Taking a
22 stand together is far more successful and House Bill 1160 provides the school districts
23 of North Dakota the opportunity to do just that.

24 Thank you for allowing me to testify this morning. I will now stand for questions if
25 there are any at this time.