

Dear House Education Committee,

January 21, 2025

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 1172, which seeks to add the option of responsibility to the parent when families utilize NDCDE services. As a superintendent in North Dakota, I have witnessed firsthand how the current requirement can undermine the rigor and integrity of our educational system. We know from experience that virtual learning is not what is best for a large portion of our student body. I believe families and schools should work together when identifying the right educational platform for individual students.

By mandating that districts cover the costs of distance learning, the current policy inadvertently enables students to bypass traditional classroom settings and choose their teachers based on convenience rather than academic challenge. This can result in a diluted educational experience for some students, where the focus shifts from mastering rigorous content to simply fulfilling requirements in the easiest way possible.

What I have witnessed is students who choose a virtual option, regularly do so out of perceived ease. In many cases we see students come back to face-to-face learning only to be further behind academically. I also have noticed many of these students are already marginalized due to the lack of support and or adverse life experiences. The current system undermines the hard work of our in-district educators and creates disparities in the learning environment oftentimes for at-risk students.

House Bill 1172 addresses this issue by fostering accountability and encouraging students and families to make more deliberate decisions about distance learning. I understand there are times when virtual learning may be what is best for students. I can attest, because we have a virtual academy. When this occurs schools can use a screening system that engages the student, family, and teachers to make a decision that is best for the student and family.

Passing HB 1172 will also alleviate financial pressures on school districts, allowing us to redirect resources toward initiatives that enhance student learning and well-being. In rural areas, where budgets are already tight, this change is critical to sustaining and improving the quality of education we provide.

My only concern is the bill still allows for students to skirt rigor. Many online courses may use a slightly different title or context than traditional courses but be used for graduation requirements. A consideration may be to add to line 11, “if the school does not offer a similar course.”

I urge you to support House Bill 1172 for the benefit of our students, teachers, and communities. Thank you for considering this important matter.

Sincerely,



Dr. Marcus Lewton
Superintendent
Dickinson Public Schools