

**Emily G. Schaefer**

**Assistant Principal and Professional Development Coordinator**

**North Dakota Center for Distance Education.**

**HB 1172- In opposition**

Chair Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

I am here to provide testimony in opposition to HB 1172. I would like to introduce myself. I am Emily Schaefer, from Langdon, ND, originally from Walhalla, ND. I am currently the Assistant Principal and Professional Development Coordinator at NDCDE. Prior to that I was a full-time elementary teacher with NDCDE, a part-time elementary teacher with NDCDE, and before that a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher in Cavalier, ND. My roots in North Dakota are strong and my passion for the students in this state runs deep.

On behalf of the leadership team at NDCDE I want to speak on the reasons that students need access to the center for distance education other than scheduling needs or course offerings or availability in districts.

I am lucky enough to be employed by NDCDE. It was a happenstance situation where in 2020, I saw a part-time job opening for an elementary teacher. Since then, my career with NDCDE has evolved and most recently grew into a leadership role. I have seen NDCDE through major growth with the pandemic and then the legislative session of 2023. I have taught countless students who have come to online learning for different reasons. My passion and focus until recently was mainly our elementary program, but now I see first-hand the effect we have had on K-12 learners. I had families tell me they could not “thank me enough” for this option. Families and children going through illness (child or parent), moves, hardships, mental health struggles who were able to have access to a quality education through NDCDE. As of yesterday evening, we had over 15,700 enrollments for the year. Each one of those with different stories. Last year, I had a student who had severe health issues, she needed a complicated surgery and was unable to attend school or leave her house due to exposure to illness. I was able to provide her with a quality education, regardless of all those obstacles. Her parents financially could never have afforded NDCDE. They both worked multiple jobs and had medical bills to pay. If her parents had had the burden of covering the costs, I do not know what they would have done.

Sometimes we are students last option, when every teacher or building has given up or deemed them too difficult (academically, behaviorally or emotionally), they are brought to us. Parents are given hope for another way for their child to be educated. If HB 1172 passed, that choice leaves our students. Often, districts push these students to us, and we will serve that role as the educators for any student who comes to NDCDE, but that would seem quite hypocritical- giving the district choice but not the student. That would not show the student-centered education that we pride ourselves on providing here in North Dakota.

I ask you to consider opposing this bill, as it will take educational opportunities away from our North Dakota students. North Dakota strives to better the place we live, and providing access to all forms of education for our children should be a priority.

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