



North Dakota House of Representatives

STATE CAPITOL
600 EAST BOULEVARD
BISMARCK, ND 58505-0360



Representative Emily O'Brien

District 42
2029 Second Avenue North
Grand Forks, ND 58203-3311
eobrien@ndlegis.gov

COMMITTEES:

Appropriations
Appropriations - Human Resources Division

01/28/2025

House Bill 1329

House Education Committee

Chairman Heinert and Vice Chairman Schreiber-Beck,

I am Representative Emily O'Brien; I represent District 42 in Grand Forks.

Before you is House Bill 1329, the intentions of this bill is to have transparency on where the money is going and ensure more money is going into the classroom. Before you may not be the perfect bill- but I am hoping that stakeholders can come to the table to come up with solutions that are reasonable and equitable to support transparency in where the money is getting dispersed.

In North Dakota, our K-12 budget is \$2.5 Billion dollars. We have an enrollment of 115,797 students and 9,233 teachers in our public schools. While campaigning, one of the things I continued to hear was the troublingly low levels of teacher pay, paraprofessionals and aids in our classrooms.

Teachers' pays went further nearly 40 years ago than they do today due to rising inflation and flat pay. Fourth grade reading scores have not improved for more than three decades. We are asking teachers to do more in the classroom, with less. As a mom of a kindergartener, who has been begging to go to school since she was two, I want to ensure that our educators have every tool in their classroom to ensure student success.

K-12 school spending has increased 340% since 19860, even when controlling for inflation. In 1960, it took 13 students to pay a teacher's salary. Today it only takes four. So, where does the money go?

Education spending transparency allows parents, school boards, and taxpayers to stand up to unaccountable bureaucracies that waste money and fail to educate children. By creating a window into each purpose that a

school makes, states empower parents to advocate for wasting less and putting more money into higher teacher pay and other research-backed solutions that are proven to improve student learning outcomes.

The increased number of administrators, support staff, and instructional aids - please do not get me wrong, these people are important to the operations of our schools. But this increase has not improved student learning outcomes - and has made it nearly impossible to increase pay that would attract and retain more high-quality teachers. Publishing school-by-school information will help ensure that taxpayers know how their money is being spent - and can hold schools accountable.

Working together, we can set up a public checkbook portal - or add to our Office of Management and Budget Transparency Checkbook Portal for local schools to publish detailed information about every dollar that is being spent.

Local officials, parents, and members of the public would have immediate access to the information on how every dollar is spent, whether an administrator's salary, office supplies, or new curricula.

This policy can be even more effective when paired with mandatory training for superintendents, principals, and school board members so that they understand the information and what actions they can take when they find something concerning.

When communities come together, armed with facts about how public-school dollars are spent, parents can hold schools accountable and advocate for proven strategies that improve student outcomes and compensate teachers fairly.

Since we have the OMB Transparency Checkbook for state expenditures - we can strike on page 1, line 19. "A budget unit under section 54-44.1-04". This piece would indicate every agency that is part of the state budget process would be included. This is a duplication of 54-44.1-18, which requires OMB to maintain a searchable database of state expenditures.

That concludes my testimony. Thank you, Chairman Heinert and members of the committee.