

1 HB 1369 – Weighted Average Daily Membership – by Dr. Jeff Fastnacht,
2 Superintendent, Bismarck Public School District.

3 I wish to support HB 1369 and applaud the efforts to provide substantial financial
4 support to your public schools to ensure every public school child in the great state
5 of North Dakota is provided the educators, programs, and services they need to be
6 Choice Ready, graduate, and succeed.

7 I could provide testimony on the overall foundation payment and a desire to see the
8 Legislature be more supportive, but I want to share some points on the formula that
9 are more precise.

10 I would like you to consider amendments to address a rapidly growing population
11 and the services they need to become productive members of our workforce. This
12 consideration is for your support of English Language learners. Bismarck Public
13 School, as of last Friday, had 645 enrolled EL students. EL students are put into
14 levels based on their proficiency, starting with Newcomer/Level 1, up to Level 6.
15 Last year, BPS saw a 73% increase in Level 1 students. This year, that increase is
16 another 47% resulting in now 170 Newcomer/Level 1 students. BPS has 100 level 2
17 students; the rest are level 3 or greater. You can see that 41% of our EL students are
18 classified as Newcomer or Beginning.

19 What does that mean for our educators and students? Level 1 students commonly
20 have little or no English skills. They come in all shapes and sizes, from kindergarten
21 to high school students. Many assume that we only need to provide translation
22 through an interpreter or electronic device and we can accommodate these children
23 while we teach them English. That may be some of our kids, but not all. We have
24 many new students who are entering our schools as Newcomers, that are not only

1 learning English but they are also learning their native language. These new students,
2 can speak their home language, but due to lack of schooling or other factors, they
3 cannot read their home language. So we are, in some cases, not only teaching these
4 children English but also providing support to learn their home language. Without
5 the ability to read their native language, even written translation becomes a
6 significant challenge.

7 What I am asking is that you consider expanding the weighting factor for EL students
8 to make Levels 1, 2, and 3 the same weight as Level 1 is today (.40). This would
9 help support the services that are being stretched in many of our districts as we
10 welcome in a more diverse workforce from around the nation.

11 My second ask for you and the committee is to consider the impact of student
12 behavioral health needs on our schools. I will not get into the stories as you have
13 heard those already, but those needs are not adequately funded as many districts
14 build robust systems of care for these students. In BPS, we have building-level
15 interventions, additional mental health staff, and ever-expanding out-of-building
16 programs such as RenewEd. Would the committee consider providing all schools
17 additional funding to address these needs within the At-Risk factor in the formula.
18 At the present time the factor is .025 and the number of students is determined by
19 the number of students between 3rd to 8th grade that receive free or reduced-price
20 meals. At risk students are not just those that receive free or reduced-price meals. In
21 addition, in a world where fewer and fewer families are even completing those
22 applications, the factor is not representing the need. Would you consider changing
23 this to a factor applied to our entire student population?

24 Thank you for considering these important aspects to the funding formula.