

House Education Committee
Sixty-ninth Legislative Assembly of North Dakota
House Bill 1494

My name is Dakota Breen, and I am writing on behalf of Dakota TESOL, a nonprofit organization and state affiliate of the national TESOL organization serving North and South Dakota. Dakota TESOL supports educators of multilingual learners by providing professional development and advocating for the improvement of educational services for multilingual learners. Additionally, I am writing as a teacher of English learners with over thirteen years of teaching experience. I am testifying in favor of House Bill 1494, with suggested amendments to strengthen the bill.

Support for House Bill 1494

I support the bill's goal of more equitably distributing weighted average daily membership (WADM) funding for English learners in K-12 schools by allocating equal funding for students at proficiency levels one, two, and three.

Proposed Amendments

1. Include Proficiency Level Four in WADM Funding

I recommend amending the bill to include students at proficiency level four in WADM funding. North Dakota K-12 schools are required to provide English language services to students at this level, as outlined in the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) exit criteria. NDDPI mandates that students must achieve a composite score of 5.0, with a minimum score of 3.5 in each language domain, to be considered English proficient. As schools are responsible for supporting students at level four, it is logical to include them in the funding model to align financial resources with service requirements.

2. Revise or Remove Language from Section K.3 of the Bill

The current payment structure in Section K.3 creates a counterproductive incentive by allocating more funding to students who remain at lower proficiency levels (Levels 1 and 2) indefinitely, without a cap on funding duration. This may unintentionally discourage timely progression to higher proficiency levels and runs counter to NDDPI's annual language growth expectations for English learners.

I propose either:

- Removing the three-year cap entirely for all proficiency levels, or
- Applying the cap consistently to all proficiency levels.

This change would better align the funding model with NDDPI's accountability measures and encourage steady, measurable language growth.

Conclusion

With the suggested amendments, House Bill 1494 would:

1. Address the disparity between state-mandated service requirements and funding allocations for English learners.
2. Ensure equitable support for students across all proficiency levels, fostering language growth and academic success.
3. Align the funding model with best practices for language acquisition, promoting progression through proficiency levels.

Thank you for considering these recommendations. I urge the committee to adopt House Bill 1494 with the proposed amendments to ensure it fully supports the needs of multilingual learners and the educators who serve them. The goal of EL programming is to help ELs reach English proficiency. This in turn benefits our state's economy by providing more of a workforce that is English proficient.

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