

**HB 1494**  
**2025 Legislative Testimony**  
**House Education Committee**

Good afternoon. Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee. For the record, my name is Steven Holen and I am the Superintendent of Schools for the McKenzie County Public School District #1 in Watford City. I am submitting a written testimony in favor of HB 1494.

The McKenzie County Public School District #1 has witnessed exponential growth in its EL population since 2010 having essentially zero students identified as EL at that time. Currently, the school district has 313 EL students of various levels and this population subgroup continues to increase each school year. The EL population in our school district, at approximately 14%, matches the levels of special education students and its impacts on the school district can be very similar in terms of resources and efforts to maintain compliance with ILP requirements. The EL department in our school district has expanded to 4/5 EL licensed teachers, 5 paraprofessionals including a liaison/translator, and will be expanding to an administration position as a Director of EL and Student Services to address the expanding needs of this population as well as the professional development and assistance required to address the academic needs of this subgroup of students. The added diversity to our school district has been welcomed in the past 15 years, however, the additional expenditures and required resources are impacting our school district budget and restricting the ability to address programming in a comprehensive and appropriate manner.

The McKenzie County Public School District #1 had 154.66 student ADMs associated with the 2024-2025 foundation aid formula and payment related to Level 1, 2 and 3 students which equated to 30.20 weighted student units and a payment of \$334,374.40. The total expenditure for the EL program will exceed \$700,000.00 this fiscal year and will get closer to \$1 million in the upcoming fiscal years. The perception of Level II and III students costing exponentially less than Level I students is false and nowhere near the proportions current in NDCC. HB 1494 provides the same weighing factor for both Level II and III students and will address the current inequity and inadequacy in the weighted factors for the Level II and III students. Level II and III students require resources and staffing of which the current weighting factors do not come close to fulfilling and are burdened with the school district and taxpayer. The weighted factors for EL students have remained unchanged for over a decade while adjustments have been made to the special education weighted factor and justifiably so. However, the EL population has become of a population to mirror the impacts of special education and warrants the adjustment to allow school districts to adequately fund EL programs without subsidizing from other programs or resources.

The EL program encompasses students and families of high quality and deserving of opportunities to succeed academically in our school systems. The challenges of overcoming language barriers can be immense and high-quality EL programs serve to provide school districts, students, and teachers with resources to provide opportunities for success and to

expand programs accordingly. HB 1494 is a step in the right direction to draw attention to EL funding and to increase outdated and inadequate weighting factors to address this growing population in North Dakota and to ensure academic progress and proficiency in comparison to their peers.

Thank you for your time and consideration of support for HB 1494.

Steven Holen