

**January 24, 2025**

**HB 1498**

**Members of the House Education Committee:**

I am writing today to voice my strong support a **DO PASS recommendation for HB 1498** which seeks to reinstate language that I believe was unintentionally omitted during the last legislative session. This bill will provide school districts, such as New Salem-Almont, with the much-needed ability to recruit qualified teachers by authorizing school boards to offer first-year signing bonuses.

Recruiting teachers, especially in rural or small school districts, has become increasingly challenging due to teacher shortages and competitive job markets. This bill provides a practical tool for school boards to attract educators who might otherwise look outside our state or choose larger districts. By allowing a signing bonus, small districts can compete more effectively while remaining fiscally responsible.

The provisions of this bill are well thought out:

1. The signing bonus would only be available to individuals who are licensed or approved by the education standards and practices board, ensuring quality candidates.
2. The bonus applies to those who were not classroom teachers in the state during the prior school year, encouraging new talent to join our schools.
3. Importantly, the bonus would be separate from any negotiated teacher contracts, ensuring the flexibility to recruit while maintaining the integrity of existing agreements and salary structures.

For many small school districts, having the authority to offer a first-year signing bonus can be the difference between filling a critical teaching vacancy or leaving classrooms without a qualified educator. This bill allows districts to address staffing needs in a way that is both responsible and impactful, ensuring that our students have the high-quality teachers they deserve.

In conclusion, I strongly urge this committee recommend a DO PASS on HB 1498. By reinstating this language, you are providing small schools with the tools they need to attract qualified teachers and, ultimately, better serve our students. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brian Christopherson

Superintendent

New Salem-Almont School District