

## **Testimony on North Dakota Student Teacher Scholarship Program**

**House Education Committee – February 4, 2025**

**Allen Burgad, Dean for the School of Education, Valley City State University**

### **Support for HB 1517**

Good morning, Chair Heinert and members of the Education Committee. My name is Allen Burgad, and I am the Dean for the School of Education at Valley City State University (VCSU). I am here to offer my full support for House Bill 1517.

Currently, VCSU is home to 521 pre-service teachers enrolled in our Teacher Education program. Of these, 170 are pursuing a degree in secondary education, while 351 are working towards a degree in elementary education. During the 2023–2024 academic year, 133 students completed their student teaching. Of those, 94 completed their student teaching in North Dakota, and 39 in other states. For the current 2024–2025 academic year, we have 157 students either completing or in the process of completing their student teaching, with 117 placed in North Dakota schools and 40 placed out of state.

I support HB 1517 for three primary reasons:

1. To address the critical teacher shortage in North Dakota,
2. To provide essential financial support for pre-service teachers to complete their degree and student teaching in North Dakota, and
3. To incentivize pre-service teachers, both in-state and out-of-state, to student teach in North Dakota.

### **Addressing the Critical Teacher Shortage**

According to recent findings from the North Dakota Teacher Retention Task Force, 61% of schools reported significant difficulty filling teacher vacancies. With over three decades of experience as a school administrator and four years serving as the Dean of the School of Education at VCSU, I understand that pre-service teachers are more likely to pursue their teaching careers in North Dakota schools when given the opportunity. A student teaching placement lasts 10–12 weeks, and once they successfully complete their placement, these pre-service teachers are available to fill urgent staffing needs as substitutes or para-educators.

### **Financial Support for Pre-Service Teachers While Student Teaching**

A majority of university students work part-time while completing their degrees, often as substitute teachers. However, student teaching is a demanding, full-time commitment that typically requires pre-service teachers to end their part-time employment in order to focus on their placement. Our teacher education program includes an

advisory committee of approximately 20 students who provide valuable feedback on how to improve our program. One of their key recommendations has been the need for financial assistance to help offset the costs of living and the loss of income during the student teaching period. I strongly believe that financial support for tuition and fees will help alleviate this burden and allow more students to successfully complete their student teaching experience.

### **Providing an Incentive to Student Teach in North Dakota Schools**

This third point ties directly to our efforts to address the teacher shortage in North Dakota. At VCSU, we offer pre-service teachers the flexibility to complete their student teaching in North Dakota or elsewhere. While some pre-service teachers choose to student teach in other states, we know that a significant number would prefer to stay in North Dakota and pursue their teaching careers here if given the right incentives. HB 1517 offers such an incentive, helping to ensure that our graduates will be better positioned to fill critical roles in North Dakota schools, including substitute teaching and para-educator positions, which are in high demand.

In conclusion, HB 1517 is a vital step in supporting North Dakota's education system by helping pre-service teachers complete their education and encouraging them to stay in-state after graduation. I strongly urge the committee to pass this bill and help address the teacher shortage while providing much-needed financial support to those entering the teaching profession.

Thank you for allowing my testimony. I will now stand for questions if there are any at this time.