

Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Aaron Schramm, and I serve as the Superintendent of Park River Area School. I am here to express my strong opposition to the proposed Education Savings Account (ESA) legislative bill HB 1540, which seeks to allocate public funding for private school students. This legislation threatens the integrity and viability of our public education system in North Dakota, and I urge you to oppose it.

Public schools serve as the foundation of our communities, ensuring that every child—regardless of background, ability, or socioeconomic status—receives a quality education. Our commitment is to provide equitable learning opportunities to all students. This proposed ESA bill undermines that principle by diverting crucial public funds away from our schools and favoring private institutions.

One of the most concerning aspects of this bill is its funding model, which grants public financial resources per student to those attending private schools without a similar opportunity for those enrolled in public schools. Public schools are already facing budgetary constraints due to inflation, increasing operational costs, and growing student needs. Providing additional funding to private schools at the expense of public education only exacerbates these challenges, leading to larger class sizes, reduced academic programming, and fewer support services for students who need them most.

Furthermore, private schools are not held to the same accountability and transparency standards as public schools. Unlike public institutions, which adhere to rigorous oversight regarding curriculum, assessment, and inclusion policies, private schools have discretion over admissions, instructional methods, and financial practices. Public tax dollars should not be funneled into institutions that are not required to serve all students equitably or demonstrate measurable educational outcomes.

The ESA proposal also raises concerns regarding rural education. Schools like Park River Area School serve as the backbone of their communities, providing not only education but also essential services such as transportation, special education, and extracurricular activities. Shifting taxpayer dollars to private schools, which are often concentrated in urban centers, risks widening the education gap for rural students, leaving them with fewer resources and diminished opportunities.

The best way to improve education in North Dakota is not by redirecting funds away from public schools but by strengthening our investment in them. If the goal is to empower families with more educational choices, we must ensure that public schools have the resources necessary to provide high-quality instruction and support tailored to the needs of all students.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to oppose the ESA legislative bill 1540. Public education is a public good, and it must remain a top priority for the future of our state and our students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Aaron Schramm
Superintendent, Park River Area School