

Testimony in Support of HB 1553
HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL STUDENTS
2/10/25
10:00am Education Committee Hearing
Coteau AB

Chairman Heinert and members of the Education Committee. My name is Amy Heuer, Co-Executive Director for the North Dakota Society of Health and Physical Educators (ND SHAPE), a volunteer with the American Heart Association, and a recently retired Middle School Health and Physical Education Teacher. I am here to provide testimony and support for HB 1553.

When I started teaching health and physical education 25 years ago, it was to the alarming news from the National Institute of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), that my daughters' generation would be the first generation to not outlive their parents. They would be the first generation whose life expectancy was shorter than their parents. At the time it was attributed to low activity levels and what was referred to as overeating, causing record levels of childhood obesity.

In these same 25 years, as science has evolved, we have learned that it isn't the extra fatty tissue the body carries, but the damage that it does to our circulatory system, digestive organs, and the brain that is of concern. We are also learning that it is the type of ingredients in the food as much as the amount that can cause the health risk.

Here we are, 25 years later, and we still have the same warning. Our lack of substantive action has not changed the very real issue of our children's life expectancy, quality of life, and the rising cost of obesity. You will be able to read the latest stats and percentages, as well as the cost, both direct and indirect, from other's testimony in support of HB 1553.

While I don't expect Chairman Heinert and the Education Committee to solve all problems associated with childhood obesity, there is something very real that you can start to help all students in North Dakota.

I would like to share some information regarding students and hunger that several studies over the past 15 years agree on.

Students that are hungry:

- Have lower math scores, slower memory recall, poorer cognitive functioning.
- Are more likely to be hyperactive, absent, and tardy.
- Teens are more likely to be suspended from school and have difficulty relating to their peers.

Students that eat breakfast at school:

- Closer to class and test taking-perform better on standardized tests, and will have significantly higher scores in spelling, reading, and math than those that skipped breakfast.
- Have improved attendance, improved behavior, and less tardiness.
- Eating breakfast improves a child's performance on mathematical tasks, vocabulary tests, cognitive function, attention and memory.

In my many years of teaching, I have seen these results in action. One of the best tools for student engagement I had and used frequently were healthy snacks. If a student was hungry, they knew that Heuer had some healthy snacks to share. I knew that if a student was hungry, they were more likely to stop paying attention, start messing around and be a distraction to other students. I would also like to point out that it did not matter the socioeconomic level of the family as to which students would come to my room for a snack, as even those from affluent families might not have had time for breakfast.

Many conversations in education have centered around how to improve attendance, better manage disciplinary issues, and prepare our students to perform their best academically. One proven way to do this is to feed all of our students healthy breakfast and lunch.

You, Chairman Heinert and the Education Committee, have the ability to support our teachers, and the education of all students in North Dakota, by voting YES to HB 1553, ensuring every student has a nutritious breakfast and lunch. The investment we make in our students today is an investment in their future health and academic success.