

Representative Heinert and the House Education Committee,

As representatives of many small communities in our state the impact educationally and financially will be felt in your districts not immediately but over time.

There is quite a bit of rhetoric regarding the belief that funding private schools increases scores. Yet there hasn't been one conclusive study to support that stance. In each state that has supported school vouchers, education welfare, ESA, etc. The belief was that by adding competition that over time you would see increased scores. In those failing urban areas, the proponents will point to success stories of a new charter or private school posting dramatically better test scores than the nearest public school. What they fail to acknowledge is that the school that they took those students from posted lower scores since their brightest students went to the charter/private school. What the result has been in every state with a 10yr minimum impact time has been is stagnancy. If one school rises and another school falls lower, you haven't increased student outcomes. You have created a social class barrier system or increased an already existing one. Public education was meant to ensure all Students received an education that allowed them to compete in the civilian market based on their drive and inherent intellect. By creating closed school systems (Charter/Private) that can select the students they educate you are creating a system in which educational opportunities will be disproportionately divided between haves and have nots. For this to happen in its current framework is acceptable to most. Those who choose to pay the cost or do the volunteer work so their children can have the parochial or private education they want already have that option. Parents who believe that a nearby school is a better school than the one they are in can already open enroll them in that district. Parents who choose to home-school their children already have that option. All parents and guardians in every public school district already can affect their schools' outcomes by becoming involved in the process and/or running for their local board. Student choice already exists in our state in every measurable aspect.

To speak of financial relief that should be due to parents who are "choosing" a private education, I would use this paradigm. The state provides me with a road to my farm. I pay my taxes, and they do the maintenance on the road. I have a road that serves my every need of transportation. If I "choose" to pave that road to ensure I don't get rock chips on my car, tractor, or truck would it seem reasonable for me to apply for a reimbursement through the state for the expense I have incurred to have that paved road by my own free choice?

There has been much said of the low impact this will have on public funds. A 50-million-dollar initial allocation isn't a drop in the bucket and is coming from a bucket our state says is limited. If the legislature can express in detail where this funding would come from and will come from in perpetuity that would go a long way in allaying people's fears of such.

The last thing would be to propose amendments to the current SB2400 to minimize the impact to public education. If you would like I would be happy to testify to these amendments.

1. That any institution private, parochial, or charter have a cap set on its tuition that matches the state foundation raise for that year. (If the per pupil goes up 3% that any institution that accepts

public dollars can only go up the same amount) This will ensure that private institutions don't simply go up to the amount the state reimburses within a few years and the only ones who win are the private schools.

2. Any ESA amount that is eligible to a public-school student would revert to that student's district at the end of the year if the student has not utilized it through the education marketplace. (Please talk to your local school administrators about the challenges they face getting those who most need free and reduced meals in their districts to apply for it. This would unlikely be different for those families applying for and utilizing ESA marketplace education options)

Thank you for engaging in this conversation. We need deep conversations about the future of education. As these bills find their way through, please consider me a resource on how they could affect the small rural districts you represent and that students within them. I was once told that a good board member cares about what is happening in their school that year. A great school board member cares about what will be happening in their school in 20 years. That is why we should both be strongly considering the long-term impacts of any legislation that will outlive your time as a legislator and my time as a board member.

Respectfully,
Lucas Greff

Mott, ND