

Do NOT Pass - SB 2400 school ESAs/vouchers

Dear Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

I strongly urge a Do NOT Pass on SB 2400 - vouchers for private schools (ESAs).

The estimated appropriation for SB 2400 would be at least \$58,119,500 for 1 year - based on only 50% of eligible private school students applying who are at the 300% or 500% of the most recent poverty income guidelines to receive an ESA payment of \$2,000 or \$3,500. I believe the participation rate estimate is low and that the expenses would be significantly higher than projected.

The appropriations note states this is for the biennium, but it is actually only for Year 2 of the biennium. In the future the dollar amount needed to fund SB 2400 will be over \$116,000,000 per biennium, if passed, and likely higher with participation >50%.

Administrative costs of the program by DPI are estimated at \$3,000,000 but not defined clearly as to tracking applications, distribution of funds, verifying receipts of acceptable expenses, administering and summarizing student surveys, audits of funds and providing web and phone based support to parents and schools with questions.

SB 2400, if passed, would undermine public schools leading to reduced funding of our public schools in ND at a time when our schools are in need of additional funding to address shortages of teachers and staff, including bus drivers and paraprofessionals. This bill would negatively impact rural areas of ND who do not have access to a private school, within a reasonable driving distance, diverting public school tax dollars with no benefit to many rural areas of ND.

- Private schools are not required to follow the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Private schools can set their own "standards" for admission, turning away children with special needs.
- Private schools are not required to provide children with special needs any accommodations or special services.
- Test scores cannot be compared due to differences in assessment standards and outcome measures between public and private schools.

ND has excellent public schools and teachers and support staff. We need to support our public schools and not undercut their funding, ultimately to undermine them, but instead support public schools, the teachers and most importantly the students who attend our public schools. Instead of funding ESAs, the legislature should increase the per-pupil payments to public schools, currently slated to be 2% per year for the upcoming biennium, and should be increased.

If parents want to send their children to private schools, that is their school choice to fund themselves. I should not have to pay for their school choice.

I urge a Do NOT Pass on SB 2400.

Thank you.
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