



1 I am here today to advocate for the funding of our public schools in North Dakota. Our state is  
2 home to some of the best-performing schools in the nation, and yet, to be completely honest, we  
3 find ourselves under significant pressure this session.

#### 4 **A History of Funding Shortfalls**

5 In 2013, the legislature passed a new school funding formula, tying property tax relief to  
6 education funding. At the time, discussions at 3 AM acknowledged that in order to sustain  
7 quality education, per-pupil funding would need to keep pace with inflation—at a minimum of  
8 3% annually.

9 Yet, here is how the reality has unfolded over the past 12 years:

- 10 • The **average annual per-pupil increase** has been just **1.85%**, including one anomaly (a  
11 4%/4% increase), with some years seeing **0% increases**.
- 12 • **Teacher pay increases** have averaged only **1.68% per year**—significantly lower than  
13 state employees and higher education staff.
- 14 • **Consumer Price Index (CPI) increases** have been **6.5% over the same period**.
- 15 • **Transportation support** for schools has **declined from 44% to 31.8%** in the past  
16 decade.
- 17 • **Food costs have risen 31.5%**.
- 18 • **Gas prices have increased 45.7%**.

19 Despite these rising costs, we convene task forces to investigate why we are struggling with  
20 teacher recruitment and retention. The answer is clear: Teaching is one of the most demanding  
21 yet **underpaid** professions. Meanwhile, when public schools request essential funding, the  
22 conversation turns to performance concerns—yet we continue to **excel despite these financial**  
23 **constraints**.

#### 24 **The Current Proposal Falls Short**

- 25 • We are now debating a **2% / 2% increase**, which fails to meet inflationary needs.
- 26 • **Special Education (SPED) remains severely underfunded**, covering only  
27 approximately **35%** of actual costs.
- 28 • **English Learner (EL) funding legislation has died**, leaving students without adequate  
29 support.

30 At the same time, **hundreds of millions of dollars** are being proposed for **ESA and voucher**  
31 **programs**, which divert public funds away from the **93% of North Dakota students** who attend  
32 **public schools**—the only institutions that our **state constitution mandates funding for**.

#### 33 **North Dakota Schools Are Among the Best—Why Undermine Success?**

*NDCEL is the strongest unifying voice representing and supporting administrators and educational leaders in pursuit of quality education  
for all students in North Dakota.*

*Executive Director: Aimee Copas-----Government Lead and Special Projects: Kevin Hoherz*



1 North Dakota ranks **#2 in the nation in math achievement** for grades 4 and 8. And are among  
2 the top 15% in reading skills.

3 Our schools are **leading in innovation, adaptability, and student outcomes.**  
4 And yet, **some hesitate to acknowledge that our investments in public education are**  
5 **working.**

6 The national narrative may suggest failing schools—but here in North Dakota, that **is not our**  
7 **reality.** If we shift course now, the consequences may be felt for generations.

### 8 **Invest in Public Schools—Invest in North Dakota's Future**

- 9 • **Choice already exists in North Dakota.**
- 10 • **Funding choice is not required.**
- 11 • **What's at stake is the choice to uphold our commitment to public education.**

12 I urge you to **choose NO** on policies that undermine our schools. Instead, choose to **invest in our**  
13 **students, teachers, and future workforce.**

14 Thank you for your time and consideration.