



**NDSBA**  
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## **SB 2400**

### **Testimony of Amy De Kok House Education Committee March 18, 2025**

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, my name is Amy De Kok. I am the executive director of the North Dakota School Boards Association. NDSBA represents all 168 North Dakota public school districts and their governing boards. I am here to express strong opposition to SB 2400, which proposes the establishment of an Education Savings Account (ESA) program, including a private school voucher scheme. This bill represents a significant and harmful shift in the allocation of public funds, diverting scarce resources away from our public education system, which serves 93% of North Dakota's children.

#### **North Dakotans Oppose Diverting Public Dollars for Private Education**

For years, North Dakota citizens have made it clear that public dollars should not be used to fund private school tuition. The rejection of previous voucher proposals underscores the commitment of our communities to ensuring public funds remain dedicated to public education. SB 2400 disregards this stance by creating a system in which private school students receive an inequitable financial advantage—up to \$3,500 per year for tuition—while public and home-school students receive only \$500 for educational expenses.

#### **Impact on Rural Schools and Communities**

This policy disproportionately impacts rural schools and communities, which are the backbone of North Dakota. Rural school districts are already facing financial and staffing challenges, and diverting public funds to private schools—many of which are inaccessible to rural students—will exacerbate these issues. With fewer resources, rural public schools will struggle to maintain academic programs, hire quality teachers, and support students with special needs.

#### **Vouchers Do Not Save Taxpayer Money**

Additionally, the claim that private school vouchers save taxpayer money is simply untrue. States that have implemented similar voucher programs have faced multi-million dollar deficits and tax increases. Instead of producing cost savings, these programs have drained public education budgets, forcing cuts to critical services and increasing financial burdens on taxpayers. North Dakota should learn from these costly mistakes and reject this inefficient use of public funds.

## **Voucher Programs Do Not Improve Student Outcomes**

SB 2400 also fails to achieve its purported goal of improving student outcomes. Repeated studies of voucher programs across the country show that they do not result in better academic achievement. In fact, research indicates that students who use vouchers often experience declines in test scores, particularly in math.

- In [Washington DC](#), students who had been offered a voucher to attend a private school scored lower in both math and reading, in comparison to their peers who stayed in public school.
- A [voucher study in Louisiana](#) found on average, participating voucher students' performance in both reading and math dropped for three consecutive years. The Louisiana findings are significant and show declines that are the equivalent of the average math student at the 50th percentile—dropping to the 34th percentile after three years of participation in the Louisiana voucher program.
- [Researchers have studied vouchers in Ohio](#), as well. Comparing scores on the Ohio state assessment for voucher students against public school students found large negative effects for mathematics *and* for reading among the voucher students. Students using vouchers experience academic losses that are far larger than the academic gains experienced by students not using vouchers.
- [In Indiana](#), researchers found that students who used vouchers to switch from public to private schools were more likely to score less well in math, and were about the same in reading.

The focus of our education policies should be on strengthening public schools rather than diverting funds to unaccountable private institutions with no proven academic advantage.

### **SB 2400 Does Not Expand “Choice”**

Furthermore, despite claims that school vouchers expand “choice,” the reality is that they offer little meaningful choice for families. Private schools can selectively admit students, setting criteria that may exclude those with disabilities, behavioral challenges, or lower academic performance. Public schools, on the other hand, are required to serve all students, regardless of background or ability. If the goal is true educational choice, the legislature should invest in strengthening public education, including expanding resources for special education, increasing access to advanced coursework, and supporting educators.

### **SB 2400 Disproportionately Benefits Private School Students**

Finally, SB 2400 is fundamentally inequitable. By providing private school students with up to seven times the funding allocated to public and homeschool students, the bill unfairly favors a small subset of students at the expense of the vast majority. A policy that privileges private education over public education undermines the core principles of fairness and equal opportunity that define our state’s constitutionally required commitment to public schooling.

## **North Dakota Public Schools are NOT Failing**

Despite national rhetoric about failing public schools, this is not the case for North Dakota's public schools. The 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results confirm that our students rank among the top performers in the nation—a direct result of strong public schools, dedicated educators, and legislative investment.

### Mathematics Excellence:

- 8th Grade: #2 in the Nation
- 4th Grade: #3 in the Nation

### Reading Success:

- 8th Grade: #12 in the Nation
- 4th Grade: #7 in the Nation

North Dakota students also compete globally. Our 8th-grade math scores rank in the top 10 worldwide, outperforming countries like Canada and Germany. Our 4th-grade math and reading scores rival the best education systems internationally. This success doesn't happen by chance—it happens because of public investment in public schools. Rather than diverting funds to private school vouchers, we must continue strengthening the system that is already delivering outstanding results for North Dakota's students.

## **Conclusion**

I urge you to oppose SB 2400 and instead focus on policies that support and strengthen North Dakota's public education system. Our schools need more investment, not more financial diversions. Please stand with the overwhelming majority of North Dakotans who support keeping public dollars where they belong—in public schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I'd be happy to answer your questions.