

Stephanie Baumgardner
3701 N Sedona Dr.
West Fargo, ND
701-306-8577
stephbaumgardner00@gmail.com

March 16, 2024

**Concerns About HB1540 & SB 2400
Using Public Education Funds for Private Schools: Impacts and Evidence**

Honorable Chair Beard and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

As a parent of students in West Fargo Public Schools and a 3rd-grade teacher within the district, I, Stephanie Baumgardner, am writing to express my deep concerns regarding the proposal to use public education funds for private schools. I believe HB1540 would significantly and negatively impact our local public education system.

One of my primary concerns, both as a parent and an educator, is the disparity in accountability between public and private schools. Public schools in West Fargo, like those across the state, are held to strict standards, including standardized assessments, transparent financial reports, and state educational guidelines. This ensures that taxpayer money is used responsibly and effectively. In contrast, private schools often operate with greater autonomy, which can lead to less transparency in how public funds are spent. As the National Education Association (NEA) points out, voucher programs, which transfer public money to private schools, often lack proper accountability, potentially harming public trust and efficient resource use (National Education Association, "Vouchers," <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/action-center/our-issues/vouchers>).

Furthermore, moving public funds to private schools would significantly impact the fair distribution of educational opportunities within West Fargo. Our public schools are required to educate all students, regardless of their background, abilities, or beliefs. Taking resources away from these schools worsens existing inequalities, especially for students in underserved communities who rely on public education. As First Focus on Children has documented, privatizing public school funds can threaten fairness, access, and educational quality (First Focus on Children, "Privatizing Public School Funds: Threats to Equity, Access, and Educational Quality," <https://firstfocus.org/resource/privatizing-public-school-funds-threats-to-equity-access-and-educational-quality/>).

Additionally, the issue of fairness and access is further complicated by the selective admissions policies of many private schools. As a 3rd grade teacher, I see firsthand the diverse needs of our student population. Public schools, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), must provide specialized services to students with disabilities. Private schools are not always held to these standards, which could lead to the exclusion or inadequate support of vulnerable students. As Britannica explains, discrimination is a key concern when discussing school vouchers (Britannica, "School Vouchers Debate," <https://www.britannica.com/procon/school-vouchers-debate>).

Finally, using public funds for private religious schools raises constitutional questions about the separation of church and state. This principle is vital for maintaining a public education system that respects the diverse beliefs of all West Fargo students and families.

I strongly urge you to reconsider this policy, and instead focus on investing public funds in strengthening and improving our West Fargo Public Schools, which are crucial for our community.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Baumgardner
3rd Grade Teacher, West Fargo Public Schools
Parent, West Fargo Public Schools