

Dear lawmakers,

As Superintendent of the Valley-Edinburg School District, encompassing five small rural communities in the northeast corner of North Dakota, I ask that you consider the constitutionality of the many ESA bills presented to you this session.

North Dakota's Constitution is unquestionable about the use of public school funds for sectarian schools: "no money raised for the support of public schools shall be appropriated or used for the support of any sectarian school." Likewise is the constitutionality of reimbursing student families for private school tuition: "Neither the state nor any political subdivision thereof shall make any direct or indirect appropriation or payment from any public fund in aid of any sectarian school." The compulsory nature of our educational system requires our state to offer free, equitable public education to all students in our state. The issue does not lie in the creation and use of ESA's, if the amount of support is equal for all students in the state, regardless of the type of education they choose to access.

My school district is currently educating 223 students in our buildings. These 223 students come from varying socioeconomic backgrounds and were born with varying abilities and health conditions. It is our responsibility and constitutional mandate to educate each of these students, regardless of these factors. The ND Department of Public Instruction recently developed a North Dakota School Needs Rank List, in which a 1-10 scale (1=lowest need and 10=highest need) rated each school's overall level of needs based on the percentage of students with the following disadvantages: economic, free and reduced lunch counts, students with disabilities, IEP assignments, students learning English as a second language, and Native American students. Valley-Edinburg's PK-2 grade building in Hoople received an 8 ranking; Valley-Edinburg's 3-6 grade building in Crystal received a 7 ranking; and Valley-Edinburg's 7-12 grade building in Edinburg received an 8 ranking. These rankings suggest a high level of student needs that we are committed to addressing and meeting every day, because that is what we are charged to do as a public school in the state of North Dakota. Despite these needs, our district, through adequate funding, smart budgeting, and outstanding teaching, manages to exceed the state average by almost 20% in ELA achievement, by almost 20% in Math achievement, and over 20% in Science achievement in our annual state academic testing last year.

This is not easy work, and our charge changes continuously throughout the school year based on ongoing diagnoses, fluctuating enrollment, etc. Not only do we work diligently throughout the school year to provide each of these students with a Free and Appropriate Education, we also work continuously to provide enriching, supplemental programs for all of our students and school community families, because we know that great education happens when you choose to educate the WHOLE child:

- In-house Dual-Credit Biology Courses (offered to surrounding schools via ITV)
- Course planning w/ Lake Region College for high school students to earn Associate's Degrees or General Education Certificates
- High school school-to-work placements with area businesses

- Member of North Valley Career and Technical Center (offered to all 10-12 graders - marketing, agriculture, business, health care, automotive, construction, and welding)
- Extensive career exploration programs: job shadows, college visits, career exploration events (SCRUBS Camp & Manufacturing Days)
- Spanish program for all 9-12 grade students
- Competitive theater and music programs for all 7-12 grade students
- Co-curricular opportunities such as River Watch, FCCLA,
- On-site telehealth services for counseling and mental health appointments
- On-site speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychological services, and behaviorist services
- In-house Valley-Edinburg Special Education Unit
- Math and reading intervention program for all PK-12 grade students
- PK-2 grade in-house Spanish immersion program
- In-house daycare facility
- District-sponsored preschool program
- In-house Extended School Program, providing additional learning from 7AM-5:30PM for all PK-8 grade students
- Monthly interest clubs for 3-6 graders
- Tiny Titans Basketball Camp for all PK-2 graders
- Tiny Titans Cheer Camp for all PK-2 graders

These programs have all been developed as a response to our local needs and stakeholder requests. As a parent of two children currently enrolled in this school system, I am excited about the opportunities they have access to every day in our school district, on top of the excellent educational experience they receive.

These 223 public school students are the future of North Dakota's workforce and our nation's workforce. We ask that these students, as mandated by the state's constitution, receive the level of priority that they deserve.