

Milnor Public School District No. 2

530 Fifth Street | P.O. Box 369

Milnor, North Dakota 58060-0369

Phone: 701-427-5237 | Fax: 701-427-5304

www.milnor.k12.nd.us

Chris Larson, Superintendent and Activities Director

Ryan Weber, High School Principal

Theresa Wittich, Elementary Principal

1 Testimony in Support of SB 2354

2 Dr. Chris Larson
3 Superintendent, Milnor Public School
4 Senate Education Committee
5

6 February 10, 2025

7 Chairman Beard, members of the committee, my name is Chris Larson, and I serve as the
8 Superintendent of Milnor Public School. I am here today in strong support of Senate Bill 2354, which
9 ensures school districts develop a clear, locally driven policy regarding student wireless communication
10 device use.

11 A Shift in Perspective

12 Not many years ago, I was an advocate for allowing cell phones in schools. Like many educators at the
13 time, I believed that cell phones were an inevitable part of students' lives and that our role was to teach
14 them how to use these devices responsibly rather than restrict them. The philosophy was that since cell
15 phones weren't going away, we needed to embrace the technology and integrate it into the educational
16 environment.

17 However, in recent years, we have seen firsthand the challenges that unrestricted cell phone access
18 presents in our schools. We have pivoted from an open-access mindset to developing policies and
19 practices that limit cell phone use during school hours. We've done this not because we oppose
20 technology, but because we've seen the research—and the reality—in our classrooms:

- 21 • **Distraction from Learning:** Students struggle to focus when devices are within reach, even if
22 they are not actively using them.
- 23 • **Mental Health Concerns:** The rise of social media and constant digital engagement has
24 contributed to increasing levels of anxiety, depression, and cyberbullying.
- 25 • **Classroom Management Issues:** Teachers often spend more time enforcing individual phone
26 rules than focusing on instruction. A **consistent policy** is necessary for effective classroom
27 management.

28 Applauding Local Control

29 One of the greatest strengths of SB 2354 is that it maintains local control, ensuring that school boards—
30 not the state—develop policies that reflect the needs and values of their communities. Every school
31 district in North Dakota is unique, and local leaders are in the best position to determine how to balance
32 educational priorities, student well-being, and the role of technology in the classroom.

Milnor Public School District No. 2

530 Fifth Street | P.O. Box 369

Milnor, North Dakota 58060-0369

Phone: 701-427-5237 | Fax: 701-427-5304

www.milnor.k12.nd.us

Chris Larson, Superintendent and Activities Director

Ryan Weber, High School Principal

Theresa Wittich, Elementary Principal

1 This bill provides necessary guidance while leaving the details in the hands of local school boards to
2 develop policies that work best for their students, parents, and educators.

3 **Key Strengths of SB 2354**

4 ✓ **Local Decision-Making:** Each district will craft its own policy, ensuring community needs and
5 perspectives shape the guidelines.

6 ✓ **Educational Use Allowed:** Teachers may permit device use for specific learning activities.

7 ✓ **Health & Accessibility Protections:** Students who rely on devices for medical or special education
8 needs are exempt from restrictions.

9 ✓ **Stakeholder Engagement:** The bill requires districts to solicit input from parents, teachers, and
10 students—ensuring that policies reflect local values.

11 ✓ **Annual Review & Updates:** Schools will regularly evaluate their policies to align with new research
12 and evolving best practices.

13 **Conclusion**

14 At Milnor Public School, we have already begun limiting student cell phone use based on our evolving
15 understanding of their impact on learning and well-being. SB 2354 ensures that all North Dakota schools
16 take a proactive and research-based approach to managing device use while maintaining local control
17 and flexibility.

18 I strongly encourage the committee to support SB 2354 and uphold the principle that local school boards
19 are best positioned to establish policies that serve their students.

20

21 Respectfully submitted,

22

23 Dr. Chris Larson

24 Superintendent

25 Milnor Public School

26 Chris.larson@k12.nd.us