

Testimony of Dr. Cory Steiner

Northern Cass Superintendent

Senate Bill 2362

Tuesday, February 11th, 2025

Chairman Beard, Vice-Chair Lemm, and members of the committee, my name is Dr. Cory Steiner, and I am the Superintendent of the Northern Cass School District. I'm testifying in support of Senate Bill 2362 and as for a 'do pass' recommendation.

For the past 8 years, Northern Cass has engaged with Marzano High Reliability Schools (HRS). The HRS, based on 40 years of educational research, defines five progressive levels of performance that a school/district must master to become a high reliability school. It ensures all learners are proficient in key content and develop the skills necessary to graduate choice ready. Certification is a rigorous process which involves outside evaluation while ensuring high standards are met.

Many North Dakota districts are already implementing the HRS model throughout their initiatives, and many educators are already practicing research-based strategies which are ingrained in the framework. The HRS Framework provides a model for how best practices work together and provides indicators to empower districts to measure their progress against five increasing levels of reliability. HRS also provides a wealth of resources and support which make continuous improvement something that is no longer jargon but actually practice in a school/district. The levels are:



Northern Cass provides evidence to support the fact that our district has met key indicators and objectives. The process of certification is rigorous but also meaningful. It requires the district to identify leading and lagging indicators while utilizing data to inform decision-making. We have engaged more educators in HRS than we ever were able to with Cognia. Using the framework and indicators, our district has created permanent, positive, and significant impacts on achievement by synthesizing multiple complex initiatives into one system.

When we held our last Cognia accreditation visit, we utilized all the materials we had prepared for our ongoing certification as part of being a HRS district. We were recognized with distinction. When we complete our strategy maps, we utilize our strategic plan which is completely based on the HRS model. Northern Cass is a district which prides itself on being innovative. Utilizing Cognia does not align with our district's goals and objectives. Although I respect the work of Cognia as an accrediting

organization, it has become a checklist for our district to meet state requirements. It has led to duplication of effort in our district. HRS has become the foundation of our innovation and is truly about continuous improvement. It has provided our district with a relevant model for accreditation. HRS allows districts or individual schools to engage, which provides even further flexibility.

The state of North Dakota has provided a variety of pieces of legislation (HB 1478, SB 2186, and SB 2196) to encourage innovation. This is the next key piece of legislation which will now provide a full pathway to innovation. This bill would further encourage districts to innovate at a systems level and to truly engage in continuous improvement instead of 'checking a box' which has unfortunately done little to move the needle in terms of achievement in our state. As a state, we value local control. By allowing districts to utilize a different but state-approved accreditation model, you are ensuring local control while also guaranteeing every learner receives the education they deserve.

I ask you for your support of this bill and recommend a 'do pass'