



1 **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill No. 2362**

2 I stand before you today in **strong support** of Senate Bill 2362, which provides a **modernized,**  
3 **flexible, and results-driven approach** to school accreditation in North Dakota. This bill  
4 represents a significant step forward in ensuring that schools can **focus on what truly matters—**  
5 **student achievement—while eliminating unnecessary duplication and inefficiencies.**

6 Currently, our schools navigate a complex and sometimes redundant accreditation process, one  
7 that demands time, resources, and personnel while offering little in return if the system does not  
8 align with their school improvement models that is working for their school community. **We**  
9 **know that certain accreditation pathways, such as the High Reliability Schools (HRS)**  
10 **framework, have demonstrated measurable success in improving student outcomes,**  
11 **teacher effectiveness, and overall school performance.** Senate Bill 2362 acknowledges this  
12 reality by allowing schools to **select an accreditation model that best aligns with their**  
13 **instructional goals and operational needs,** rather than forcing them into a **one-size-fits-all**  
14 system.

15 By recognizing **nationally and internationally validated school improvement models,** this  
16 bill:

- 17 **✓ Eliminates redundant accreditation processes,** allowing schools to focus on **actual**  
18 **improvement rather than compliance checklists.**
- 19 **✓ Empowers schools to choose the accreditation model** that best aligns with their mission and  
20 instructional framework.
- 21 **✓ Ensures accountability** by requiring all accreditation models to meet or exceed **state**  
22 **standards for student achievement and school performance.**
- 23 **✓ Brings education stakeholders to the table—**including administrators, teachers, and school  
24 boards—to guide the accreditation process in a way that is both **practical and effective.**

25 North Dakota’s educators and administrators work tirelessly to ensure that students receive a  
26 high-quality education. **Forcing schools into outdated accreditation models that do not align**  
27 **with their improvement efforts wastes time, energy, and taxpayer dollars.** Instead, we  
28 should **trust our schools** to choose pathways that **work best for their communities** while still  
29 holding them accountable for results. For some the current accreditation model works well, for  
30 others a different model may fit their school better.

31 Senate Bill 2362 is a **commonsense approach** that removes barriers, reduces duplication, and  
32 supports schools in their mission to continuously improve. I urge this committee to support this  
33 legislation and give North Dakota’s schools the flexibility they need to **focus on excellence, not**  
34 **bureaucracy.**

35 Both **High Reliability Schools (HRS)** and **Cognia** offer school improvement and accreditation  
36 models, but they differ in their approach, flexibility, and focus. Here’s why **HRS might be a**  
37 **better choice** for many schools compared to Cognia:

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for all students in North Dakota.*

*Executive Director: Aimee Copas-----Government Lead and Special Projects: Kevin Hoherz*



## 1. HRS is Built on a Research-Based, Continuous Improvement Framework

HRS, developed by **Dr. Robert Marzano**, is based on **decades of educational research** and focuses on creating a **safe, supportive, and high-performing school environment**. Unlike Cognia, which is **primarily an accreditation organization** that evaluates compliance with broad standards, HRS is a **structured, actionable school improvement model** aimed at **real, measurable progress in student achievement**.

## 2. HRS is a Continuous Improvement Model, Not Just a Compliance Process

- **Cognia Accreditation** is largely **compliance-driven**, requiring schools to meet **preset organizational standards** that may or may not align with a school's actual instructional goals.
- **HRS focuses on progressive, evidence-based school improvement**, with schools working through **five key levels**:
  1. **Safe, Supportive, and Collaborative Culture**
  2. **Effective Teaching in Every Classroom**
  3. **Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum**
  4. **Standards-Referenced Reporting**
  5. **Competency-Based Education**

These levels **build upon each other** to create a **clear pathway for school improvement**, rather than just a check-the-box evaluation.

## 3. HRS is More Flexible and Tailored to Schools' Needs

- Cognia's accreditation process follows a **rigid, standardized framework** that may not always align with a school's strategic vision.
- **HRS allows schools to implement improvement strategies at their own pace**, ensuring that changes are **meaningful and sustainable**, rather than rushed for accreditation purposes.

## 4. HRS Offers Immediate, Actionable Feedback

- **HRS focuses on evidence-based practices** that lead to **tangible school improvement** rather than just accreditation status.
- Cognia's accreditation **typically results in a report** with **broad recommendations**, but schools may struggle with **how to translate that into day-to-day improvements**.
- In contrast, HRS includes **self-assessment tools, stakeholder surveys, and targeted strategies** that schools can immediately apply to improve instruction, leadership, and student learning.

## 5. HRS Directly Measures What Matters – Student Achievement

- Cognia's process **evaluates schools based on broad organizational effectiveness** but doesn't necessarily lead to improved student outcomes.

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- 1 • **HRS directly ties school improvement to student performance**—ensuring that schools  
2 **implement proven strategies** that lead to higher student achievement.

### 3 **6. HRS Eliminates Redundancy and Bureaucracy**

- 4 • Cognia often requires **extensive paperwork, site visits, and documentation** that can  
5 become **time-consuming and redundant**, especially for schools already using other  
6 improvement models.
- 7 • HRS is **streamlined and practical**, allowing educators to **focus on meaningful**  
8 **improvements** rather than bureaucratic requirements.

### 9 **7. HRS Aligns Better with Local and State Priorities**

- 10 • Since HRS focuses on **creating a high-performing school system** rather than just  
11 accreditation status, it **better aligns with district and state-level strategic goals**.
- 12 • Cognia is a **broad, one-size-fits-all accreditation process** that may not take into account  
13 the **unique challenges and goals of North Dakota schools**.

### 14 **Key Takeaway:**

15 For some schools, HRS is a **more effective, flexible, and research-driven model** for  
16 **continuous school improvement**, focusing on **real outcomes rather than compliance**. It  
17 eliminates duplication, **empowers schools to take ownership of their improvement journey**,  
18 and ensures that every step taken is backed by **proven strategies** that directly benefit students  
19 and educators. This is a great reason why SB 2362 is a bill that makes sense. Please vote yes.