



SCR 4019
Senate Education
Tuesday, February 11, 2025
Senator Todd Beard, Chair

Chairman Beard and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Roxane Romanick and I'm writing as a representative for Designer Genes of ND, Inc., Designer Genes represents roughly 270 individuals with Down syndrome and their families across the state. Designer Genes' mission is to strengthen opportunities for individuals with Down syndrome and those who support them to earn, learn, and belong. I am also the parent to an adult daughter with Down syndrome, who I'm proud to say has a diploma from Century High School and an associate's degree from Dakota College of Bottineau.

Designer Genes is in support of SCR 4019. We project, that outside of North Dakota students with Down syndrome being homeschooled, all other children, youth, and young adults with Down syndrome are covered by the guarantees of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and are served under Individual Education Plans. The provisions of a free and appropriate education (FAPE) and learning in a least restrictive environment (LRE) with specially designed approaches to learning and targeted adaptations mean that our students have learning opportunities available to them that older individuals with Down syndrome went without. As an organization, we are concerned about the academic achievements of our children, youth, and young adults with Down syndrome in North Dakota because we know that high expectations, highly qualified professionals, and quality instructional strategies are critical to learning.

My daughter's path to reading and math competencies stalled through middle school. I had often been told that there would come a time when her skills may just plateau because of her diagnosis. I refused to believe it, because I had seen her grow steadily, even if a bit differently. It took a new curricular approach, new professionals, and practical experience in high school to kickstart her reading, writing, and functional math use. I'm not sure she would have succeeded in her college program if this had not happened.

While we are not asking for any amendments at this time, we would like to point out two important considerations:

- 1) Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA), schools/states are allowed a 1% cap on the students who are allowed to take a statewide alternate assessment. Typically, these are the students who have the most support needs to make learning gains. Often students who have a diagnosis of Down syndrome are in this group and we want to assure that the study covers our most vulnerable learners.
- 2) In the consideration of best practices, we want to make sure that the study considers learning in the least restrictive environment as called for in IDEA. Learning within the general education curriculum means that our students with Down syndrome don't miss out on learning what everyone else learns. Our students do require significant adaptations to access information so that they can use it in everyday life, but they want to learn about things like pyramids, government, frog anatomy, etc. Also, our students become more independent, make friends, and learn about navigating the world when they are learning beside their peers.

As called for in the study language, Designer Genes would be willing to serve as a stakeholder for this important work, if and when the study is chosen.

Thank you for your time and I would answer any questions.

Roxane Romanick
Executive Director
Designer Genes of ND, Inc.
701-391-7421
info@designergenesnd.com