

Testimony of Dr. Cory Steiner
Northern Cass Superintendent
HB 1238
Senate Workforce Development Committee
Thursday, March 6th, 2025

Good morning, Chairman Wobbema and members of the committee, my name is Dr. Cory Steiner, and I am the Superintendent of the Northern Cass School District. I'm also in my second term as a representative on the Education Standards and Practices Board (ESPB). I speak in opposition to HB1238 which proposes lifetime licenses for teachers who have been teaching for 20 years instead of the 30 years currently, as required in administrative rules.

ESPB has continued to engage in conversation related to this topic since last session. Throughout these conversations, one thing has remained constant. The Board has been reluctant to change to the current 30-year license. However, the Board understand compromise is important and has reconsidered its position. The Board would ask for this committee to consider an amendment making the lifetime license available at 25 years. The board has based their decision on the following reasons:

1. ESPB needs to continue to require self-reporting on renewals. Since my time on the board, we have seen an increase in the need for special meetings to address significant concerns/issues related to the behavior of practicing educators. An educator would have a significant amount of time remaining in their career where they would not be required to self-report infractions. It would take away a check which has proven vital to ensuring learners receive the education they deserve.
2. ESPB is currently in the administrative rules process, adding specificity relating to boundary violations in the ethics section of administrative rules. The discussion on this area has been robust and done so with a sense of urgency. The removal of the checks would contradict these efforts.
3. I do not know of any 'four-year college' profession which does not require formal learning to continue throughout the entirety of their career. By not requiring further education, I believe we are conflict with the work being done in the state to lift 'up' the field of education.
4. There are many requirements for professional learning at the district level. Districts can work with educators to assist them in making these learning experiences credit-bearing and cost-efficient. This would allow for local control to be practiced.
5. We live in a world which is changing at an exponential rate. Whether it is the Science of Reading or now the Science of Math, we are learning more about learners than ever before. With that knowledge requires us to do more. Professional learning is the catalyst to change our system when necessary. I fully understand that simply offering learning does not mean there will be significant change. However, I do know nothing of significance changes without education and new learning.
6. If cost is a concern, the state of North Dakota has put into place many credits which can be earned at no cost to the educator. The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

(ND DPI) has done excellent work with the Education Hub. The various educational entities throughout the state can and should find a long-term solution for a low or no cost solution to professional learning.

There is no doubt we are facing a crisis in terms of not having enough teachers. However, we are also facing a similar crisis with librarians, school counselors, and administrators. The bill does not address those positions. If this bill is about benefitting those who work with learners in the field of education, it must include all educational careers which have requirements for continuing education.

Governor Doug Burgum engaged in a Retention and Recruitment Task Force, whose recommendations have already been part of some of the proposals and discussions during this legislative session. There was no recommendation from the committee for less professional development for teachers. Instead, multiple other recommendations for legislators to consider this session were suggested, all of which would directly benefit educators at a more impactful level.

In my opinion, I believe the intention of HB1238 is admirable. It is necessary to find ways to support teachers, especially those who commit their career to this noble field. We must find ways to ensure educators feel valued. However, I believe the unintended consequences far outweigh the potential benefits. We must continue to celebrate teaching and the field of education as not less than other fields, but equal to all other fields. I worry this bill will reinforce the negative public perception that currently exists.

I ask for this committee to recommend a 'do not pass' vote. In addition, I ask for the consideration of an amendment for a lifetime license to be issued after 25 years of service. Finally, because I believe this conversation is important, I ask you to challenge key stakeholder groups to work together to find a solution which embraces successful longevity in teaching while also maintaining the highest levels of learning and safety in our districts. Teachers are the foundation of our educational system, and we must have a comprehensive and impactful plan to support them now and in the future.