

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Sarah Ricks, I am a resident of Dickinson, North Dakota, and I am in favor of this bill. I have the privilege of working as an educator at Dickinson Middle School and I am the current chair of the Support and Innovation subcommittee of the K12 Coordination Council. To help you understand why I am in favor of this bill, I'd like to give you some context on its origins.

As the support and innovation subcommittee, we were asked to answer the question, "How can schools prepare tomorrow's workforce?" So of course, we first thought to identify the skills students will need for tomorrow's workforce. We did a literature review and conversed with experts in career and technological education. We discovered that the skills needed by students are already very much present in state-created frameworks such as the Learning Continuum, the Profile of Graduate, the Choice Ready framework, and the North Dakota Career Ready Practices. We then asked ourselves, "How can we know if students are mastering the skills they need for tomorrow's workforce?" The Learning Continuum seemed to offer an obvious answer especially because the century code allows districts to create a mastery framework aligned to the learning continuum in lieu of traditional graduation requirements. So, if schools were using a mastery framework to measure progress toward those skills, then we would know if students were prepared for the workforce, or not. However, we found that schools are not using mastery frameworks. So, we could get a general sense by looking at Choice Ready numbers, but we wouldn't be able to see skill by skill. Therefore, the next obvious question was, "Why not? Why aren't schools taking advantage of this mastery framework opportunity?"

To answer this question, we spoke with school leaders and other stakeholders, as well as individuals involved in the Personalized Learning Network. Through these conversations, we identified key elements needed to drive educational innovation in the area of personalized learning. We also identified an important barrier schools were facing. You can see these key elements in the attached infographic. We start with the first element, a reason to change. We all know we want our students to be successful in the future. Next, we need standards that define what it is we want students to learn. These are provided by the state in the form of content standards and the learning continuum. Another needed element is leadership from individuals at all levels of the educational system who are willing to push the work forward, and we have many wonderful people working in education in our state. We also need a culture of risk which previous legislatures have endeavored to encourage by opening the doors of policy to new ideas. The last element is time. We heard again and again from educational leaders that this element of time is a barrier for them in moving innovative work forward in their schools.

Teams of administrators and teacher leaders need time together to do the deep work it takes to develop a mastery framework and shape what personalized learning looks like for their school and their community. Right now, organizations in the state offer support for schools trying to do this work in the form of innovation academies and the personalized learning network. In order to take advantage of these opportunities, schools must either pull their best and brightest out of the classroom on student contact days to do this work, or they must ask their teacher-leaders to volunteer many many hours of their own time outside of the school week and school year. Neither lends itself to moving this big, important work forward in an efficient and timely manner. One requires sacrificing student experience, the other burdens teachers with an additional unpaid workload. The added challenge of a substitute teacher shortage frequently makes the option of taking a teacher out of their classroom untenable.

This bill is an effort to remove time as a barrier for schools that want to provide innovative and personalized learning for their students. The bill provides grant dollars for schools to buy time from their teacher leaders outside of their contracted days to do the heavy but impactful work needed to create and implement mastery frameworks. All mastery frameworks and implementation models created through this grant process would be required to be shared openly with other North Dakota schools- offering a supportive network and a pathway for them to follow.

This grant program has several advantages. First, it is targeted. The dollars are only to be used to develop mastery frameworks and implementation models. Because mastery frameworks are only useful in a personalized, competency-based system, this ensures that only schools that want to grow in that direction will have access to the dollars. In fact, the grant prioritizes schools that have shown they are serious about personalized learning. Second, there is no opportunity for waste. Dollars cannot be used to pay for travel or materials. This is an investment in human capital that we already have here in North Dakota working with North Dakota's students. These dollars will not be going to outside contractors or agencies. Third, accountability is built into the grant with the requirement that schools share their finished products as models to be used throughout the state. Fourth, this is low-stakes, high-reward. For \$500,000 we can support at least 20 school teams in doing high-quality work to transform educational experiences for kids across our state. If 20 schools from diverse communities with diverse educational needs can create mastery frameworks that work in their setting, then all schools will be able to see how personalized learning might work for them. In other words, this grant program offers an opportunity to systematize innovative, personalized education while still maintaining local control.

Previous state legislators and state agencies have spent years laying the groundwork for personalized, competency-based education for all students in North Dakota. This bill removes the barrier of time so that the right people can do the right work to take the next steps toward enacting that vision.

Thank you.