

Chairman Owens, Members of the Education Committee –

Good morning, my name is Eric Ripley and I serve as the Director of CTE for the Grand Forks Public Schools and Grand Forks Area Career and Technology Center. I am providing my support of HB1430 in allowing eligible students to qualify for both the North Dakota Academic and CTE scholarship.

The overarching goal of K-12 is to enable our students to be “Choice Ready” for their next step after high school, and for the vast majority of career pathways, that next step involves post-secondary education. I have worked in K-12 education for my entire 22 year career, both as an instructor and administrator. What has changed over that time is the understanding that post-secondary education or college does not automatically equate to a 4-year or advanced degree. The archaic approach to selecting the college first, then selecting a degree path that institution offers, then hoping to find an occupation that matches that level of degree has thankfully evolved to students finding the occupational pathway that interest them, then determining the degree or training required for that pathway, and then selecting a post-secondary location that provides that degree or training.

My CTE staff and I strongly believe that our CTE courses at the K-12 level are designed for a student to explore and start developing a career pathway that aligns with their individual interests and abilities. Often times, that pathway aligns with a 2-year or less degree at one of the state’s high quality technical colleges. Currently, for students that qualify for either the North Dakota Academic or CTE scholarship, the scholarship maximum amount of \$6,000 is provided one semester at a time (\$750), repeatable up to 8 semesters (a typical 4-year degree program). For the CTE student interested in pursuing an Associate Arts or Technical Degree, both of which are less than 4 years, that student ends up leaving scholarship dollars on the table and unused.

The flaw in the current scholarship program is that the payments of \$750 per semester over the course of 4 years still encourages the perspective that all student should be pursuing a 4-year degree. With the successful passing and implementation of HB1430, this provides students qualifying in both the Academic and CTE categories to be awarded both scholarships. That may still provide the unused dollars for a student pursuing less than a 4-year degree, however, it also provides them with increased, and targeted, state support for those pursuing that 2-year or less degree.

The qualifications for both categories of the scholarships differ slightly, with the Academic scholarship requiring a 24 or greater ACT score, successful completion of an Advanced Placement or Dual Credit course, among the qualifications consistent between both categories. The inclusion of the high ACT score, and college-ready courses aligns with the concept of Academics and post-secondary education. Within the CTE category, students can use either an ACT score of 24 or greater or a score of 5 or higher on the three WorkKeys Assessment, which is a workplace readiness exam. In addition, the CTE category requires successful completion of 2 credits in a Coordinated Plan of Study (career pathway), and 3 additional credits of CTE. This aligns with the goal again of K-12 CTE programs in helping students explore pathways, develop workplace readiness skills, and figure out what areas they are interested in pursuing further after high school. For students that demonstrate both a strong academic foundation, combined with exploration and development of a career pathway, is the best candidate for success at the post-secondary level. These are the types of students we want and need in both our post-secondary programs and future workforce. Prepared, focused, and highly skilled. We have an opportunity to invest in these students through this bill.

Chairman Owens and Education Committee members, I ask for your support of HB1430 and stand for any questions you may have. Thank you.