

1 Tuesday, March 9, 2021

2 Beth Slette, Superintendent, West Fargo Public Schools

3 Support for SB 2196

4 Good afternoon, Chairman Owens members of the House Education Committee. My name is Beth Slette
5 and I am the Superintendent at West Fargo Public Schools. I am here today to speak to you in support of
6 Senate Bill 2196.

7 In 2018, my first year as Superintendent in West Fargo, our district was one of four districts accepted
8 into the pilot to lead the state in personalized, competency-based learning (PCBL). More than two and a
9 half years later, our district has taken great strides to put systems in place to ensure that every child,
10 regardless of the neighborhood they live in, school they attend, principal at the school, or teacher in the
11 classroom, has equal access to a guaranteed and viable curriculum that is aligned to the North Dakota
12 State standards while personalizing instruction for each learner. While I see evidence every day that we
13 have taken great strides, we are not there yet. Senate Bill 2196 would provide the flexibility for districts
14 that choose to make PCBL a reality for the students they serve.

15 Through this work, our district has identified seven belief statements that we feel are critical in
16 providing our students with a comprehensive educational experience that truly personalizes instruction
17 for our learners. This may sound like a simple step, but it was not. As adults, we have all attended
18 school, and we all have an opinion about what it should look like. Please allow me to share these beliefs
19 with you. As you listen, please think about what you believe about teaching and learning.

20 One, we believe that teaching is both an art and a science. We utilize research and study best practices
21 to determine our instructional practices. This means that we have defined a rigorous progression of
22 learning and proficiency scales to articulate student competencies aligned to the standards at each
23 grading period. We believe that the guaranteed and viable curriculum (GVC) needs to be on a cycle of
24 continuous improvement and needs to be created at the local level, collaboratively with district
25 leaders and educators. In short, our district has a plan, and we don't leave our instructional practices
26 to chance.

27 Two, we believe that learning is social and requires humans to interact with other humans. We
28 encourage active student engagement in the learning process keeping in mind that the person doing
29 the work is doing the learning. This will be supported by engaging students in higher levels of depth of
30 knowledge and more creation. In short, we don't believe students should spend the majority of their
31 learning on a technology device. Students need hands-on activities and engagement with their
32 teachers and peers.

33 Three, we believe in social-emotional learning, and that our students need explicit instruction in order to
34 build and practice skills for their mental wellbeing, beginning when they first enter our schools. This is
35 supported by fostering the development of the key dispositions outlined in our district's Profile of a
36 Graduate: collaboration, communication, compassion, creativity, critical thinking, reflection, resilience,
37 and responsibility. In short, interpersonal skills are critical for a student to be successful in tomorrow's
38 world.

1 Four, we believe in foundational knowledge and understanding, and the use of a variety of instructional
2 models, modeling the thinking and learning process and guiding our learners through practice as they
3 move toward independence. This means that students have a voice and choice in their learning, by
4 making a more deliberate connection to the authentic purpose of learning. In short, students that
5 have the opportunity to explore their passions are more engaged, motivated, and successful.

6 Five, we believe reflection and building self-efficacy are critical components of the learning process. This
7 means that learners are asked to set goals at a developmentally appropriate level and regularly reflect
8 on their learning growth to determine next steps. In short, students that set goals and work hard to
9 achieve them are building self-efficacy and are motivated to achieve their goals.

10 Six, we believe in personalized (competency-based) learning that focuses on understanding where
11 students are in their learning and supports what they need to move forward through various levels of
12 instruction including whole-group, small-group, and individualized instruction. We will utilize formative
13 assessments to help determine student needs in the classroom. Students can demonstrate their
14 learning in multiple ways and are provided with opportunities to seek advanced knowledge and
15 understanding. In short, don't throw the baby out with the bath water. There is a time and place for
16 various instructional models.

17 Seven, we believe providing targeted learner supports to help ensure that students are receiving the
18 supports they need through the use of a comprehensive assessment system. This is supported by
19 utilizing instructional strategies and technology to simplify (not replace) the teaching and learning
20 process. In short, we must know where students are in order to know where they need to go.

21 As you reach into your purse or pocket, you are all carrying a personal cell phone that has settings set
22 to your personal preferences. When you leave this room, many of you will get into a car that will
23 automatically adjust your seat, steering wheel, and mirrors to you as the driver. Some of you will
24 spend time reading the local paper this evening. Maybe you will have ink on your hands, while others
25 will bring out their laptop to make the font extra-large because you cannot see as well as you used to,
26 and others will pull it up on their phones because you have excellent vision. Our world has become
27 more personalized, yet we still see many schools across the country sitting in rows and counting the
28 minutes a student is sitting in a seat to determine whether they will graduate from high school. To be
29 clear, I am not here to speak against teaching the rigorous North Dakota State Standards. Nor am I
30 opposed to assigning credits for graduation. With Senate bill 2196, schools will have more flexibility to
31 teach the competencies aligned to the state standards in a way that is more meaningful and relevant,
32 and then use authentic assessments to measure these competencies.

33 Thank you for allowing me to testify this afternoon. I will now stand for questions if there are any at
34 this time.