

**TESTIMONY ON HB 1232  
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**March 9, 2021**

**By: Joe Kolosky, Director of School Approval and Opportunity**

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**North Dakota Department of Public Instruction**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Joe Kolosky and I am the Director of School Approval & Opportunity with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). I am here on behalf of the department, to speak in favor of House Bill 1232 regarding to the satisfaction of school calendar hours through virtual instruction.

As we all know, it has been a trying and unprecedented time in education the past several months, both in North Dakota and worldwide. From the beginning of the pandemic NDDPI has facilitated the creation of the original distance learning plan guidance, the summer “soft reopening” of schools, and the K-12 Smart Restart for the start of school last fall. Throughout the last several months I have seen the importance of a quality education to North Dakota students more than ever before.

There are several reasons why NDDPI supports this bill. For one, this bill will ensure the continuum of quality education services of our students no matter the circumstance. Be it a natural event like blizzard or flood of that could cripple a

city and district for days or weeks; a burst pipe that leaves a school unusable; or, another pandemic that shutters schools for several months.

In addition, the district will be able to be better stewards of taxpayer's money by enabling quality virtual education during the times of duress and uncertainty. Parents and community members can rest assured that their monies will be utilized effectively, and their children continue to receive a quality education.

Local control is important but taxpayers also need assurance that the money they invest in K12 education is providing the time promised to the their children in direct instruction and high-quality teaching and supervision. The specific identification of measuring synchronous, asynchronous instruction, virtual meeting time, and the time students and teachers are logged into a virtual learning platform and doing homework assures the taxpayers are receiving the services they are paying for and is supporting the expectations the legislature has set out in the instructional time requirements schools must deliver in order to receive their foundation aid payments.

Throughout my testimony I have continually used the term "quality education." This is purposeful. The reason is, this bill specifically outlines that "rules governing the submission, evaluation, and approval of applications and the monitoring of any school district receiving a waiver under this subsection" will be

adopted. We have learned a lot about virtual learning the past several months. We have seen what has worked and what has not worked. The department will work with stakeholders to develop administrative rules that outline efficient and quality virtual learning protocols. We will also work with stakeholders to create and provide professional development regarding quality virtual education that districts can utilize in creating their virtual learning applications.

In the event that additional language is considered for amendments to expand this bill into the opportunity for districts to conduct virtual learning academies without an emergency occurring, we ask that NDDPI be involved in that discussion to ensure Assistant Director of School Finance, Mr. Adam Tescher and I have the necessary processes and definitions in place to ensure educational and fiduciary fidelity.

In closing, this bill provides the flexibility the schools need, while providing the checks and balances taxpayers deserve. The department will work tirelessly to provide districts the tools and resources to utilize virtual learning to enable all students in North Dakota to succeed and accomplish their educational goals. Chairman Schaible and members of the committee, this concludes my prepared testimony and I will happily stand for any questions you may have.