



**SB 2147 – Relating to high school graduation and curriculum requirements**

**January 19, 2021**

Chairman Schaible and members of the Senate Education Committee – My name is Dr. Russ Ziegler, and I am the assistant director for the North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders. I am testifying today in support of SB 2147 with a proposed amendment. The amendment comes to address some concerns expressed by our secondary principals and superintendents to tighten the potential application of this bill. After my testimony today, there will be a couple secondary principals who will testify and share with you questions they had about the current breadth of the bill and help to zero in on our request for some modest amendments to tighten the language and when the utilization of this opportunity is appropriate.

NDCEL supports the intent of this bill. As I have testified earlier on another bill I stated that this world is not a one-size fits all. There are students who need to have different options in place to achieve success. Even though a traditional diploma pathway may work for the majority of students it does not work for everyone. It is for that reason that we have the alternative diploma options. There are a couple of examples of different pathways that were made available in the past.

- 1) The first one being the GED (General Educational Development) which was established in 1942 by the United States Armed Forces Institute. The GED was a test that measured high school level academic skills. There have been numerous revisions since its inception with the most recent coming in 2014 along with dropping the General Educational Development and just going with the acronym GED. The GED consists of Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies.
- 2) A second pathway was established by the North Dakota the state legislature that would allow for an optional high school curriculum for students who might be struggling with the traditional diploma route. In the optional high school curriculum, a student may be able to take a different route if they meet certain criteria such as if they have failed to pass at least one-half unit from three subsections or has a GPA below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of other students in their district who are in the same grade. If the criteria are met then the school can meet with the student and parent to decide if the optional high school curriculum would be a good way to go.

This bill would allow another pathway for students who are struggling on the traditional diploma route. We believe this could be a helpful pathway to those students who might otherwise drop out of school due to unique circumstances. We believe having multiple pathways is a good option for students. However, with this bill we also have a few concerns. We feel that adding the



34 recommended language is too broad as stated. The bill does require a local school board to approve  
35 this path, but it does not state that the local board is allowed to change the bill, so it better matches  
36 the goals and strategic plans that the district has in place. For example, a school board may wish  
37 to add that an individual can choose this route only after their seventh semester and if they have  
38 failed a required course for graduation or if the school board would like to say that the student who  
39 utilizes this option would qualify for the an alternative diploma. Furthermore, we would ask that  
40 you consider whether it would be more appropriate to have this language in the “optional  
41 graduation” pathway rather than the traditional diploma route. At minimum we would ask that the  
42 board could establish local parameters regarding how this might be implemented if that district  
43 would choose this as an optional pathway. Our principals who will testify will also outline other  
44 questions from their perspective that are relevant to consider.

45 Thank you for your time and I can stand for any questions.