

TESTIMONY ON SB 2196
Senate Education Committee
January 26, 2021
by Ann Ellefson, Director of Academic Support
(701) 328-2488
Department of Public Instruction

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

My name is Ann Ellefson, Director of the Office of Academic Support of the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI). I am here today representing NDDPI to provide supportive testimony for SB 2196, which provides for the establishment of a North Dakota competency framework and provides flexibility regarding the requirements for instructional time.

Although personalized, competency-based education might be a new star in the spotlight for North Dakota, the concepts and ideas have been around for some time. The KnowledgeWorks Foundation, a well-known, established organization supporting competency-based education, has over twenty years in supporting education reform and transforming educational systems. Since 2014, State Superintendent Kirsten Baesler has leaned on KnowledgeWorks as coaches and thought partners in redefining education for the students of North Dakota.

When SB 2186 was passed by the legislative assembly in 2017, I had the privilege to work with a cross department team in the development, rollout, and support of the innovative education programming bill. Also, during the 2016-2017 school year, I personally was introduced to the phenomenal organization that has grown to be a true partner to education in North Dakota—KnowledgeWorks. Together the NDDPI and KnowledgeWorks secured a five-year commitment of philanthropic dollars to support transformational systems change in North Dakota. This opportunity, referred to as North Dakota Personalized, Competency-Based Education (ND PCBL), was open to

all districts throughout the state and today, three years later, we continue to work with four districts on innovative change. I have enclosed a full list of districts operating under the Innovative Education Program flexibility as well as those who have submitted formal inquiries (Attachment A). As the department lead for this work, I continue to feel privileged to work so closely with these districts. It has provided the state education department great insight on the complexity and logistics of transforming educational systems and informed our practices moving forward.

The Department of Public Instruction has provided written support for a variety of competency-based education bills during this 67th legislative assembly. Superintendent Baesler testified in support of HB 1135 addressing the state scholarship and the use of proficiency-based grading systems (Attachment B); and I recently testified in support of the K12 Coordination Council's proposal HB 1111 which would provide a legislative management study of competency-based learning and innovative education programs. (Attachment C). The department strongly believes that personalized, competency-based learning systems are a way for North Dakota schools and districts to better meet student needs by addressing each students' unique learning styles and personal strengths.

In order to ensure that the important and necessary strides being made in SB 2196 are long-lasting and effective, the department asks the committee to consider the following:

- Stakeholder review and engagement. Over the last eight years, the department has worked tirelessly to ensure inclusive voices are represented in the work we do. The proposed North Dakota competency framework process deserves the same. The department hopes a suitable process can be developed that includes working with the legislative body, the state education agency, and school/district stakeholders (including students and families) in the review and development process.

- The North Dakota competency framework will be a sister framework to other similar structures (i.e., North Dakota state standards, state requirements for elementary and secondary schools). It is important to note that these frameworks do not move forward with a one-and-done approach. Rather, there needs to be an established process that supports the evolution for the framework to be reviewed, further developed, and revised on a regular basis. Education department administration and oversight of the process for establishing the North Dakota competency framework will be important.
- Flexibility addressing graduation requirements. When referring to SB 2196, people often reference it as the “graduation pathway bill” implying the flexibility granted by these statutory changes would allow for greater flexibility in student graduation. High school diploma and graduation requirements are addressed in NDCC 15.1-21-02.1; 15.1-21-02.2; and 15.1-21-02.3. So, for this bill to be effective in creating flexibility in diploma and graduation requirements, we suggest referencing NDCC 15.1-21-02.1; 15.1-21-02.2; and 15.1-21-02.3 on page 1 line 17 of the bill in lieu of NDCC 15.1-21-01 and 15.1-21-02. The current citation in the bill addresses what a public school must **offer** to be an approved school. In my close work with districts pursuing or implementing personalized, competency-based learning structures, I believe their students would benefit most if additional flexibility were granted around graduation requirements.

The department believes these adjustments will ensure a solid foundation for developing, a continued, sustained support to schools and districts and provide a product that can withstand the test of time, providing opportunities for many more students in the decades to come.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Attachment A

List of schools requesting Innovative Education Program

School	Date Submitted	Short Description	Response on Planning Proposal (PP)	Response on Implementation Plan (IP)	NDCC Waived
Bismarck – Career Academy	October 7, 2019	CBE in CTE	Approved October 2019	Approved April 2020	15.1-21 HS Grad 15.1-18 TQ 15.1-20 HS Time
Center for Distance Education	August 21, 2018	CBE in virtual classes	Approved September 2018	Approved December 2018	15.1-20 HS Time
Northern Cass	May 2017	Career <u>Exploration</u> (Jaguar Academy) PCBL w/ KW	Approved August 2017 Working with KnowledgeWorks	Approved July 2017	15.1-20 Instructional Calendar Time 15.1-18 TQ
Northern Cass	Spring 2018	PCBL	Approved-PCBL w/ KW	Approved-PCBL w/ KW	15.1-20 HS Time
Northern Cass	Spring 2019	1x a month shortened high school day, 5.5 hrs instead of 6 hrs		Approved April 2019	15.1-20 Time
Northern Cass	February 2020	State Scholarship		Approved March 2020	15.1-21 Scholarship
Oakes	Spring 2018	PCBL	Approved-PCBL w/ KW	Approved-PCBL w/ KW	15.1-20 HS Time
West Fargo	Spring 2018	PCBL	Approved-PCBL w/KW	Approved-PCBL w/ KW	N/A
West Fargo	Spring 2019	Hybrid Courses at Sheyenne HS		Approved April 2019	15.1-20 Time
New Rockford-Sheyenne	Spring 2018	PCBL	Approved-PCBL w/ KW	Approved-PCBL w/ KW	N/A
New Rockford-Sheyenne	Spring 2019	Flex-Mod Schedule			15.1-20 HS Time
YCC	Summer 2018	PCBL	Approved-PCBL w/ KW	Approved-PCBL w/ KW	15.1-20 HS Time
YCC	Spring 2019	4-day School Week		Approved April 2019	N/A

IP – Implementation Plan
PP – Planning Proposal
HS – High School

CBE – Competency-Based Education
PCBL – Personalized Competency-Based Learning
KW – KnowledgeWorks

Schools Expressing Interest – Contact and additional information was provided

1. Bismarck – Simile Middle School (January 2019)
2. Bismarck – Bismarck High school (January)
3. Beach & Home on the Range (April 2019)
4. Dunseith (November 2018)
5. Ellendale (March 2018)
6. Grand Forks (October 2018)
7. Larimore – Kal Triplet
8. Midway (May 2019)
9. Milnor (March 2018)

**TESTIMONY ON HB 1135
HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

January 13, 2021

**By: Kirsten Baesler, Superintendent of Public Instruction
701-328-4570
North Dakota Department of Public Instruction**

Chairman Owens and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kirsten Baesler, Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of North Dakota. I am here to speak in favor of HB 1135, regarding proficiency-based grading for the North Dakota Academic and CTE Scholarship.

HB 1135 will allow districts that use locally approved proficiency-based grading scales as part of an approved innovative waiver to have those grades count towards meeting the criteria of the North Dakota Academic and CTE Scholarship, commonly referred to as the state scholarship. Two of the requirements for the scholarship are to have a grade point average at least 3.0 on a 4-point scale, and also to have no grades lower than a C. These current requirements are based on a traditional A, B, C, D grading scale. Students graduating from schools using a proficiency-based grading scale are not currently eligible for the scholarship. HB 1135 allows schools to use equivalent scores from the proficiency-based grading scale to meet the North Dakota academic and CTE scholarship requirements. HB 1135 adds value to innovative education and rewards all students who work hard to earn the North Dakota scholarship.

Chairman Owens and Members of the Committee that concludes my prepared testimony and I will stand for any questions that you may have.

K-12 Education Coordination Council Meeting Minutes

1:00 PM November 24, 2020 - Zoom Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Luke Schaefer at 1:02 PM with the following members of the K-12 Education Coordination Council in attendance: Superintendent Kirsten Baesler, Senator Kyle Davison, Senator Erin Oban, Representative Pat Heinert, Luke Schaefer, Nick Archuleta, Alexis Baxley (designee for Holly Stromsodt), Aimee Copas, Brandt Dick, Rupak Gandhi, April Foth, Kevin Hoherz, Michelle Strand, Melissa Vollmer, Jen Weber, Governor Burgum joined in progress, Jeff Fastnacht joined in progress.

Also present were: Wayne Sick, Dave Schaibley, Jim Upgren, Kayla Effertz Kleven

Absent: Wayne Fox

Consent Agenda

A motion was made by Aimee Copas to approve the consent agenda. The motion was seconded by Superintendent Baesler.

Results of roll call vote:

Aimee Copas – yes

Alexis Baxley – yes

April Foth – yes

Senator Oban – yes

Brandt Dick – yes

Wayde Sick (designee for Jeff Fastnacht) – yes

Kevin Hoherz – yes

Superintendent Baesler – yes

Motion carried unanimously.

Nick Archuleta – yes

Senator Davison - yes

Jennifer Weber - yes

Representative Heinert - yes

Rupak Gandhi - yes

Michelle Strand - yes

Melissa Vollmer – yes

Luke Schaefer – yes

Draft Legislation:

Chairman Schaefer gave the Council 15 minutes to review the draft legislation and asked for them to be ready to have very frank conversation regarding the draft. Additionally, he asked the members to bring any questions or concerns they may have forward to have a draft ready to approve at the December meeting that will have a full consensus of the Council.

The Chair opened the meeting for discussion on both agenda items three and four; the drafts of legislation and the annual report and asked for any questions regarding those agenda items. A question was raised regarding the legislation that concerns competency based learning. After discussion it was clarified that what the Council is looking for is a study to gather more information about this topic. Further discussion led the Council to decide that the scope of the study should focus on programs that incorporate competency-based learning initiatives and innovative programs. The study should be expanded beyond those who had requested a waiver to participate in innovative education programs.

A question was raised about the funds being requested in the legislation to expand the teacher mentoring program. Clarification was provided that an increase in funding across the biennium was being requested to expand the program. Discussion was held regarding what is anticipated to be many teachers leaving the profession after this school year, mainly due to the added burdens that Covid has placed on teachers. It was decided that if this program is a priority for the Council then it is the individual members' job to promote the importance of it to the legislature.

Further discussion was held about where North Dakota student's scores are this spring as compared to where scores were last fall. Superintendent Baesler shared that, in North Dakota, about one in four students in grades 3-11 who were at grade level last fall are now below grade level.

Report Draft:

A concern was raised that the language in the Career Awareness, Exploration and Development subcommittee section of the annual report was too specific regarding the programs named. It was decided to broaden that section, so it didn't appear as though the Council was promoting or endorsing specific programs.