

The teaching profession is under a great deal of stress especially during this unprecedented time of the pandemic. Fewer individuals are entering into teacher education programs and more of our teachers are nearing retirement or contemplating a career change. Teaching is definitely not an easy job. Early career teachers often times experience a lack of support, isolation, unforeseen problems or issues with students or parents and a myriad of stressful situations that require quick decision-making to ensure the safety and success of their students. The promising element is that teachers are dedicated professionals who care deeply about their students academically and social-emotionally. Unfortunately, the teaching profession experiences an attrition rate of approximately 30% for early entry teachers (within their first five years). As an educator, I feel that it is essential that we find ways to support teachers in the beginning, middle, and end of their incredibly important careers.

I grew up in a rural community in North Dakota. My consolidated very rural school district often times had difficulty attracting and/or keeping teachers. It seemed like the best ones always moved on and the revolving door continued to result in a lack of rapport and continuity. We couldn't find a foreign languages teacher so the opportunity to learn another language was not offered, nor were upper-level sciences. You have to wonder how much that could restrict a student's chance for certain career paths. I also remember that in my job search during student teaching, I was overjoyed to secure a position in the district that had supported me during my capstone experience. I had grown to love the students, teachers, and community and wanted to begin my career in that system.

It is for these reasons that I fully endorse SB 2229 to support the Rural Student Teaching Residency. Throughout our state, we struggle to get and keep teachers in our rural districts. The foreseeable future may make teacher shortages an even greater problem, especially in rural areas. The need for enthusiastic, well-prepared, committed early entry teachers starts with successful student teaching experiences. This bill would provide support for both student teachers and rural school districts across the state. Any teacher education student from a North Dakota institution would be qualified for a scholarship upon student teaching acceptance. This scholarship would provide the student with the support needed to transition to a rural community, to secure adequate accommodations and cover living expenses, as well as to pay for their tuition and fees. These student teachers would be mentored and supervised by both a qualified teacher within the district and a university supervisor to ensure a top-notch experience for the student teacher and the students within the classroom. The ultimate goal of this proposal would be to produce highly successful teachers who are committed to staying in the state of North Dakota, especially in our rural communities. Please consider funding this bill to ensure the success of our youth, they are our future.