

Testimony regarding SB 2235
Senate Education Committee
Jan 25, 2021

1/21/2021

Dear Chairman Schaible and members of the Education Committee,

My name is Luke Schaefer and I am the Executive Director of the Central Regional Education Association, one of seven service agencies that exist to provide support to ND schools in many forms. Further, I am a member of the ND Full Service Community Schools (FSCS) Consortium which is a framework for schools to become the hub of supports, working closely with partners, to provide services to students and their families in the community, whether it is related directly to academics or indirectly, such as health, poverty, food insecurity, housing, etc. Lastly, I have been an educator in ND for 17 years. I would like to provide testimony for how SB 2235 aligns with the philosophy and practices we promote in FSCS, an evidence-based approach to increasing student outcomes.

This bill provides funding for one of twelve pipeline services outlined in FSCS schools; primary health care. It is no surprise that many schools do not have nurses. Cost and availability of nurses both make hiring extremely difficult. This bill would help alleviate that. It is common practice in ND for the school secretary to make the decision sometimes about whether or not to call the caregivers of a child when they are not feeling well. With as many students as report to the office with headaches, ear aches, tummy aches, and chills, the school secretary becomes the first level of triage for many districts, especially our smallest.

I would offer an additional solution. The ND E-Nurse Program was designed in partnership with Avera Health out of South Dakota and is available to schools in ND. This program offers all day access to a nurse in the building through live audio-visual medical technology, which is a gold standard of care. Unfortunately, even our largest districts who have hired or contracted with agencies to provide nurses, do not have nurses in their buildings all day. ND E-Nurse teaches the school secretary and others how to simply and easily connect to the school nurse, use the otoscope or other medical devices, and allow the nurse to help determine if little "Johnny" can go back to class with a couple of crackers or if more care is required for things like heart or lung sounds; ear and throat issues; skin problems; injuries; or even chronic care, such as diabetes. What is, I believe, the most effective part of this program, is that 91% of students who had an E-Nurse visit were able to stay in school instead of going home.

Further, the ND E-Nurse program, since it does not rely on a physical presence in the building, is priced out in a per-pupil manner. The typical cost for the districts in ND using ND E-Nurse is between \$3,000-\$12,000. This nurse is not only available all day, but they are the ones who call parents and document visits to the office for student care. They also work in partnership with local medical providers with students as needed.

This program currently services 21 schools in ND consisting of 3,785 students. There have been 2,509 school nurse video visits in just 2019-2020. Further, four of our schools have added the school behavioral health access for 751 students.

This bill addresses the number one belief, that of early prevention mechanisms. Addressing student health during the school day has a direct impact on student attendance and achievement. For this reason, this bill is wonderful for ND. Hiring a FT nurse might be the best option for some schools. Others may be able to find a nurse willing to keep PT hours. I would ask that you consider more than just hiring nurses, as contractual processes can be more affordable, and in some rural instances, the only possibility for accessing this much-needed service through which we do not want geography to create inequitable opportunity.

I humbly thank you for considering this bill. A do pass would provide the ability for students to stay healthy and stay learning.

Respectfully submitted,

Luke Schaefer (Minot, ND)
Executive Director, Central Regional Education Association