

Chairman Heinert and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to come and speak with you today. I am Jacob Jenkins, the principal of Berthold Public School. We are one of two K-12 schools in the Lewis & Clark School District. As you know, we are here today to speak about Senate Bill 2328 and the provision to weigh students differently if their district K-12 schools are 14 miles or greater apart. Before I talk about this, though, I would like to give you an idea of how classes work in our school.

At Berthold Elementary, each grade level only has one teacher. This means every fifth grader, for example, is taught by Mrs. White. Mrs. Neubauer teaches all of our third graders. In the high school, every student takes English from Mrs. Taylor. Mrs. Roland teaches all of the social studies courses. And Mr. Hochhalter teaches all of the science classes. Everyone in the school receives music education from Mrs. Helfrich. I'm telling you this so that you can understand how things work at Berthold. They work the same at North Shore Plaza. We operate as small, rural schools operate.

This is distinctly different from most of the other school districts that have the same number of students as we do. Look at South Prairie or Rugby, for example. They have several teachers in the elementary for each grade. In the high school, they have several English or Science teachers. I'm not here to complain about what another school has that we don't, I merely want to highlight that our situation is different than that of the other similarly sized school districts. We operate as individual schools, not as singular entities in the school district.

We strive to be fiscally responsible with the funding that we receive and use it in the best way possible for our students and community. We have had to make a few significant cuts in staffing already in the past few years. For example, we no longer have a librarian or a Family Consumer Science teacher. If this bill does not pass and our weighting factor is considered the same as a district in which all teachers and students are within the same building, I fear what this million dollar decrease in funding would do to our school. I fear that we will not be able to maintain. I fear that we will have to cut the limited programs that we are able to offer. I fear that teachers and staff will leave us, and new ones will not want to come to us because we will not be able to offer them anything like the other schools can. Most of all, I fear for what this means for our student's education and the potential impact upon our small communities.

We all lived through COVID and watched as students struggled to cope with online learning. You know, as well as I do, that having a live, in the classroom teacher has a greater affect upon the learning of our children. Right now, we rely upon ITV and online independent study courses to supplement our high school student's education. In Berthold, we're fortunate to have a teacher for Agriculture classes and a teacher for business and computing. We share an art teacher between Berthold and North Shore Plaza. If this bill does not pass, these are the positions that would be in danger and our students would be looking at having to take almost all of their elective classes through ITV or online classes.

This is not an ideal situation and does not offer them an acceptable and equitable education.

My hope today is that you will see the unique situation our school is in and that you will help us to provide an equitable education for all students in the Lewis & Clark School District and in very few districts that face a similar situation by moving this bill forward.

Thank you for considering this bill and for caring for the students and staff of North Dakota's educational system. I thank you for your time and would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.