

# Senate Appropriations- Education and Environment Division Public Hearing

January 24, 2023

SB 2013 A BILL for an Act to provide an appropriation for defraying the expenses of the department of public instruction, the state library, the school for the deaf, and North Dakota vision services - school for the blind; and to provide an exemption.

Mr. Chairman Sorvaag and members of the committee, my name is Sharon Espeland and I am testifying as a private citizen who is committed to civic education. Thank you for your time and attention today. Currently, I am an assistant principal at Century High School in Bismarck. I also have served as the ND State Coordinator for the We The People program. Prior to assuming both roles, I was a social studies teacher, and I used this curriculum and program in my government and Advanced Placement Government classes.

I am in favor of this bill and asking for \$200k per biennium to expand the We The People program to more schools, offer more online training options, pay for more out-of-state training opportunities, develop mentoring specific to the program, and increase the funding we can offer the winning team so they have minimal fundraising and can focus on preparing for the academic competition.

## **Purpose of We The People:**

Students become more knowledgeable and engaged citizens. The intent is to expand civic education throughout the state of North Dakota by providing research based professional development to teachers and providing textbooks and supplemental materials that promote critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. A culminating project would be for students to participate in a simulated congressional hearing either in their classroom, community, or at the state competition.

**The We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution Program** promotes civic competence and responsibility among the nation's upper elementary and secondary students. It is a program that provides a working knowledge of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. The We the People print textbooks' and enhanced ebooks' interactive strategies, relevant content and the simulated congressional hearing make teaching and learning exciting for both students and teachers. The We the People curriculum is an innovative course of instruction on the history and principles of the United States constitutional democratic republic. The program enjoys active support from state bar associations and foundations, and other educational, professional, business, and community organizations across the nation. Since its inception in 1987, more than 30 million students and 75,000 educators have participated in the We the People program. ND has 6-8 competing schools with 160+ students. Many more schools and students participate in non-competitive hearings.

## Key Points:

- The program provides a limited number of sets of instructional materials. The text encourages students to think and support their answers with constitutional application, historic and contemporary examples, Supreme Court cases, logic, and reasoning – it does not tell them what to think.
- The simulated congressional hearing activity involves every student in the class, not just the academic stars. It works with advanced students, students in poverty, urban and rural schools.
- The We The People program meets all of the criteria of 21<sup>st</sup> C. skills, Project Based Learning Components, but most importantly it produces thoughtful and engaged citizens.

- There is strong evidence of the program's success through positive program evaluation since 1987. A research team from Georgetown University has conducted independent studies of We the People that have been confirmed by the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse, which includes the highest standards for research scholarship. The team found that We the People students scored significantly higher on tests of both civic knowledge and civic dispositions than their peers. These dispositions include (1) respect for the rule of law, (2) political attentiveness, (3) civic duty, (4) community involvement, (5) commitment to government service, and (6) the norms of political efficacy and political tolerance. Additional information and studies can be found at <https://www.civiced.org/research/wtp-research>.

Again, thank you for your time and attention today. My hope is that you will continue your support of the We The People program. It will continue to develop young men and women who are more likely to be civically minded, committed to public service and engaged in their communities.