

## Written Testimony: House Bill 1532

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Good Afternoon, Chairman Elkin and Committee Members.

My name is Sara Dudley. I am the principal of St. Michael's School in Grand Forks. I have served as the principal there for nine years. I am here to support House Bill 1532 that would provide tuition reimbursement options for families that choose to send students to non-public schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony on non-public public school's accountability to parents, tax payers, and the institutions that provide approval for non-public schools and public schools.

### ***1. The history of public resources for non-public schools and the accountability measures that accompany them***

Non-public schools have received tax-payer resources for many years in the form of federal Title dollars and the federal food programs that benefit our students who receive free and reduced lunch services. By participating in these programs, the non-public schools accept and fully participate in the assurances and guidelines of the Department of Public Instruction. Through the federal Title programs, no money has been given directly to the non-public schools, but rather a partnership with the public schools who manage the Title funds for the non-public schools.

The Title services benefit all students through literacy and math support, professional development for teachers, and after school programs for students. We are partnered with the public schools through this process, working together to use tools and resources for students. With COVID relief equitable services, non-public schools utilize these resources through specific and clear guidance from the Department of Public Instruction. Non-public schools may not use taxpayer resources and funds without clear guidelines and assurances. It is through these guidelines that administrators like myself are held accountable along with documented and consistent consultation with the public schools.

### ***2. The standards and accountability around school approval for non-public schools including the quality of instruction and quality of educators***

Non-public schools receive Department of Instruction approval using the same assurances as public schools using the STARS, State Automated Reporting System. Through the approval process, non-public schools are required to have highly qualified teachers. Through the school

approval process, non-public schools are held accountable for professional development requirements such as the recently passed legislation that states that All teachers and principals serving students in grades K-3 will:

1. Receive training in scientifically-based reading instruction practices.
2. Utilize scientifically-based instructional materials and approaches

We are also required to use approved Science of Reading curriculums with Department of Public Instruction guidance. These requirements are met at the non-public schools as they are at public schools.

Non-public high schools in North Dakota have the same graduation requirements and standards as public schools. A North Dakota diploma is a North Dakota diploma whether from a non-public school or public school.

An additional accountability measure is the school accreditation process through Cognia, the same accreditation institution that all North Dakota public schools receive accreditation. As a fully accredited school, this demonstrates the standards and accountability that include the quality of instruction and the quality of educators.

Non-public schools employ licensed teachers who have received approval through the Education Standards and Practices Board of North Dakota. The teachers receive professional development and training to the standard and quality that public schools receive.

It must be acknowledged that the public higher education institutions of North Dakota depend on the non-public schools in North Dakota to provide thorough, meaningful, and rigorous pre-service training opportunities to our pre-service teachers. If the public higher education institutions determine that the non-public school standards are high enough to train and prepare the future public school educators of the state, the non-public schools standards must be rigorous and of high quality.

Lastly, non-public schools serve students who are identified as being in poverty. We participate in the federal free and reduced lunch program. Non-public schools document this information using the STARS assurances by the Department of Public Instruction just as public schools do. Opponents falsely state that non-public schools are for the rich and wealthy, yet my school has consistently served families who are identified as living in poverty at a rate of 17%-23% over the past ten years. These are families who, even with their financial need, are willing to make a sacrifice to make the choice for their children that is best for their family. With the assistance of scholarship and school social programs, we are able to serve families no matter the financial situation of the family. No family is turned away because of financial constraint because of the generosity of school supporters.

### ***3. Non-Public Schools accept students with special needs.***

Non-public schools are happy to partner with public schools as we meet the needs of our students who are identified with a special need. Students qualify using the same special education categories and participate in a rigorous assessment process following the federal guidelines of IDEA. Non-public schools are required to follow the special education plan just as the public school's are required. Non-public schools have paraprofessionals to support our students with special needs and often, create plans that provide support and modifications when a student does not qualify for an individualized service plan. Non-public schools provide small class size, accommodations, modifications, interventions, and enrichment to our students and families. The best outcomes for students with special needs who are enrolled in non-public schools come when the public and non-public schools partner together to meet the student's needs. In some cases, students receive some special education services at the non-public school and the public school setting.

If we are going to build on the greatness of education in North Dakota, we must do it as partners in education with parents, public, and non-public schools. ND House Bill 1532 will allow parents to choose the school that matches their educational goals for their children.

I urge you to vote in favor of ND House Bill 1532 and support the rights of parents to make educational choices for their children.

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#### **Contact Information**

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