

March 13, 2023

Dear Honorable Senators of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing today in opposition of HB1532 to create an educational reimbursement program for non-public schools. I am a current public school Kindergarten teacher and had the honor to serve as the 2016 North Dakota Teacher of the Year. I feel strongly about opposing this bill.

I have been watching this bill very closely since it was introduced in the House. I have watched recordings of testimony, read submitted letters for testimony, and watched both House Education and House Appropriation Committees discuss this bill. I have a few points that I want to highlight ...

- 1) Most of the letters that have been submitted as testimony have been from parochial school parents or family members in favor of this bill. The parochial schools are taking the opportunity to solicit their parents to write letters "in support". Public Schools are not soliciting any parents through social media or newsletters. I am not sure soliciting letters is even legal for public schools to gather support for a legislative issue but parochial schools can take advantage of this method. We have over 7,000 students in my district and we are not soliciting any parents. If this bill was voted on as a Measure in a general election, I think you would get a better picture of opposition.
- 2) Discussion of low test scores in public schools has come up several times in committee meetings but also was commented on on the House floor right before voting. Educators know that comparing test scores from public schools to parochial schools is not on an even playing field. In public school, we test all children with all exceptional abilities. We recognize that we have students who perform extremely well on their standardized tests. We also gather test scores from students with no parental support, lack of food, extreme behavioral needs, high risk for psychological needs, violent behaviors, variety of learning disabilities, etc., etc. Without a doubt, these exceptional students change our overall test score average, but they are our students and we are required to test them all. We educate them all, therefore we test them all.
- 3) Through testimony and written letters from parochial school administration, they are adamant they take students with disabilities and students who have IEPs. It is true, they do educate students on active IEPs.

Special Education has a wide, wide range of abilities in the definition.

*When a student has an IEP for speech sounds, this is considered Special Education.

This student may have one additional teacher to provide services to their regular education. They may have a total of 5 staff members to teach them through the week.

This student could possibly get into a parochial school, but not guaranteed.

*When a student has an IEP for a muskular-skeletal disorder, needs a feeding tube, is wheelchair bound, and has no verbal communication, this is also Special Education.

This student may have a total of **10 staff members** to help meet IEP needs through the week: classroom teacher, music, physical education, library, counselor, intellectual disability teacher, 1-on-1 para support, occupational therapist, physical therapist, and

speech pathologist. This student is in my school and we have several more that require up to 10 staff members to assist with their education.

If non-public schools are going to receive reimbursement from public tax dollars, there should be more equity in the student population. Non-public schools should be required to accept a higher percentage of special needs students with higher disabilities and test all students regardless of their disability. They may currently turn away ANY exceptional students. Public schools educate all students of every ability or disability.

Siphoning funds away from ND public schools is going to hurt students more than anyone. Students will bear the immediate burden of larger class sizes and fewer support staff that currently assist with high needs students. The unintended consequences are to be determined.

Again, I am asking for you to Vote NO on HB1532.

Sincerely,

Amy Neal
Kindergarten Teacher - Minot
2016 ND Teacher of the Year