

3/13/2023

ND Senate Education Committee
Bismarck, ND

Chairman Elkin and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I would like to start off by expressing my gratitude to your Committee on the tireless work you do in support of education in the State of North Dakota. The work you do here is truly work worth doing as it directly impacts the lives of thousands of educators, students and their families across our state. Today, I am here to testify on behalf of myself and my position in regards to HB 1532.

My name is Kevin Leier and I have a rather unique position to share with you as I ask for your support on HB 1532. My professional career in education for well over a decade has included working as a classroom teacher, instructional leader, and REA Professional Development Specialist in the public education sphere. Now, to add to that, I find myself in a new position and honored to be Principal of Little Flower Catholic Elementary School in the rural community of Rugby, ND. I share this background with you because in the various roles I have played I have seen firsthand the quality of education being provided in our state from a unique perspective of both public and non-public. I am lucky to have close friends and colleagues in both the private and public school sectors and, although we might not see issues in education the same all the time, we respect the fact that North Dakota is a state blessed to have committed educators providing the best education possible for our kids.

For this testimony, I would like to focus your attention on two specific points that I do not think have been touched on enough in the debate about this bill.

Little Flower School has a PreK-6 student enrollment of 67 students. These students pay an average of just under \$3,000 dollars a year in tuition to attend the school. Having taught in the Rugby Public School System at the high school level for 10 years, I know that every student at Little Flower ends up a public school student when they transition to Junior High. These students become part of the student census for public school funding eventually graduating as a proud Rugby Panther. Our little school is fortunate to have a strong relationship with Rugby Public Schools. This is an important point to be made knowing that all students in Rugby, regardless of where they are educated PreK-6, end up Panthers at the end of their public school careers in our community. Because of this, I have never looked at Private and Public Education in North Dakota to be at odds with one another. The greater point I would like to make here is that over \$550,000 dollars is saved a year in state per pupil payments by students attending Little Flower. Would the state not have to pay that out if our school was to simply close and families had no choice but to send their kids to the public school? HB 1532 would reimburse parents a mere fraction of that dollar amount for choosing Little Flower Elementary. To this point it is important that you know this is not just an option in large communities. There are similar

situations to Rugby's in Langdon, Wahpeton, Jamestown, Belcourt, Devils Lake, and Valley City to name a few more. These schools all transition students to public school as they end at either grade 6 or 8 pending location.

The second point I would like to make is in regard to the example I can provide about how alumni from non-public schools, like Little Flower, become a great case study in workforce development, entrepreneurship and community involvement in our state. After reading all 225 written pieces of testimony as of Sunday night, there has been very little discussion on how impactful our non-public schools have been on retaining alumni to become successful future North Dakota residents. Most opposition stems around location, special education and educating all students and I'd be happy to answer questions, from my position, to those points. But, regardless of the positions in this room on this bill, I believe we all have common alignment when it comes to education being a primary pillar to workforce development. I've personally looked at the class rosters from our small school over the last 20 years and over 75% of those former students have gone on to live and work right here in North Dakota building companies, carrying on farming and ranching operations, serving their communities and maybe most importantly, building families for the next generation of our great state. I don't believe it is far-fetched to say similar numbers could be seen from our other non-public schools and maybe this is an idea to add to the legislative study now attached to the bill. During a special session last year, over \$85 million dollars was allocated to fund grants for CTE Centers across the state. Is it not a similar argument if your community is not a recipient of this funding that all taxpayers, regardless of the tax funding source, are supporting an educational initiative even if they can't use it due to location? Maybe we need to look at all aspects of success in educating, developing and retaining the high quality people of North Dakota and non-public schools undoubtedly play a part in this process. HB 1532 merely allows a small amount of new dollars (by comparison) in support for students to walk a different educational path in that pursuit. I strongly urge you to look at the impact of all our students in North Dakota and support passing this legislation with a Yes vote.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Kevin Leier- Principal
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