



March 13, 2023

Good morning Chairman Elkin and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

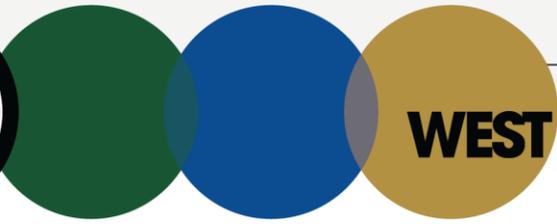
First, I would like to thank you for your service to our great state! The hours and energy you put into this work is very much appreciated by our entire WFPS team.

My name is Beth Slette, and I am the Superintendent of West Fargo Public Schools. I am writing this letter today as testimony in opposition of HB 1532. I am sure you have seen all the talking points and you are aware of the reasons for opposition. However, I would like to share my unique perspective.

I am the youngest of eight children raised in a large Catholic family in small town Mahanomen, Minnesota. I had the privilege of attending Catholic school through 6th grade and I am a strong advocate of private schools. I believe that private schools in our communities provide another option for families, and I welcome collaboration and partnerships with them. When there are options for families, we all do better.

That being said, I am opposed to HB 1532 for many reasons, but I will highlight a few that stand out to me:

1. I understand that the \$24 million is a separate appropriation, and I am told WFPS will not lose funding. I wonder, though, because it is all the same pot of money, coming from the general fund. We will have the same amount of peanut butter but more pieces of bread. I have a hard time believing it will not weaken our programs, especially considering how hard schools are feeling the impact of inflation. A 3% and 3% increase in the formula is deeply appreciated yet still lags inflation.
2. Public schools are required to take all children regardless of background or disability. We educate, love, and care for them ALL. We take them whether we are short staffed or have more students than we have room for, and we do so because it is our calling and moral imperative to do everything in our power to ensure every child has the opportunity to grow up and be a successful contributor to our society. If this bill passes as written, more than \$23 million of the proposed \$24 million could go to families who are already in private schools in just the first year of the biennium, whether the family needs the money or not. Only 4% will actually have a "choice"; and may have access to nothing in the second year. Furthermore, the private schools can pick the best and brightest, further increasing the gap between the "haves" and "have nots". Comparing outcomes between a private school and a public school is not an apples to apples comparison.
3. Have advocates of this bill considered that people may reconsider their monetary gifts to private schools if this bill passes because they are being funded by their tax dollars? Also, private schools may increase their tuition, which would limit the actual value to families. As we've seen with higher education, more money in the system doesn't guarantee tuition will stay the same.



WEST FARGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"Educating all learners for tomorrow's world."

I am proud to be the Superintendent of the second largest district in the state of North Dakota. Our district is a leader in innovative practices and quality experiences for all learners. Our special education programs are second to none. We welcome competition but we do not welcome a bill that is not fair to learners and their families. With no accountability and no expectations to take all the children, this bill will do harm. It does not advance 'true choice'; it provides state-funded choice for private schools, not for students and their families. It will send a message that our state leaders do not support public schools and the incredibly difficult work that is needed to be done to make our communities the very best they can be. The belief that money to private schools with no accountability and selective admission policies will improve public education is one I simply can't understand. It will divide our state in an already divided nation.

Please vote no on HB 1532, a bill that unfairly provides taxpayer dollars to private schools with no accountability. Unless all children across the state of North Dakota have equal access to the opportunity to attend a private school, it is not school choice.

Sincerely,

Beth Slette

Superintendent, West Fargo Public Schools