

Representative Austin Foss Testimony in Support of HB 1516

Chairman Heinert, members of the education committee,

I am here today to introduce House Bill 1516, which would provide teachers with a formal voice as board observers on school boards. This bill is an essential step in fostering a more collaborative, respectful, and effective relationship between school boards and the educators who work directly with students every day.

Recent survey data from North Dakota United shows that teachers do not feel heard or respected by school boards. According to the survey, 56% of teachers feel that their opinions are not respected by their school boards, and 52% believe their experience is not valued. This disconnect creates frustration among educators and contributes to the larger issue of teacher dissatisfaction and retention.

The Teacher Retention Task Force specifically addressed this issue in Recommendation #3, which calls for schools to create a more supportive school culture and include employee satisfaction as a factor in strategic decision-making. HB 1516 directly aligns with this recommendation by ensuring that educators have a presence in school board meetings, providing valuable insight into the challenges and successes within classrooms. Also, by fostering open and honest dialogue between school boards and teachers, this bill empowers communities to address issues directly and create a stronger, more supportive work environment for educators. Local collaboration is key to ensuring our schools are places where teachers feel valued and supported.

Moreover, giving teachers a formal role as board observers is not an unprecedented concept. We already have faculty and staff representation on the State Board of Higher Education, and in the private sector, board observers are a common practice to ensure decision-makers receive firsthand insight from employees. The same logic should apply to our K-12 schools.

At its core, the primary mission of our education system is to serve students. Teachers are the ones providing this service every single day. School boards exist to make decisions in the best interest of students, and those decisions should be informed by the professionals who are in the classrooms with them. When school boards and teachers communicate openly and with mutual respect, we create stronger schools, retain high-quality educators, and, most importantly, improve student outcomes.

House Bill 1516 is a solution to bridge the gap between school boards and teachers. It ensures that educators have a seat at the table—not as voting members, but as informed voices that can provide perspective and insight that directly impact students. I urge you to support this bill and take an important step toward strengthening our education system.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

North Dakota United 2023 Survey Excerpts

Q3: And do you think things in your school district are moving in the right direction, or do you think things are on the wrong track?

Right direction	31%
Wrong track	48
(VOL) Unsure	21

Q7: How big an issue is teacher retention?

Major issue	88%
Somewhat of an issue	11
Minor issue	1
No issue	0
Unsure	1

Q18: As an educator, do you feel your opinion is respected by each of the following:

C – Your School Board

Yes, A Lot	5%
Yes, Somewhat	29
No	56
Unsure	10

Q19: As an educator, do you feel your experience is respected by each of the following:

C – Your School Board

Yes, A Lot	7%
Yes, Somewhat	30
No	52
Unsure	11

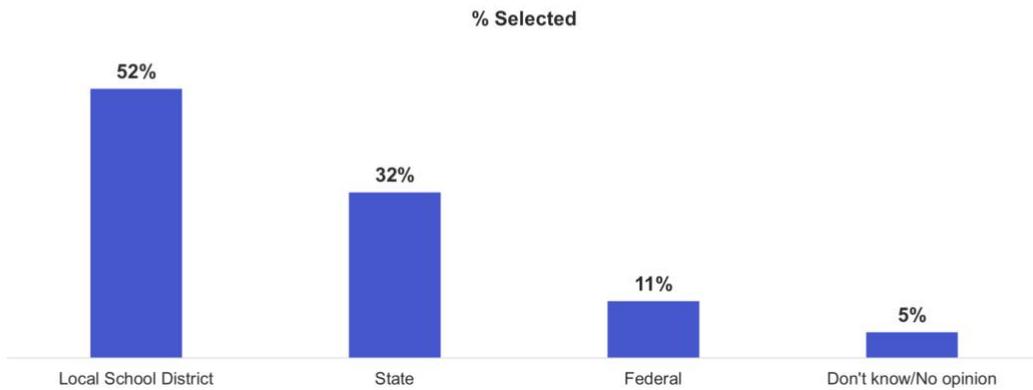
Q22: If asked by a current student, would you recommend/encourage them to enter the education profession?

Yes	10%
No	50
Depends	37
Unsure	3

Morning Consult National Teacher Survey Excerpt

More than half of those who agree that the government has a role in education accountability think that local school districts should have the most influence in these systems.

Which level of government (state, district, federal) should have the most influence on accountability systems in K-12 education? *(Among teachers who agree the gov't has a role to play in the accountability systems in K-12 education; N=841)*



Learning Policy Institute Teacher Shortage Information

State	Undercertified teachers	Percentage of schools with vacancies unfilled or reported as hard to fill
North Dakota	0.8%	61.5%
Iowa	0.04%	49.4%
Minnesota	1.6%	44.7%
Montana	4.5%	59.2%
South Dakota	2.7%	47.2%
Wisconsin	2.2%	43.1%
Wyoming	0.3%	56.7%
United States Average	3.7%	46.9%

Teacher Retention Task Force

RECOMMENDATION #1. PROVIDE A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR EDUCATORS AND LEARNERS IN EVERY BUILDING

The Task Force recommends state agency leaders and education stakeholders collaborate to address system gaps, leverage opportunities and activate a continuum of support to create safe, supportive environments for educators and learners in every building as measured by a statewide system of student behavior metrics.

This recommendation aims to support a safe and supportive working environment for all North Dakota educators. The Task Force specifies measuring improvement in addressing system gaps, leveraging opportunities and activating continua of support by utilizing statewide data systems focused on student behavior. Positive school cultures and healthy learning environments have a significant impact on student outcomes and [educator retention](#). Strong school environments result in higher engagement and attendance for students and staff, reduced office referrals and decreased teacher [turnover](#). Safe and supportive learning environments may be measured through student metrics such as risky or unsafe behavior which are shown to be [reduced](#) within positive learning environments.

RECOMMENDATION #3. UNDERSTAND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

The Task Force recommends the state annually survey school employees to understand employee satisfaction. Further, the Task Force recommends school boards include employee satisfaction in driving their strategic goals.

This recommendation aims to increase awareness and planning to support employee satisfaction through data collection. Job satisfaction is influenced by factors which maintain or encourage people in their role. This recommendation supports data collection to inform planning and improvement of workplace satisfaction including [factors](#) such as compensation, school policies and relationships. This includes achievement, recognition and career advancement. By incorporating employee satisfaction data in strategic goal setting, schools and districts will identify key factors related to educator retention in plans for continuous improvement aimed at ensuring supportive school culture.