

Thank you for your service. Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee and submit testimony in support of SB2362.

I would like to begin by saying that I am committed to the idea of continuous improvement. I firmly agree with Alberta Lee Cox when she stated, "It is not enough to be good if you have the ability to be better. It is not enough to be very good if you have the ability to be great."

Because I believe that every school has a responsibility to strive be great, I do not have any objection to the expectation that every school and district be held accountable for meeting a standard of excellence. An expectation that schools engage in a continuous cycle of improvement is a good thing. Honestly, I am not opposed to Cognia.

That being said, I stand in support of the wisdom of SB2362 which would allow local districts to move beyond Cognia and have opportunities to pursue "Accreditation through a nationally recognized accrediting organization, a formal school improvement organization, or a continuous improvement organization approved by the superintendent of public instruction" in order to demonstrate that they are indeed meeting the expected standards of a quality education, and that they are actively engaged in a cycle of continuous improvement.

Some of the reasons that I support SB2362 are:

1. I believe that the process of continual improvement should be demonstrated every day, not every 5 to 6 years. By allowing a LEA the autonomy to demonstrate that they are meeting, or exceeding, the state's expectations, that LEA will have more buy-in and commitment to the continuous improvement process. For example, our district is striving to incorporate Marzano's HRS framework. Our commitment to this framework has resulted in every one of our 8 schools achieving level 3 HRS and half of our schools achieving the distinction of being a Level 4 HRS school. In addition, our commitment to becoming HRS drove our current strategic plan including providing a basis for our vision, mission, value statements, and stated goals. Every teacher in our district can tell you that we are striving to be HRS, and what efforts we are making to achieve that goal. That is buy-in, that is commitment, that provides the "why" behind the hard work that we ask our staff to do every single day. Whereas, on the other hand, Cognia feels more like an event that we must endure every 5 years.
2. By providing a LEA the autonomy to select their own model of continuous improvement, the work within that model is authentic. In our district, we not only did the work to meet the requirements to become HRS, but we also collect "quick data" on a regular basis to ensure that we continue to meet the requirements of HRS. In contrast, going through the Cognia accreditation process feels more like a Dog and Pony Show. It is an event every 5 years where the district finds the evidence to show that they have jumped through the hoops set before them. If you ask any of the teachers in our district about the indicators of HRS, I think you would like the answer that you get. Ask that same teacher about how the Cognia process affects their work every day, few would be able to make a connection.
3. The cost in time and manpower to prepare for a Cognia visit is extreme. We just completed our Cognia review. I am happy to report that our district did very well, and we are proud of our results. But the literally hundreds of hours of work that we put into preparing for the review was on top of the work that we were already doing. Our district's administration and

school improvement team dedicated literally hundreds of hours preparing for our Cognia visit. It would have been so much more cost effective if we could have committed those hours to furthering our efforts to achieve HRS.

4. Finally, allowing a LEA to have autonomy to choose their own model will allow the district to enjoy some consistency in the process. Over the past 20 plus years, I have gone through 4 accreditation visits. The one thing each of these events had in common was we were told every time that the process was not going to change for the next accreditation cycle. The second thing that each of these visits had in common was the process always did change. Over the course of time we went from Northwest accreditation to Advanc-ed to now, Cognia. Even the Cognia standards were changed from 2017 to 2022. In contrast, as we work toward achieving HRS, we rely on the expert research of Marzano, Hattie, Dufour, and others. We utilize a consistent model and resource. For example, Level 1 HRS is the creation of a Safe, Supportive and Collaborative culture. The 6 indicators do not change. The tenants of the PLC do not change. And while we are continually striving to improve in each of those 6 indicators, the consistency of the indicators provides an ongoing focus for our continuous improvement efforts.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat that I am not opposed to the Cognia accreditation process. For those districts who have not adopted a research-based model to drive their continuous improvement efforts, Cognia may be a great option for them. But allowing a district to choose an alternative model that provides an ongoing focus on the day-to-day improvement efforts, system wide buy in, a savings of time and resources, and allows consistency in a district's efforts, just makes good sense.

As a final note, I spent some time doing a crosswalk between the current Cognia standards and the leading indicators contained in the HRS model. For all but 1 of the stated Cognia standards, I identified 1 to 3 HRS indicators that demonstrated the same skill or competency. If we would have been allowed the autonomy to simply present the data on our HRS efforts, we could have exceeded North Dakota's requirements and saved the hundreds of hours of effort that we committed to the Cognia process. I hope that you strongly consider allowing Districts the autonomy to demonstrate their compliance to the expected continuous improvement process by passing SB2362.

Sincerely,

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