



Southwest Area CTE Academy

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Chairman Beard Vice Chair Lemm and Committee Members,

My name is Aaron Anderson, and I have the pleasure of serving as the Director of the Southwest Area Career and Technical Education Academy in Dickinson. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of House Bill 1188. This bill is a crucial step toward ensuring equitable and sustainable funding for Career and Technology Education (CTE) Centers across North Dakota.

The establishment of new brick-and-mortar Career and Technical Education (CTE) centers, the first in over forty years, has highlighted significant gaps in our existing Century Code regarding how we assess fees for partner schools. As the state invests in expanding these new centers, we've discovered that the current fee framework has not kept pace with the evolving needs of CTE. Specifically, the existing code mandates cost assessments based on total high school enrollment rather than actual participation in our centers, which can unfairly burden smaller, rural schools.

This bill is not just a response to isolated concerns but the result of thorough collaboration and vetting by CTE directors from across North Dakota. The language in HB1188 has been carefully considered and approved at multiple meetings of the ND CTE Directors and with leadership from the Department of CTE. These meetings have become even more critical due to a recent opinion from the North Dakota Attorney General's Office, which highlighted the urgent need for this legislation to ensure all CTE centers—both new and existing—can operate in compliance with Century Code language.

In summary, this legislation would allow our governing boards, comprising a majority of elected school board members, to set a fee structure that covers the costs of the centers in a way that makes sense for all partner schools. According to the Attorney General's opinion, I must assess my current schools not based on their utilization of SWCTE but rather on their total high school enrollment. Beach High School, located 62 miles from the SWCTE Academy, will never have the same level of participation in center programming compared to schools in and around Dickinson due to geographical constraints. Beach's total high school population currently accounts for about 5% of the students of our Academy members. While we have two students from Beach attending classes daily and programs utilizing some of our mobile labs, the current language would require us to assess them over \$82,157 to be members. Although they value their membership in SWCTE, this cost would make it prohibitive for them to continue participating. We need the flexibility to assess fees for Beach that are fair and equitable. Dickinson High School and private schools in Dickinson make up around 71% of the total students, they utilize our center's programming around a 90% rate. While this change would impact Dickinson Public Schools with picking up a higher share of the costs, they understand the need to pay their fair share for programming.

The Beach's, Belfield's, South Hearts, New England's and Killdeers shouldn't be paying the costs for Dickinson High School students to attend the center. In our first full year of operation SWCTE boasts 15 program areas, with over 1120 unique students enrolled from seven high schools, two private schools and homeschool students from four districts in over 2650 class enrollments. The one of a kind opportunities we are providing students, needs to be support by language giving our local board the ability to assess costs that work for all schools in SWND.

Some may argue for Beach and other rural schools to participate as non-member schools, but I stress the importance of having their board members at the table to help drive decisions and programming that support students across SW North Dakota. Schools like Bowman, Scranton, and others want to be part of the opportunities SWCTE offers, but costs exceeding \$100,000 a year for membership would prohibit their participation. While we currently have an excellent board of directors at SWCTE and a director committed to expanding opportunities for rural schools, these individuals can change. Let's protect their interests and ensure all students have access to CTE at our centers, regardless of their proximity to the CTE Center Campuses.

Furthermore, the deletion of language in Page 1, Lines 21-24, and Page 2, Lines 1-4, is necessary to clean up outdated provisions. These sections, which pertain to CTE centers that only operate mobile units, do not reflect current or future practices in North Dakota. Researching the origins of this language revealed it does not align with the operational realities of our CTE centers today. Our centers have evolved to include comprehensive programming beyond just mobile units.

In conclusion, HB1188 is vital legislation that modernizes our approach to funding CTE centers, promotes fairness, and supports the state's investment in expanding career and technical education. It empowers local control, aligns with the recommendations of CTE directors and the Department of Career and Technical Education, and ensures that all students in North Dakota have access to these valuable educational opportunities.

I urge the committee to support this bill to secure the future of CTE centers and the students they serve across our great state. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
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