



North Dakota House of Representatives

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COMMITTEES:

Appropriations
Appropriations - Human Resources Division

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House Bill 1329 Senate Education Committee

Chairman Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am Representative Emily O'Brien; I represent District 42 in Grand Forks.

Before you is House Bill 1329, the intentions of this bill is to have transparency on where the money allocated from the legislature to our local school districts is being spent. Currently, legislators know how much funding each district receives but lack detailed insights into the actual expenditures.

We heard in the House opposition testimony that this would be an immense burden on local school districts. Our school administrators are already doing budget preparation, payroll processing, and financial reporting at the local level - it should be no different to report the information at the state level.

In North Dakota, our K-12 budget is \$2.5 Billion dollars. We have an enrollment of 115,797 students and 9,233 teachers in our public schools. While campaigning, one of the things I continued to hear was the troublingly low levels of teacher pay, paraprofessionals and aids in our classrooms.

Teachers' pays went further nearly 40 years ago than they do today due to rising inflation and flat pay. We are asking teachers to do more in the classroom, with less. As a mom of a kindergartener, who has been begging to go to school since she was two, I want to ensure that our educators have every tool in their classroom to ensure student success.

K-12 school spending has increased 340% since 1960, even when controlling for inflation. In 1960, it took 13 students to pay a teacher's salary. Today it only takes four. So, where does the money go?

Education spending transparency allows parents, school boards, and taxpayers to stand up to unaccountable bureaucracies that waste money and fail to educate children. By creating a window into each purpose that a school makes, states empower parents to advocate for wasting less and putting more money into higher teacher pay and other research-backed solutions that are proven to improve student learning outcomes.

The increased number of administrators, support staff, and instructional aids - please do not get me wrong, these people are important to the operations of our schools. But this increase has not improved student learning outcomes - and has made it nearly impossible to increase pay that would attract and retain more high-quality teachers. Publishing school-by-school information will help ensure that taxpayers know how their money is being spent - and can hold schools accountable.

Local officials, parents, and members of the public would have immediate access to the information on how every dollar is spent, whether an administrator's salary, office supplies, or new curricula. When communities come together, armed with facts about how public-school dollars are spent, parents can hold schools accountable and advocate for proven strategies that improve student outcomes and compensate teachers fairly.

Working together, we can set up a public checkbook. I learned late last week about some of our different vendors that we currently utilize that may be able to integrate this financial information from our local schools. We discussed the financial transactions that are occurring and monitoring student behaviors and outcomes - which is an additional financial impact.

I am requesting some time to work with the vendors to explore potential options and criteria to move forward whether that is through a study or platform we already have available.

That concludes my testimony. Thank you, Chairman Beard and members of the committee.