

Good morning, Chairman Beard and members of the Senate Education committee. My name is Shawn Kuntz, and I am the Superintendent of Wishek Public School District #19 in Wishek, North Dakota. Today, I will present testimony in four parts. While we advocate for public school funding, particularly in specialized areas like English Language Learner (ELL) services, our primary goal is to showcase the successes occurring in public schools throughout North Dakota.

As I mentioned earlier, the word “success” is central to my message, and I will return to it later. To begin, I would like to invite my interventionist, Ms. Kalli Scherbenske, and two of our students, to speak.

[Ms. Scherbenske and Regina and Juan speaks]

Now, I circle back to that important word: success. I stand before you as a proud superintendent, proud of my staff, school board, coaches, and community for the incredible successes we achieve every day—successes that extend far beyond the individual but reflect our collective efforts. Today, we demonstrated one part of public education that many people may be unaware even exists. This is a testament to the potential within every public school, and I am confident that public schools across North Dakota could share similar success stories.

Unfortunately, these successes are often overshadowed by a flawed system established 25 years ago with No Child Left Behind, a concept that I argue has roots going back even further to the early 1980s with the A Nation At Risk report that detailed the inadequate education that was taking place in public schools during the 1970’s. However, today’s focus is on funding.

In my district, 4% of our student population requires ELL services. With a total of 250 students, that translates to 10 students needing additional, specialized instruction, which significantly impacts our staffing needs. Currently, we receive an additional .21 adjusted daily membership (ADM) for ELL services, which, when multiplied by the school size weighting factor of 1.24, results in approximately \$2,883.15 for ELL funding. Unfortunately, this amount is insufficient given our actual needs.

Finding qualified employees in rural areas is a challenge we all understand. When we cannot hire locally, we must contract services, which comes with high costs—particularly travel fees. Moreover, the quality of services is often better when we can employ staff who are present in the building and community rather than relying on distant contractors.

We have been fortunate to have Ms. Scherbenske join our team, and her contributions exemplify the type of success we strive for.

In closing, I want to reiterate the importance of success. What we demonstrated here today—whether through ELL students, special education, or general education—occurs across every public school, and it is the essence of what we do. We educate all students with the tax dollars we receive, alongside state and federal oversight.

The achievements we celebrate today reflect a significant success for Wishek Public School and North Dakota public education. However, if you were to evaluate us solely based on test

scores—often the only metric discussed—you might not recognize this success. I urge you to consider that it may not be the schools failing, but rather the instruments we use to measure success that warrant reevaluation.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to share our story, and for your commitment to serving the educational needs of North Dakota.