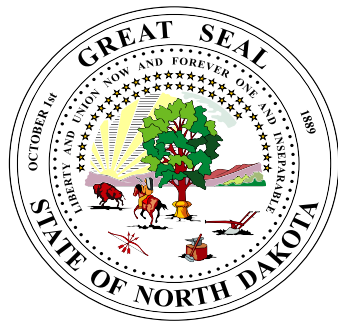


September 2024

North Dakota Educational
Opportunities Task Force
Stakeholder Listening
Session Feedback



INTRODUCTION FROM THE HUNT INSTITUTE



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OVERVIEW OF LISTENING SESSION PARTICIPATION

DATE	STAKEHOLDERS	REGISTERED	ATTENDED
September 12, 2024	Educators	20	15
September 12, 2024	Community Members	9	7
September 17, 2024	Community Members	46	18
September 17, 2024	Educators	38	23
September 18, 2024	Educators	12	8
Online Survey	Combined		25
Total		125	96

WHAT DOES SCHOOL CHOICE MEAN TO YOU?

Variety of Educational Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants described school choice as access to various educational options, including public, private, charter schools, homeschooling, tutoring, and online learning.• Having options can allow parents to select the environment best suited to their child’s learning style, interests, and abilities, fostering a personalized approach to education.• Parents believe this flexibility is seen as particularly valuable for students who may not thrive in traditional public schools.
Equitable Access to Quality Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many participants emphasized that school choice should ensure all families, regardless of income or location, have access to high-quality educational options.• Parents viewed school choice as a way to empower parents to make the best educational decisions for their children, aligning with each child’s unique needs.• Educators reiterated that ND already offers choice to families through public schools (CTE centers and open enrollment).
Concerns About Public vs. Private Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A significant concern was whether public funds should be used to support private education, which may lack the same accountability as public schools.• Participants worried that diverting funds to private schools could reduce resources for public schools, impacting equity and quality in public education.• Some argued that private schools often only accept students who are likely to succeed, potentially weakening public schools. Others countered that private schools have specific missions and are not necessarily “elitist”.

CAN SCHOOL CHOICE BENEFIT STUDENTS AND FAMILIES IN NORTH DAKOTA? IF SO, HOW?

Empowering Parents and Customization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School choice was seen as empowering parents to decide what educational setting is best for their children, allowing for a more customized educational experience.• Parents appreciated having the flexibility to choose schools that align with their values, educational philosophies, and their child's specific learning needs.• This could include selecting schools with specialized curriculums, such as STEM-focused programs or schools emphasizing arts or technical skills.
Access to Specialized Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants noted that school choice can open doors to specialized programs not available in all public schools, such as CTE centers, which offer training in trades, technology, and other fields.• Some attendees noted that ND already provides opportunities like CTE centers for vocational and technical training.• Some emphasized that school choice should not be limited to private schools but should include options like charter schools.
Challenges in Rural Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many participants from rural areas expressed that school choice is often limited by geographic and logistical barriers, such as long travel distances and a lack of local private or charter schools.• Rural families often have fewer choices, which can make school choice seem more theoretical than practical in these communities.
Concerns About Unintended Consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some participants worried that school choice might unintentionally prioritize extracurricular activities, like athletics, over core academic programs.• There were also concerns that focusing on school choice could divert attention from improving existing public schools for all students.

IN YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES OR BARRIERS THAT FAMILIES FACE WHEN CONSIDERING DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS FOR THEIR CHILDREN?

Financial Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cost was frequently mentioned as a major barrier to accessing private or specialized education options. Without financial assistance, many families are unable to afford tuition, uniforms, or additional fees associated with private schooling.• Even when scholarships or vouchers are available, they often do not cover the full cost, leaving families to make up the difference.• Many stakeholders stressed the importance of school choice and the financial barriers that prevent some families from accessing alternate educational options.
Acceptance of Special Needs Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many educators noted that most private schools lack the necessary resources, such as specialized staff and support services, to adequately serve students with disabilities.• Parents reported instances where their children were turned away from private schools because they did not fit the school's admissions criteria or needed services the school could not provide.• This "exclusionary practice" was seen as a major flaw in the implementation of school choice.
Concerns About Unintended Consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants, particularly those from rural areas, highlighted the significant challenge of limited availability of schools within a reasonable distance. For many families, the nearest private or charter school could be miles away, making daily travel unrealistic.

CAN SCHOOL CHOICE EXPAND EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL STUDENTS? IF SO, HOW?

Potential for Expanding Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants believed that expanding school choice could provide more equitable access to high-quality education, particularly through programs that are not traditionally offered in all public schools, such as advanced placement courses, specialized curriculums, or unique extracurricular activities.• Many parents and private school educators view school choice as a way to diversify educational opportunities and tailor learning experiences to meet different student needs.• Many public school educators view school choice as a way to potentially limit equitable opportunities
Equity and Discrimination Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Despite the potential benefits, participants expressed concerns that school choice could inadvertently increase inequities. Selective admissions processes could lead to discrimination against students with disabilities, English language learners, or those from low-income families.• There were fears that some schools could selectively admit students, creating a two-tier system that marginalizes those who are most vulnerable.
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants across the board stressed the importance of consistent accountability standards across all school types to ensure that every student receives a high-quality education.• Without uniform accountability, there is a risk that private and charter schools might not meet the same educational standards as public schools, which could lead to uneven educational outcomes.

WHAT ROLE SHOULD PUBLIC FUNDING PLAY IN SUPPORTING VARIOUS SCHOOL CHOICE OPTIONS SUCH AS PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS, PRIVATE TUITION, AND SUPPLEMENTARY SUPPORTS, SERVICES, AND MATERIALS FOR ALL STUDENTS?

Varied Views on Public Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opinions were divided, with some advocating for public funds to follow students to whichever school their parents choose, arguing that this would enhance flexibility and access.• Others felt that public funds should remain within the public school system to ensure that resources are equitably distributed and that all students benefit from public investment.• There was a discussion about constitutional limitations on using public funds for private schools, with some participants emphasizing that school choice should be limited to public schools.
Concerns About Resource Drain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There was a great deal of concern that diverting public funds to private or charter schools could drain resources from already underfunded public schools, particularly in rural and low-income areas.• Participants worried that this could exacerbate existing disparities, leaving public schools with fewer resources to support the students who remain.• Raised constitutional obligations, arguing that public funding should not support multiple educational systems and should be limited to public education.
Ensuring Equity and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many participants called for policies that ensure public funds are used equitably and that all schools receiving these funds adhere to the same standards of accountability and transparency as public schools.• There was a strong emphasis on the need for oversight to prevent misuse of funds and to ensure that schools serve all students fairly.

WHAT ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES SHOULD BE IN PLACE TO ENSURE THAT ALL SCHOOLS, REGARDLESS OF TYPE, PROVIDE A HIGH STANDARD OF EDUCATION UNDER A SCHOOL CHOICE MODEL?

Uniform Standards Across All Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants consistently voiced that all schools receiving public funds should be held to the same academic standards as public schools, including testing, curriculum, and assessment requirements.• Ensuring consistent standards would help maintain a high quality of education across all school types and protect students' right to a rigorous education.
Rigorous Oversight of Public Funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There was broad agreement on the need for rigorous oversight to ensure that public funds are spent appropriately and that schools are held accountable for their educational outcomes.• Participants stressed the importance of transparent financial practices and regular evaluations to ensure accountability.
Equal Admission Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants stressed the importance of equal admission policies, requiring that any school receiving public funds must admit all students, regardless of disability, language barriers, or other factors.• Ensuring inclusive admissions would help prevent discrimination and ensure that all students have equitable access to educational opportunities.• If they receive public funding, private schools should accept all students, regardless of faith, to receive public funding.• Stakeholders highlighted the transparency and accountability of public schools, governed by locally elected boards, and debated the need for full accountability in non-public schools.

KEY TAKEAWAYS | COMMUNITY SESSIONS

Empowerment and Customization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents want control over their child's education.• School choice allows for personalized learning experiences.• Customization is seen as essential for academic and personal growth.
Access to Diverse Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents seek access to specialized programs and diverse curriculums.• School choice offers exposure to STEM, arts-focused, and vocational training options.• Choice is seen as an opportunity to better prepare children for the future.
Barriers to Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents face significant barriers such as cost, transportation, and distance.• Rural families often have fewer or no realistic options for school choice.• The need for equitable access and support to overcome these barriers is crucial.
Equitable Standards and Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concern over equitable admissions practices in private/charter schools.• Parents seek safer, higher-quality environments for their children.• Consistent standards across all schools are viewed as essential for fairness.

KEY TAKEAWAYS | EDUCATOR SESSIONS

Accountability and Uniform Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educators emphasize the need for consistent accountability across all schools.• Public funds should be accompanied by strict oversight to maintain high standards.• Schools must meet the same academic and testing requirements as public schools.
Impact on Public Education Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diverting public funds to private or charter schools can weaken public education.• Educators worry about reduced resources, especially in rural and low-income areas.• Public school resources are critical to supporting vulnerable students.
Challenges in in Rural Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Geographic isolation and limited school alternatives hinder rural implementation of school choice.• Rural educators struggle with fewer resources and available options.• Educators highlight the need for fair policies that address these geographic disparities.
Ensuring Inclusivity and Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensuring all students, especially those with special needs and language barriers, have access to education.• Educators advocate for inclusivity and fairness in admissions policies.• Strong support for maintaining the public school system's inclusive standards.

THANK YOU!

