

2025 HOUSE EDUCATION

HB 1530

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Education Committee Coteau AB Room, State Capitol

HB 1530
2/11/2025

To provide for a legislative management study on the circumstances and needs of special education teachers and the related special education teacher shortage.

11:27 a.m. Chairman Heinert called the hearing to order.

Members Present: Chairman Heinert, Vice Chairman Schreiber- Beck, Representatives, Conmy, Hager, Hatlestad, Hauck, Heilman, Jonas, Longmuir, Maki, Marchall, Morton, Novak, Osowski

Discussion Topics:

- Teacher's mental health
- Special Education System
- Teacher shortages
- Turnover rates
- Individualized Education Plans
- Case and work loads

11:27 a.m. Representative Schneider introduced the bill and submitted testimony. #36890

11:32 a.m. Amber Haskell, Field Consultant for ND United, testified in favor and submitted testimony. #36918

11:37 a.m. Kendra Vander Wal, Executive Director of Designer Geans, testified in favor and submitted testimony. #37102

11:43 a.m. Michael Olson Attorney ND P&A, testified in favor and read Brenda Ruehl's testimony. #36631

11:46 a.m. Dr Katherine Terras, Central Certification, testified in favor and submitted testimony. #36985

11:50 a.m. Chairman Heinert closed the hearing.

11:50 a.m. Representative Hager moved a Do Pass.

11:50 a.m. Representative Jonas seconded the motion.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Pat D. Heinert	Y
Representative Cynthia Schreiber-Beck	Y
Representative Liz Conmy	Y
Representative LaurieBeth Hager	Y
Representative Patrick R. Hatlestad	Y
Representative Dori Hauck	Y
Representative Matthew Heilman	A
Representative Jim Jonas	Y
Representative Donald W. Longmuir	Y
Representative Roger A. Maki	Y
Representative Andrew Marschall	Y
Representative Desiree Morton	Y
Representative Anna S. Novak	Y
Representative Doug Osowski	Y

Motion carried: 13-0-1

11:52 a.m. Representative Novak moved to placed on the Consent Calander.

11:52 a.m. Representative Hager seconded the motion.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Pat D. Heinert	Y
Representative Cynthia Schreiber-Beck	Y
Representative Liz Conmy	Y
Representative LaurieBeth Hager	Y
Representative Patrick R. Hatlestad	Y
Representative Dori Hauck	Y
Representative Matthew Heilman	A
Representative Jim Jonas	Y
Representative Donald W. Longmuir	Y
Representative Roger A. Maki	Y
Representative Andrew Marschall	Y
Representative Desiree Morton	Y
Representative Anna S. Novak	Y
Representative Doug Osowski	Y

Motion carried: 13-0-1

Bill carrier: Representative Novak

Additional written testimony:

Matt Liebel, ND Resident, submitted testimony in favor. #36261

Kori Jensen, ND Resident, submitted testimony in favor. #36275

Alisha Webster, ND Resident, submitted testimony in favor. #36400

Stefanie Keidel, Special Education Teacher, submitted testimony in favor. #36475

Katie Wood, ND Resident, submitted testimony in favor. #36560

Nathan Horgeshimer, ND Resident, submitted testimony in favor. #36759

Alexis Rasset, Special Education Teacher, Submitted testimony in favor. #36770

Jessica Nolz, Special Education Teacher, submitted testimony in favor. #36875

Alicia Weiland, ND Resident, submitted testimony in favor. #37000

11:54 a.m. Chairman Heinert adjourned the meeting.

Leah Kuball, Committee Clerk

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
HB 1530 ([25.1241.01000](#))

Education Committee (Rep. Heinert, Chairman) recommends **DO PASS** and **BE PLACED ON THE CONSENT CALENDAR** (13 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1530 was placed on the Tenth order on the calendar.

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1530

Presented to the House Education Committee
North Dakota Legislative Assembly

Chairperson Heinert, Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Matt Liebel, and I am here today to voice my strong support for House Bill 1530, which calls for a legislative management study on the circumstances and needs of special education teachers and the ongoing special education teacher shortage in North Dakota.

I spent 15 years in Williston as a middle school science teacher, and I recently transitioned into a new role as a Field Consultant for North Dakota United. In this position, I have had the opportunity to work directly with educators across the state, including special education teachers, as part of the NDU SPED Collective. Through this collective, we listen to special education teachers share their daily struggles—challenges that include overwhelming caseloads, excessive paperwork, a lack of support, and difficulties in maintaining work-life balance. Their voices consistently highlight a systemic issue that requires urgent attention.

The Growing Special Education Crisis

The shortage of special education teachers is not just a staffing issue—it directly impacts students, schools, and communities. Special education teachers play an essential role in providing individualized support to students with unique learning needs, yet they are often overburdened, underpaid, and undervalued. Many educators in this field leave due to burnout or frustration, making it increasingly difficult for schools to provide the legally required services that students deserve.

This study is an important first step in understanding why special education teachers are leaving and what can be done to improve their working conditions, support structures, and overall job satisfaction. Without this data-driven approach, any solutions will be temporary fixes rather than meaningful, long-term reforms.

Why This Study Matters

By approving HB 1530, this legislature has the opportunity to take a proactive approach in addressing the challenges within special education. This study will provide crucial insights into:

- The specific factors driving the special education teacher shortage
- The workload and administrative burdens that contribute to burnout
- Recruitment and retention strategies that could be implemented statewide
- Ways to better support special education teachers so they can best serve their students

Investing in this study means investing in our students, our educators, and the future of education in North Dakota. The findings will help guide policies that strengthen the profession and ensure that students with special needs receive the high-quality education they deserve.

I urge this committee to support House Bill 1530 and recognize the importance of studying this issue so that we can build a stronger, more sustainable special education workforce. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Liebel

Field Consultant, North Dakota United

Chair Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Kori Jensen, and I am a special education teacher at Harvey Public School, teaching grades 8-12. I am testifying in support of HB 1530 because this bill addresses critical issues that impact educators and students, particularly in workload, student and staff safety, and paraprofessional support.

As a special education teacher, I see firsthand how the increasing demands of paperwork, paraprofessional management, and ensuring student safety place an overwhelming burden on educators. With limited resources and staffing, providing the individualized support that many students require becomes challenging. The understaffing of paraprofessionals is especially concerning, as these individuals play a vital role in supporting students with disabilities. Students and teachers struggle to meet educational goals effectively without adequate support.

Beyond these challenges, I often lose my lunch and prep time because I provide services instead. There is little to no time left in my day to complete the extensive paperwork required for special education, as my priority is always my students. Additionally, special education meetings frequently occur during non-contracted hours, yet there is no compensation for the extra time spent ensuring compliance and student success. The increasing demands, without adequate support or recognition, make it even harder for special education teachers to sustain their work long-term.

HB 1530 is necessary to improve educators' working conditions and students' learning conditions. By addressing staffing shortages and reducing unnecessary administrative burdens, this bill will allow teachers like myself to focus more on what truly matters—helping students succeed.

In conclusion, I urge you to support HB 1530 to create a more sustainable and effective education system in North Dakota. Investing in our schools, staff, and students is an investment in the future of our communities. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Chair Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, my name Alisha Webster, and I am a special education teacher in Dickinson. I am testifying in support of HB 1530.

My first year as a special education teacher I had a caseload of twelve. This year I have thirty-two, as well as an additional twelve students who I see either daily or several times a week. I have had students come to my room for tests per their IEP and refuse to enter because the room is too full. I've had students come to me for a cool down, become more overwhelmed and go on to have an outburst in the classroom. This has sometimes led to dangerous situations for students. Daily, there are problems that I could have prevented if I had not been treading water trying to meet the legal minimums for my students.

This year I am averaging 30 minutes of prep during content hours per week, and I have been working very hard at taking a 30-minute lunch four days a week. My contract says it should be one and a half hours of prep and 45 minutes of lunch per day. There is no way that I could get this time while still meeting the legal minimums of student IEPs. I am working fifty plus hours a week and am still not able to give my students the services they will need to be successful adults. I know the way I was able to change lives and set kids up for success with smaller caseloads, and it breaks my heart that I can't do this now.

Our school is constantly short of para educators. This also sets students up for outbursts which might put other students at risk. More frequently it results in students who sit in classes unable to learn, thus compromising their futures.

The job of being a special education has become less and less possible in recent years. This causes us to lose good people in this field, and students too have poorer life outcomes. A study looking into a solution to this problem would be very important.

Hello! My name is Stefanie Keidel, and I am a wife, mom, and special education teacher from Mandan.

Currently, I am an elementary special education teacher for K-5 students with a variety of disabilities: Autism, Other Health Impairments, Intellectual Disabilities, and more. Previously, I have spent one year at the high school, also teaching special education. This is my 10th year at Fort Lincoln Elementary.

I live on a farm south of town with my husband, and we have an 8-year-old daughter and a 6-year old son that attend the same school I work at.

I am writing to you in support of HB1530.

As a human being in our world right now, I can attest that there are simply too many things to do with too little time; get groceries, clean the house, feed the dog, help with homework, drive to activities, RAISE GOOD HUMANS, etc. - you get the point. All while battling internal and external factors. In this chapter of life, my focus is on my kids. As a teacher, 'my kids' also includes my students. If you are not an educator, I do not expect you to understand that sentiment; however, as an educator - I can tell you, without a doubt, I care for my students as I do my personal children.

As a teacher, I am often considered with curriculum, assessments, projects, meetings, paperwork, etc. However, the wellbeing of my students comes above all else. My hope as a teacher is to help support young people as they learn and grow to become (hopefully) happy and successful members of our community. I mean: the students who have a disability who I am lucky enough to case manage, the peers of these students in their general education classrooms, and the other peers in our building who I hope grow to be inclusive and respectful of all.

I wish I could tell you how easy and great it is to be a public educator. I will say: I am lucky enough to work in a district that, I believe, is in support of teachers.

However, there are daily battles, as a special education teacher, that need to be addressed if recruiting and retaining effective special educators is a priority.

1. STAFF: Quite frankly - I cannot do my job alone. My job relies heavily on the paraprofessionals that work with me. Recruiting and retaining strong, caring individuals have been the most difficult aspects of my job. Simply put, I do not get to show up to work, do my best, and expect great outcomes. When I go to work, the influence and difference I make in a day relies on how many of my staff members are also at school. If we are short a staff member or two (which we are - almost every month in my classroom alone), I cannot do my job. My job then shifts to covering for others and adjusting schedules and filling in where needed. As certified educators, we have a teachers' union in place to be a part of, if we choose. The union helps us band together to advocate for our needs.

Wholeheartedly, I 'go to bat' for my staff. They are the heart and soul of my classroom. However, simply put - the paraprofessionals are not paid a livable wage (including benefits) that make it possible or plausible for them to stay.

2. TIME: Whether I like it or not, a huge part of my job is doing paperwork. Writing Individualized Education Plans, facilitating many (MANY!) meetings, participating in and completing individualized assessments (which require profile meetings, assessment plans, and written assessment reports), and continually communicating with other educators means there is less time to be spent working with and teaching students. I spend a great deal of time planning for my paraprofessionals to spend time with students - while I complete the paperwork and the other work done behind the scenes.
3. SAFETY: I am not sure why I left this reason for 3rd - maybe because it is the hardest for me to talk about. As a special education teacher, a staff trained in Nonviolent Crisis Intervention, and a member of our building team that responds to 'response calls' when a student is struggling, I have been injured many times in the past 10 years. I would love to give you a number - a specific amount of times I have been hurt (or a student has had the intent of causing me harm). On average, I would say I am hit, kicked, bit, hit by an object flying across the room, etc. around 2-3 times per week. Sometimes, it's a mild injury; other times, it requires a visit to the Occupational Health center. For all times, it requires documentation, communication, and a great deal of thought. What was the student communicating? (ALL behavior is communication) What could we (as staff) have done differently? Who else could we involve to help prevent these situations in the future? What can we do if we are out of resources? How can we keep our coworkers and our students safe next time?

The fact is, I don't have a lot of answers to the questions I have posed. I firmly believe this bill is important for gathering information that can help education in the future.

For the past 10 years, I have worked at the same elementary school in the same home town in which I grew up. I married my high school sweetheart, a farmer and plant-worker, and we are here to stay. We plan to raise our kids here. In the elementary school in which I work, there are two special education positions in which I have described: I hold one of them. In 10 years, I have had five teaching partners. That position has changed hands 5 times. Something isn't working. The paperwork, the caseloads, the lack of paraprofessional support, the lack of curriculum resources, the increase in unsafe behaviors, the incredible incline of disrespectful behaviors - we're running out of people that are willing to put their well-being on the line in the hopes of helping children.

I just quickly want to share a personal story: My son, Harrison, is six years old. He is in kindergarten in the same building I work in. I also happen to have a student on my caseload who is in kindergarten; however, she does not come to school at our building. She is a homebound student due to complex medical needs. At the beginning of this school year, I thought a lot of this student. I also thought a lot about my youngest child starting elementary

school. I compared the two experiences. I compared the experience of this child's parents with our experience. I immediately knew I wanted this child to be put into a kindergarten classroom in our school (in order for the child to have a general education teacher and peers). After visiting with our special education director and the superintendent, while navigating some behind-the-scenes issues (due to a student who is homebound being listed in a school-based classroom, and the funding issues that come into play - I won't pretend that I know all of these things), we 'unofficially' placed her in a classroom. It happened to work out that my son is in this classroom as well. This has been such an incredible experience to watch. The kindergarten class is kept up to date on what the homebound child is up to, how she is completing various 'kindergarten' tasks, and the like (shout out to the rockstar kinder teacher). This child is also updated frequently - with recorded messages, cards, and gifts from the kindergarten class. With support from her family, she was even able to come to the school building for school pictures this fall. And every single kindergarten student wore a mask, without complaint, to keep her healthy in order to meet her (from a distance). It was beautiful. My son frequently comes home telling me all about the update he heard about this student during the day. Just this week, he was planning his valentine's, and he was sure to include non-edible treats - since this child is unable to eat food. I know many of his peers have had similar experiences.

I share all of this for one reason: special education matters. Education matters. Public education matters. Forming these relationships between kindergarten students (who attend school in separate settings) matter. My job is getting harder every year. I won't sugar coat it - I almost threw in the towel last year. My husband and I candidly visited with our financial advisor to see if we could afford the retirement we hope for without my teaching retirement. Spoiler alert: we cannot. I chose to stick it out at least one more year (and hopefully more to come). I am here for my students and my children. It sounds so cliché, but I want the world to be a better place. Especially as a mom and a teacher - I want the world to be better for my children.

I have watched my friends walk away from this profession, and I can not blame them at all. Something has to change. There isn't a perfect answer as to what the 'something' is - but I am hoping this bill will help to pinpoint some of those reasons.

My husband and I have always told our children they can do whatever they want in life: become a welder, go to college, start a job right after high school, become a plumber, fly to the moon - you name it. As hard as it is for me to write this - I have very clearly told my daughter (and I have prayed hard many nights) - please choose a different profession. Teaching, as it is now, especially in special education, is not a safe or happy place to be.

I hope this bill provides some clarity for ways in which we can better the future of education, for all.

Thank you for your time.

Stefanie Keidel
Elementary Special Education Teacher

Katie Wood

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February 9, 2025

House Education Committee
North Dakota Legislative Assembly
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

Subject: Support for HB 1530 – Special Education Teacher Recruitment and Retention Study

Dear Chair Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 1530, a bill that seeks to address the ongoing challenges in the recruitment and retention of special education teachers in North Dakota. As a dedicated special education teacher with over 16 years of experience, I have firsthand knowledge of the increasing demands placed on educators in this field. Without targeted legislative action, these challenges will continue to negatively impact our students, teachers, and the quality of special education services across the state.

HB 1530 proposes a much-needed legislative study to examine critical issues affecting special educators, including workload disparities, student and staff safety, paraprofessional management duties, and excessive paperwork requirements. These issues have long contributed to high turnover rates and difficulty attracting new professionals to the field. By conducting this study, the state can take meaningful steps toward ensuring equitable working conditions for special educators while enhancing the quality of education for students with disabilities.

Key concerns addressed in this bill include:

- **Workload Disparities:** Many special educators are burdened with overwhelming caseloads, making it difficult to comply with students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and meet federal and state requirements. A standardized

formula for caseload assignments is crucial to maintaining compliance and ensuring students receive the support they need.

- **Student and Staff Safety:** Special education teachers frequently encounter challenging behaviors in the classroom. Increased training in de-escalation techniques, access to protective measures, and additional paraprofessional support are essential to maintaining a safe learning environment.
- **Paraprofessional Management:** The responsibility of training, scheduling, and evaluating paraprofessionals often falls on special education teachers, despite a lack of compensation and support. Addressing this issue is vital to improving teacher retention and ensuring paraprofessionals receive adequate guidance.
- **Paperwork and Administrative Burden:** The excessive paperwork requirements for special educators result in uncompensated time spent outside of contractual hours. Providing additional administrative support and compensation for required meetings and compliance-related tasks is necessary to prevent burnout and retain qualified professionals.

By advancing HB 1530, the North Dakota Legislature has an opportunity to take proactive steps toward improving special education services and retaining qualified teachers. I urge you to support this bill and ensure that the needs of special educators and the students they serve remain a legislative priority.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to improving education in North Dakota and look forward to seeing HB 1530 move forward.

Sincerely,

Katie Wood

Special Education Strategist

Century Elementary School, Grand Forks Public Schools.



Protection & Advocacy Project

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Education Committee

House Bill 1530 - February 11, 2025

Testimony of Brenda Ruehl, P&A Director Program Services

Greetings Chairman Heinert and members of the Education Committee. My name is Brenda Ruehl and I'm a Director of Program Services at the North Dakota Protection and Advocacy Project (P&A). P&A is an independent state agency established in 1977 to assert and advance the human, civil, and legal rights of people with disabilities. The agency's programs and services seek to make positive changes for people with disabilities where we live, learn, work and play.

P&A is in support of the passage of this study bill. Education is a priority area for P&A. Throughout the state P&A Disabilities Advocates and Directors work collaboratively with school districts, in Special Education and General Education, to ensure students with disabilities have access to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). P&A also works with Special Education Directors to support teachers, paraprofessionals and related service staff to identify and obtain services and supports necessary for FAPE and for students to learn in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Students with social/emotional/behavioral health needs benefit when P&A and the IEP or 504 teams work to find solutions and supports for both the students and the teachers in the schools. Special education staff need training, support, and access to other highly qualified professionals to successfully meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Special education directors and teachers are often left out of the planning and decision-making for what special education is and should be. They are asked and required to do more with fewer teachers, inadequate training, and often without backup or support especially in crisis situations. Special education teachers must meet the regulations for assessments, evaluations, and IEP meetings that must include parents, yet teachers are not compensated for the time given to these processes outside of the usual school day. Special education teachers are buried with ever increasing paperwork while expected to train paraprofessionals, teach, maintain a safe learning environment for students and staff, and a multitude of other things identified in this bill.

Special education staff are tasked with making certain there is equity for students with disabilities while experiencing inequities in their own support, compensation, and job expectations. P&A urges a do pass on this study bill to identify those inequities for special education teachers and thus the education of students with disabilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Brenda Ruehl, Director Program Services
bruehl@nd.gov

Chairman Heinert and members of the committee,

My name is Nathan Horgeshimer from Halliday. I am a special education teacher at Killdeer High School and have been in that role for 14 years. I am testifying in support of House Bill 1530.

Special education is a rewarding field to work in that has its own specific set of challenges that differ from those of the rest of my teaching colleagues. This can lead to high teacher turnover and sometimes not being able to find applicants for open special education positions.

Special education teachers have large amounts of compliance paperwork to complete, schedule and run meetings, test students, complete observations, supervise and evaluate paraprofessionals, and many times are the point person dealing with the more extreme behavior issues that occur in our schools. This is all on top of the teaching duties that they have. In my case, I am currently am the case manager for 41 students, where in the past I would typically have somewhere between 15 to 22 students.

In my district, we've run into issues with turnover of special education staff, with teachers both leaving for other positions and leaving teaching entirely due to the amount of paperwork and other duties involved. We've also gone extended lengths of time with open special education positions posted. We've been fortunate, though, as other districts in Southwest ND have gone an entire school year without a special education teacher.

I can say that none of this is to speak poorly of my administration, both in the district and in our special education unit. They are great to work with and are willing to try things to alleviate the time commitments and workloads of teachers, and to better serve the students we have in our district. They have been very persistent in trying to find teachers, both in- and out-of-district, to fill those positions. But none of that changes that there aren't as many teachers coming into education, and that is especially true for special education. If we lose the teachers we currently have in our schools, who is going to replace them? When a teacher leaves and there is no replacement, it falls to the teachers that stay.

I support HB 1530 as this study can help pinpoint actions to be made to help retain the teachers that work with the highest-need students in the state.

Thank you for your time. Being on committees can be thankless work and I appreciate the time that all of you are putting into the bills brought before you.

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1530

Presented to the House Education Committee

North Dakota Legislative Assembly

Chairperson Heinert, Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Alexis Rasset, and I am here today to voice my strong support for House Bill 1530, which calls for a legislative management study on the circumstances and needs of special education teachers and the ongoing special education teacher shortage in North Dakota.

I am a special education teacher at Mandan High School. This year is my 8th year of teaching, prior to my current role I was a special education paraprofessional for 3 ½ years. 2 years ago, I was part of a group of specialists working with North Dakota United that formed our current NDU SPED Collective. Through our collective we have discussed our daily struggles and challenges which include overwhelming caseloads, excessive paperwork/deadlines, lack of support/training, safety concerns for both students and staff, along with difficulty maintaining a work-life balance.

This bill is not just necessary, it is crucial for the future of our children with special needs. The special education teacher shortage is a crisis impacting our state and our ability to provide these students with the free and appropriate public education they deserve. We are losing dedicated professionals at an alarming rate, and we are struggling to recruit qualified individuals to fill the vacancies. This situation has devastating consequences:

- **Students are losing critical support:** When special education teachers are stretched thin or classrooms are staffed with substitutes or unqualified personnel, students with disabilities are not receiving the individualized instruction and specialized services they need to thrive. This can lead to academic regression, behavioral challenges, and a diminished quality of life.
- **Existing teachers are burning out:** The overwhelming workload, lack of adequate resources, and the emotional toll of supporting students with complex needs are driving special education teachers out of the profession. They are dedicated individuals who are being asked to do more with less, and they are reaching their breaking point.
- **Our schools are struggling:** The shortage creates a ripple effect throughout the entire school system. Administrators struggle to fill positions, general education teachers are asked to take on additional responsibilities without adequate training or support, and the overall learning environment suffers.

This legislative management study is a vital first step toward addressing this crisis. It will allow us to:

- **Gather data:** We need a comprehensive understanding of the root causes of the shortage. This study can investigate factors such as salary, benefits, working conditions, administrative

support, professional development opportunities, and the unique challenges faced by special education teachers in our state.

- **Identify needs:** The study should identify the specific needs of special education teachers, including the resources and support they require to be successful. This could include things like smaller class sizes, dedicated paraprofessionals, access to technology and specialized materials, and ongoing professional development.
- **Develop solutions:** Armed with this data, the legislature can develop evidence-based solutions to address the shortage. This could include strategies to improve recruitment and retention, such as competitive salaries, loan forgiveness programs, mentorship opportunities, and streamlined certification processes.

This is not just about numbers and statistics; it's about the future of our children. Every student, regardless of their abilities, deserves access to a high-quality education. By supporting this study, you are investing in our children, our schools, and our state. You are demonstrating a commitment to ensuring that students with special needs have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

I urge you to support this bill and take action to address the critical special education teacher retention and recoupment crisis. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Alexis Rasset

Mandan Public School, Special Education Teacher

Jessica Nolz
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(701) 471-5852
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February 10th, 2025

House Education Committee
North Dakota Legislative Assembly
600 East Boulevard Ave
Bismarck, ND 58505

Dear Chairman and Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Jessica Nolz, I have been a Special Education Strategist with Grand Forks Public Schools for over 10 years. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 1530. This bill is crucial to addressing the overwhelming workload, safety concerns, and staffing shortages that special education professionals face on a daily basis.

Special education professionals dedicate themselves to ensuring that students with disabilities receive the support they need to thrive. However, the increasing workload has made it nearly impossible to provide the individualized attention that these students deserve. The excessive paperwork requirements alone take up a significant portion of special education teachers' time that could be spent engaging directly with students. IEPs, FBAs, BIPs, evaluations, and compliance documentation have grown in complexity, and without sufficient support, educators are drowning in administrative tasks instead of teaching and supporting students effectively.

Beyond workload concerns, student and staff safety is a critical issue that HB1530 seeks to address. Many of us have encountered situations where students with behavioral challenges require immediate intervention, yet due to understaffing, adequate support is not always available. I have personally witnessed instances where staff members have been injured due to a lack of available personnel to safely manage crisis situations. The lack of proper staffing does not just endanger educators—it also jeopardizes the well-being of students who require specialized support to navigate their learning environments.

Paraprofessionals are the backbone of special education classrooms, providing direct support to students with disabilities. However, due to chronic understaffing, paraprofessionals are often stretched too thin, taking on responsibilities beyond their training and capacity. In many cases, they are expected to manage behaviors, implement complex accommodations, and provide academic support, all while balancing an unsustainable workload. This has led to high turnover rates, further exacerbating the staffing crisis and leaving students without consistent, trained support.

HB 1530 is a necessary step toward addressing these pressing issues. By ensuring that workloads are manageable, safety concerns are prioritized, and paraprofessional staffing is adequately funded and supported, we can create a more sustainable and effective special education system for both educators and students.

I urge you to support HB 1530 and take action to protect the integrity of special education services in North Dakota. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Nolz

Special Education Strategist
Grand Forks Public Schools

INTRODUCTION

By Representative Mary Schneider
of

HB 1530--Special Education Recruitment and Retention Study

House Education Committee, Representative Heinert, Chairman

February 11, 2025

Chairman Heinert and distinguished members of the Education Committee:
I am Mary Schneider, and I proudly represent District 21, central Fargo and West Fargo.

House Bill 1530 seeks to address the critical issue of special education teacher shortages. Its cosponsors are a bipartisan group of representatives and senators, a number of which are connected to and experienced with education. The bill proposes a legislative management study on the challenges impacting the recruitment and retention of special education teachers across the state.

The study will focus on key areas such as workload disparities, student and staff safety concerns, paraprofessional management responsibilities, excessive paperwork demands, and broader systemic issues impacting special education. By evaluating these challenges, the study aims to provide data-driven recommendations for recruitment and retention strategies, for improving working conditions, and for ensuring compliance with state and federal education laws.

Ultimately, House Bill 1530 represents a proactive step toward strengthening North Dakota's special education system by identifying and addressing the factors contributing to teacher shortages and operational inefficiencies. The legislative findings will be reported to the Seventieth Legislative Assembly, potentially leading to policy reforms that enhance support for special education professionals and the students they serve.

Passing North Dakota House Bill 1530 is crucial because it addresses the growing crisis of special education teacher shortages and the challenges that hinder educators' ability to effectively serve students with disabilities. Here's why this bill matters:

- Special education teachers face heavy workloads, burnout, and high turnover rates. By studying the recruitment and retention challenges, the state can develop strategies to attract and keep qualified educators in the field.
- Overburdened special education teachers may struggle to meet the requirements of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and federal and state laws. The study outlined in this bill will help identify gaps and ensure that students receive the legally mandated support they need.
- Many special education teachers are overwhelmed with excessive caseloads, paperwork, and administrative duties. The bill calls for an examination of workload equity and necessary support systems to prevent burnout and improve job satisfaction.

- The bill highlights the lack of adequate crisis plans, de-escalation training, and protective equipment for special education teachers and staff. Addressing these concerns is critical for the safety of both educators and students.
- Special education teachers often bear the responsibility of training and supervising paraprofessionals without additional time or compensation. The study will explore ways to provide proper support and resources for these essential classroom roles.
- Excessive paperwork requirements take time away from direct student instruction. The bill seeks to analyze ways to reduce this administrative burden, or provide additional time and compensation for it, while maintaining compliance with necessary regulations.
- By conducting a comprehensive study, the bill ensures that future legislative actions are based on accurate data and real-world challenges. This will lead to informed policy decisions that create sustainable improvements in special education.

Special education teachers are pretty special people in our schools. They work hard at challenging jobs, juggling multiple roles and layers of requirements. Passing House Bill 1530 is an essential step toward improving North Dakota's special education system so we can get more of them and keep the ones we have. It prioritizes the well-being of teachers, enhances student support, and ensures compliance with state and federal educational standards. Without action, the state risks continued special education teacher shortages, increased burnout, and unmet student needs. This bill lays the foundation for meaningful reforms that will strengthen special education for those who teach and the students who learn from them.

Testimony Before the House Education Committee

HB 1530

February 11, 2024

Chairman Heinert and members of the Committee, I am Amber Haskell, and I am a field consultant with North Dakota United. I rise today in support of HB 1530 and encourage the House Education Committee to issue a **do pass** recommendation for this proposed legislation.

About two years ago, ND United recognized the unique circumstances that special educators face and in response organized members through ND United's Special Education Collective. Part of my job duties, in partnership with field consultant Matt Liebel, include organizing this Collective. As a licensed special educator who spent 10 years as a special education teacher and two years as a paraprofessional, I am well aware of the daily plight facing special educators.

We recognize that special educators are responsible for providing specialized and individualized instruction for students with disabilities, in addition to being responsible for complying with state and federal mandates through IDEA. On top of that, many are tasked with supervising, training, and evaluating the paraprofessionals who work with the students they serve. They are solvers of unique problems and fierce advocates, who go above and beyond the definitions in their job descriptions to meet the needs of their students.

ND United recently surveyed members working in special education. We received 297 respondents from 26 of the 31 special education units statewide. These respondents included K-12 special education teachers, paraprofessionals, early childhood special education teachers, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and school psychologists.

Highlights from ND United's Special Educator Survey

- 71% report their workload has increased since they began working in special education
- 86% report they currently feel overwhelmed by their special education workload
- 44% report they are considering leaving special education
- 56% report their mental health is adversely affected by their current role in special education
- 63% of respondents who are responsible for supervising and training paraprofessionals report that they do not have the time or tools to adequately do so
- 78% report that the shortage of paraprofessionals adds stress to their jobs
- 59% report they are unable to take their duty-free lunch 3 or more days a week due to time spent providing direct services to students, responding to crisis, completing due process paperwork, completing observations, meetings, lack of paraprofessional support, or other required duties.
- 74% report they are unable to utilize their scheduled prep time 3 or more days a week for the reasons listed above
- 85% report they know colleagues who have left special education
- 83% report their district is having difficulty filling special education positions
- 81% report that caseloads are a significant factor in the shortage of special education teachers

Our special educators overwhelmingly report their passion for teaching. They consistently point to relationships with students and families, and watching students thrive, grow, and achieve their goals as reasons for them to continue their work in special education. The services they provide benefit not only the students and families they serve, but the school and community as a whole.

Why This Study Matters

By approving HB 1530, this legislature has the opportunity to take a proactive approach in addressing the challenges within special education. The shortage of special educators currently in the field has reached a crisis

level, negatively impacting districts' ability to comply with the requirements under IDEA and special educators' ability to provide the services their students need.

Supporting this study is an investment in our students, educators, and the future of education in North Dakota. The results should inform policies that enhance the profession and ensure students with disabilities receive the high-quality education they deserve.

Chairman Heinert and members of this Committee, I urge a **do pass** recommendation for HB 1530.

Certification Central

ND's 1st Alternative Educator Preparation Program

Box 322, McVile, ND 58254

701.322.4429

www.certificationcentral.education



Written Testimony in Support of HB1530

Chairman Heinert and House Education Committee:

For the record, my name is Dr. Katherine Terras, Co-founder of Certification Central (CC), ND's 1st Alternative Educator Preparation Programming. I am in full support of HB1530.

Certification Central focuses on special education. We train special education technicians and teachers, as well as provide consulting services to the field. As a consultant, I work alongside special education teachers 4 to 5 days a week. I service 9 special education units who represent 24+ school districts. I have a field-based understanding about the needs of students and first-hand knowledge about the reasons teachers are leaving, because I work with teachers and students directly. Each year, I have watched the most highly trained, effective special education teachers leave the field entirely or take a position as a general education teacher. If these teachers are leaving, it is definitely not a training issue. If the legislature wants to collect meaningful, accurate data about root causes, ask the teachers and paraprofessionals directly. Letting stakeholder groups speak for them will not illuminate the compassion they have for students with disabilities nor the frustrations they encounter when trying to get students the services and programming they need. Finally, I do recommend one amendment to this study, to include the following research question: *What is the impact, if any, that collaborations with outside agencies have on teachers' decisions to stay in or leave the field?*

This concludes my testimony. I will now stand for questions.

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1530
Presented to the House Education Committee
North Dakota Legislative Assembly

Committee Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Alicia Weiand. I am a 26-year-old who was born and raised in Mandan. Currently, I am a special education strategist at the high school level for Mandan Public Schools. Throughout the day, I work with a variety of different disabilities and ages. This is my third-year teaching.

I am writing in support of HB 1530. This bill is greatly needed to provide information into understanding the high needs of special education teachers and the teacher shortage we are facing in our North Dakota schools.

In today's world, everyone seems to have endless to-do lists. But when I look at my professional to-do list, each time I can cross one thing off, I am frequently met with the addition of 10 more items each a day. Grading papers, scheduling meetings, entering grades to each student's portal, calling parents to update a plan or discuss a strategy, reporting concerns, documenting student goals, finalizing multiple special education documents, truthfully, the list goes on and on.

Along with the daily responsibilities listed above, I am also expected to manage five paraprofessionals. I couldn't do my job without these incredibly selfless human beings, and yet, I wasn't given any training on how to manage them. I had to create my own rules, boundaries, and establish how to communicate with them as a team. Additional tasks that come with managing paraprofessionals include creating schedules, helping manage accommodations/modifications for my students, rescheduling my responsibilities when one of them is absent, managing employee grievances, and being a line of communication between general education teachers, student/paraprofessional, and myself.

As a special education teacher, I teach six out of seven periods during the day - which is 288 minutes or 4 hours and 48 minutes. Outside of that, I have one preparatory period that lasts 48 minutes as well as professional learning communities every day for 25 minutes. In one preparation period, I need to complete all special education paperwork, lesson plans, documentation, reports, communication with other educators, and make private phone calls to parents daily.

On top of all the responsibilities in special education, I take great pride in being up to date on safety recommendations. Because of this, I am NCI (Nonviolent Crisis Intervention) certified. This is an optional course that you are able to receive a stipend for, but is one more thing to do outside of contracted hours. Even though my staff is also certified, I tell them every time there is a behavior, "I would rather step in front and take the behavior over you. You get paid less than you deserve. I would rather get hurt and you come back to work, than you get hurt and leave this field due to behaviors."

The fact that I feel the need to think that, in hope of retaining staff due to safety concerns, is a huge issue in my eyes. I've personally been hit, kicked, bit, spit at, and scratched. I have had

staplers, scissors, three-hole punches, and chairs thrown at me regularly. My classroom has been physically torn apart - desks flipped upside down, papers thrown everywhere, and trash cans emptied - just to name a few. I know that behaviors are communication, but that doesn't mean as educators we should have to navigate behaviors alone. NCI is not enough to handle high school aged students physically or emotionally. NCI could be the baseline for all educators to provide everyone with de-escalation strategies at the least. This should not and cannot be a special education teacher's only line of defense. After being attacked, I've realized there isn't a protocol on what to do with the educator who just saw a student destroy their classroom and become a different person. I simply have had to take a breath and continue on with my day, even though my head is replaying the incident over and over on what I should have done differently. Only to go home and lose sleep over the incident and come back the next day and pretend that everything is back to normal with that student. This continually has impacted me emotionally - causing me to lose sleep, second guess myself, and feel unprotected. This has impacted me physically - with small scars up my arm from students scratching me and multiple bruises from hits, kicks, and grabs.

I believe this study could truly make or break the amount of time a special education teacher chooses to stay in this field. After I graduated, I was blessed with an incredible position, in an amazing district. I knew the tolls physically and mentally in the room would be challenging. I told myself originally 10-15 years in the field, I could do that. After year one of teaching, I told myself that I could make it to eight years. Now in my third year, I just hope I make it another day.

I come back each day for my students and care about their well-being deeply. However, as you look back into my testimony, how many of my responsibilities are solely time spent with the student? We are so focused and driven by data collection, paperwork, grades, and deadlines - the actual student gets lost. Right now, it feels like the system is all paperwork. When are we going to change and challenge our mindset, to bring the focus back to the student and their needs? As a special education teacher, I am overworked with my many responsibilities and often, items get added to my to-do list each day with little pay to compensate for my time. I hope with this bill, we develop a deeper understanding of special education and that we are better trained, educated, and compensated for our time. Something needs to change, before it's too late. We deserve better and our students deserve even more time being devoted to them, not to due dates and deadlines.

I graciously ask that you support this bill and help take action to address what is happening in the special education world. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Alicia Weiland
Special Education Strategist
Mandan Public Schools



House Bill 1530
Tuesday, February 11, 2025

Chairman Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Kendra Vander Wal, and I am the executive director at Designer Genes. Designer Genes represents roughly 270 individuals with Down syndrome and their families across the state. Designer Genes' mission is to strengthen opportunities for individuals with Down syndrome and those who support them to earn, learn, and belong. I bring with me a background in special education, as I have a minor in the field. I am also a parent of a 7-year-old son with Down syndrome.

I am here today to support House Bill 1530. This bill is an important step toward addressing some of the issues impacting our special education teachers and the students who rely on them across the state. Collaboration with special educators is key when determining these challenges and can allow us to be proactive in finding techniques, preventative strategies, and necessary solutions that benefit the whole special education team. Gaining insight on tasks conducted both during the school day and outside of school hours to accommodate students will help us continue to understand workload needs, trainings that aide student and teacher development, necessary paperwork, as well as paraprofessional support and management.

As a parent, I have seen the importance of collaborating with the special education team through the process of creating my son's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) as well as the ongoing communication needed to help him be successful at school each week. We are new to our elementary school this year, and having our son placed with a new first grade teacher, friend group, and special education team was nerve racking for our family. Questions constantly circled our heads in the weeks leading up to his school year – Will he be welcomed in his new school and classroom? Will his teachers get to know him with large class sizes? Will he be challenged and expectations set high? Will he regress? Will he be kicked out of school if he elopes on playground or if he plays too rough with his peers? Will he advocate for himself?

And through all the worry and doubt- we were met with patience, kindness, and support. Our special education teacher took the time to hear our concerns. She came up with solutions, gathered information from our family, and read through documents from our previous school to make sure she understood my son – all in anticipation for the school and done during summer months. Now that we are into the school year, his special education teacher continues to develop creative solutions and problem solve with us, in collaboration with his classroom teacher and paraprofessionals each day to make sure our son is supported. That's the kind of teacher my son deserves – that's the kind of teacher all individuals with disabilities deserve.

And yet, through all the wonderful support we have received since starting in August, we have seen paraprofessionals leave whom assisted my son daily. The transition of paraprofessionals resulted in a



change in his school routine and we saw a spike in his behaviors. He was confused as to why he no longer gets to see one of his favorite teachers anymore. I recognize these impacts span farther than my son. I now see the teaching team having to address special education team schedule changes and workload disparities to accommodate the missing paraprofessional. I acknowledge the shift in responsibility regarding student and administrative paperwork, special education communication that comes in now after school hours, and dedicated time to train new staff on the students that the previous paraprofessional worked with.

The findings from this study will be invaluable in identifying key areas of need so that we can shape policies that ensure our special education teachers have the resources, training, and support they need to succeed in their roles. Better understanding of safety of staff and students is important for adequate crisis plans, de-escalation techniques, and proper trainings. Lastly, better understanding workload disparities as well as paraprofessional support could improve retention rates for special education teachers but also ensure that all students with disabilities, including those with Down syndrome, have access to high-quality education and the support they deserve.

By taking action, we can begin the process of improving the working conditions for special education teachers and, in turn, enhance educational outcomes for students with disabilities across our state. Designer Genes recognizes this work cannot be done alone and would be willing to partner in any way possible. Thank you for your time and consideration.



Kendra Vander Wal OTR
Executive Director, Designer Genes of ND
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701-400-3879

2025 SENATE EDUCATION

HB 1530

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Education Committee Room JW216, State Capitol

HB 1530
3/25/2025

To provide for a legislative management study on the circumstances and needs of special education teachers and the related special education teacher shortage.

10:00 a.m. Chairman Beard called the hearing to order.

Members Present: Chairman Beard; Vice-Chairman Lemm; Senators: Axtman, Boschee, Gerhardt, and Wobbema.

Discussion Topics:

- Workload disparities
- Recruitment and retention
- Safety concerns
- Improve working conditions
- State and federal education law compliance

10:00 a.m. Representative Schneider, District #21, introduced the bill and submitted testimony #43699.

10:07 a.m. Nick Archuleta, President ND United, testified in favor and submitted testimony #43702.

10:10 a.m. Micah Olson, Attorney ND Protection and Advocacy Project, testified in favor and submitted testimony #43470.

10:15 a.m. Senator Axtman moved Do Pass.

10:15 a.m. Senator Boschee seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Todd Beard	Y
Senator Randy D. Lemm	Y
Senator Michelle Axtman	Y
Senator Josh Boschee	Y
Senator Justin Gerhardt	Y
Senator Mike Wobbema	Y

Motion Passed 6-0-0

Senator Boschee will carry the bill.

Additional written testimony:

Jessica Nolz, Special Education Teacher Grand Forks Public Schools, submitted testimony in favor #43286.

Brook LaRowe-Sailer, District #7 Special Education Teacher, submitted testimony in favor #43439.

Kori Jensen, Harvey Public School, submitted testimony in favor #43457.

Katie Wood, Teacher Grand Forks, submitted testimony in favor #43503.

Alexis Rasset, Special Education Teacher/Parent Mandan Public Schools, submitted testimony in favor #43624.

Sienna Bowen, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #43711.

Kendra Vander Wal, Executive Director Designer Genes of ND, submitted testimony in favor #43721.

10:17 a.m. Chairman Beard closed the hearing.

Susan Helbling, Committee Clerk

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
HB 1530 ([25.1241.01000](#))

Education Committee (Sen. Beard, Chairman) recommends **DO PASS** (6 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1530 was placed on the Fourteenth order on the calendar. This bill does not affect workforce development.

March 20th, 2025

Senate Education Committee
North Dakota Legislative Assembly
600 East Boulevard Ave
Bismarck, ND 58505

Dear Chairman Beard and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Jessica Nolz, I have been a Special Education Strategist with Grand Forks Public Schools for over 10 years. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 1530. This bill is crucial to addressing the overwhelming workload, safety concerns, and staffing shortages that special education professionals face on a daily basis.

Special education professionals dedicate themselves to ensuring that students with disabilities receive the support they need to thrive. However, the increasing workload has made it nearly impossible to provide the individualized attention that these students deserve. The excessive paperwork requirements alone take up a significant portion of special education teachers' time that could be spent engaging directly with students. IEPs, FBAs, BIPs, evaluations, and compliance documentation have grown in complexity, and without sufficient support, educators are drowning in administrative tasks instead of teaching and supporting students effectively.

Beyond workload concerns, student and staff safety is a critical issue that HB1530 seeks to address. Many of us have encountered situations where students with behavioral challenges require immediate intervention, yet due to understaffing, adequate support is not always available. I have personally witnessed instances where staff members have been injured due to a lack of available personnel to safely manage crisis situations. The lack of proper staffing does not just endanger educators—it also jeopardizes the well-being of students who require specialized support to navigate their learning environments.

Paraprofessionals are the backbone of special education classrooms, providing direct support to students with disabilities. However, due to chronic understaffing, paraprofessionals are often stretched too thin, taking on responsibilities beyond their training and capacity. In many cases, they are expected to manage behaviors, implement complex accommodations, and provide academic support, all while balancing an unsustainable workload. This has led to high turnover rates, further exacerbating the staffing crisis and leaving students without consistent, trained support.

HB 1530 is a necessary step toward addressing these pressing issues. By ensuring that workloads are manageable, safety concerns are prioritized, and paraprofessional staffing is adequately funded and supported, we can create a more sustainable and effective special education system for both educators and students.

I urge you to support HB 1530 and take action to protect the integrity of special education services in North Dakota. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Nolz

Special Education Strategist
Grand Forks Public Schools

Brook LaRowe-Sailer – Special Education Teacher

District #7

Date: 3/21/2025

Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Brook LaRowe-Sailer, and I am a special education teacher in North Dakota. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 1530 and urge you to pass this bill as soon as possible. As a dedicated educator, I see firsthand the increasing needs of students with disabilities and the growing strain on our schools to provide them with a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) as required by law. However, our funding, staffing, and resources have not kept up with these demands, making it increasingly difficult to give students the individualized support they need to succeed.

The challenges facing special education providers today are immense. Our caseloads are higher, the severity of student needs has increased, and we are often forced to do more with fewer resources. We are constantly adapting to new requirements, addressing behavioral challenges, and providing differentiated instruction—all while navigating shortages of specialized staff and funding constraints. The reality is that without additional support, many schools struggle to meet the needs of students with disabilities, leaving both educators and families in impossible situations.

HB 1530 is a necessary step forward. This bill [insert key provisions of the bill, such as increased funding, improved staffing ratios, or expanded resources for special education services—if available]. These changes will allow us to better support our students, reduce burnout among special education staff, and ensure that North Dakota remains a leader in providing equitable educational opportunities for all children.

By passing this bill, you are making a clear statement that students with disabilities matter, their education matters, and the educators who serve them matter. You are ensuring that our schools have the necessary funding, personnel, and resources to provide every child with the high-quality education they deserve.

I urge you to support HB 1530 and move it forward without delay. Our students, families, and educators cannot afford to wait any longer. Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions and appreciate your commitment to the success of all students in North Dakota.

Sincerely,

Brook LaRowe-Sailer

Chair Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Kori Jensen, and I am a special education teacher at Harvey Public School, teaching grades 8-12. I am testifying in support of HB 1530 because this bill addresses critical issues that impact educators and students, particularly in workload, student and staff safety, and paraprofessional support.

As a special education teacher, I see firsthand how the increasing demands of paperwork, paraprofessional management, and ensuring student safety place an overwhelming burden on educators. With limited resources and staffing, providing the individualized support that many students require becomes challenging. The understaffing of paraprofessionals is especially concerning, as these individuals play a vital role in supporting students with disabilities. Students and teachers struggle to meet educational goals effectively without adequate support.

Beyond these challenges, I often lose my lunch and prep time because I provide services instead. There is little to no time left in my day to complete the extensive paperwork required for special education, as my priority is always my students. Additionally, special education meetings frequently occur during non-contracted hours, yet there is no compensation for the extra time spent ensuring compliance and student success. The increasing demands, without adequate support or recognition, make it even harder for special education teachers to sustain their work long-term.

HB 1530 is necessary to improve educators' working conditions and students' learning conditions. By addressing staffing shortages and reducing unnecessary administrative burdens, this bill will allow teachers like myself to focus more on what truly matters—helping students succeed.

In conclusion, I urge you to support HB 1530 to create a more sustainable and effective education system in North Dakota. Investing in our schools, staff, and students is an investment in the future of our communities. Thank you for your time and consideration.



Protection & Advocacy Project

400 E. Broadway, Suite 409

Bismarck, ND 58501

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Senate Education Committee
House Bill 1530 - March 25, 2025
Testimony of Micah Olson, P&A Position-In Support

My name is Micah Olson. I am an attorney at North Dakota Protection & Advocacy.

P&A is in support of the passage of this study bill. Education is a priority area for P&A. Throughout the state, Directors works collaboratively with school districts, in Special Education and General Education, to ensure students with disabilities have access to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). P&A also works with Special Education Directors to support teachers, paraprofessionals and related service staff to identify and obtain services and supports necessary for FAPE and for students to learn in the Least Restrictive Environment. Students benefit when P&A and the IEP or 504 teams work to find solutions and supports for both the students and the teachers in the schools. Special education staff need training, support, and access to other highly qualified professionals to successfully meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Special education directors and teachers are often left out of the planning and decision-making for what special education is and should be. They are required to do more with fewer teachers, often without backup or support, especially in crisis situations. Special education teachers must meet the regulations for assessments, evaluations, and IEP meetings, yet they are not compensated for the time given to these processes outside of the usual school day. Special education teachers are buried with ever increasing paperwork, while expected to train paraprofessionals, teach, maintain a safe learning environment for students and staff, and a multitude of other things identified in this bill.

Special education staff are tasked with making certain there is equity for students with disabilities while experiencing inequities in their own support, compensation, and job expectations. P&A urges a do pass on this study bill to identify those inequities for special education teachers and thus the education of students with disabilities.

P&A supports a Do Pass recommendation.

Katie Wood

Kwood41434@gmail.com

March 21, 2025

Senate Education Committee
North Dakota Legislative Assembly
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

Subject: Support for HB 1530 – Special Education Teacher Recruitment and Retention Study

Dear Chair Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 1530, a bill that seeks to address the ongoing challenges in the recruitment and retention of special education teachers in North Dakota. As a dedicated special education teacher with over 16 years of experience, I have firsthand knowledge of the increasing demands placed on educators in this field. Without targeted legislative action, these challenges will continue to negatively impact our students, teachers, and the quality of special education services across the state.

HB 1530 proposes a much-needed legislative study to examine critical issues affecting special educators, including workload disparities, student and staff safety, paraprofessional management duties, and excessive paperwork requirements. These issues have long contributed to high turnover rates and difficulty attracting new professionals to the field. By conducting this study, the state can take meaningful steps toward ensuring equitable working conditions for special educators while enhancing the quality of education for students with disabilities.

Key concerns addressed in this bill include:

- **Workload Disparities:** Many special educators are burdened with overwhelming caseloads, making it difficult to comply with students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and meet federal and state requirements. A standardized formula for caseload assignments is crucial to maintaining compliance and ensuring students receive the support they need.

- **Student and Staff Safety:** Special education teachers frequently encounter challenging behaviors in the classroom. Increased training in de-escalation techniques, access to protective measures, and additional paraprofessional support are essential to maintaining a safe learning environment.
- **Paraprofessional Management:** The responsibility of training, scheduling, and evaluating paraprofessionals often falls on special education teachers, despite a lack of compensation and support. Addressing this issue is vital to improving teacher retention and ensuring paraprofessionals receive adequate guidance.
- **Paperwork and Administrative Burden:** The excessive paperwork requirements for special educators result in uncompensated time spent outside of contractual hours. Providing additional administrative support and compensation for required meetings and compliance-related tasks is necessary to prevent burnout and retain qualified professionals.

By advancing HB 1530, the North Dakota Legislature has an opportunity to take proactive steps toward improving special education services and retaining qualified teachers. I urge you to support this bill and ensure that the needs of special educators and the students they serve remain a legislative priority.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to improving education in North Dakota and look forward to seeing HB 1530 move forward.

Sincerely,

Katie Wood

Special Education Strategist

Century Elementary School, Grand Forks Public Schools.

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1530
Presented to the Senate Education Committee
North Dakota Legislative Assembly

Chair Beard, Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Alexis Rasset, and I am here today to voice my strong support for House Bill 1530, which calls for a legislative management study on the circumstances and needs of special education teachers and the ongoing special education teacher shortage in North Dakota.

I am a special education teacher at Mandan High School. This year is my 8th year of teaching, prior to my current role I was a special education paraprofessional for 3 1/2 years. 2 years ago, I was part of a group of specialists working with North Dakota United that formed our current NDU SPED Collective. Through our collective we have discussed our daily struggles and challenges which include overwhelming caseloads, excessive paperwork/deadlines, lack of support/training, safety concerns for both students and staff, along with difficulty maintaining a work-life balance.

This bill is not just necessary, it is crucial for the future of our children with special needs. The special education teacher shortage is a crisis impacting our state and our ability to provide these students with the free and appropriate public education they deserve. We are losing dedicated professionals at an alarming rate, and we are struggling to recruit qualified individuals to fill the vacancies. This situation has devastating consequences:

- **Students are losing critical support:** When special education teachers are stretched thin or classrooms are staffed with substitutes or unqualified personnel, students with disabilities are not receiving the individualized instruction and specialized services they need to thrive. This can lead to academic regression, behavioral challenges, and a diminished quality of life.
- **Existing teachers are burning out:** The overwhelming workload, lack of adequate resources, and the emotional toll of supporting students with complex needs are driving special education teachers out of the profession. They are dedicated individuals who are being asked to do more with less, and they are reaching their breaking point.
- **Our schools are struggling:** The shortage creates a ripple effect throughout the entire school system. Administrators struggle to fill positions, general education teachers are asked to take on additional responsibilities without adequate training or support, and the overall learning environment suffers.

This legislative management study is a vital first step toward addressing this crisis. It will allow us to:

- **Gather data:** We need a comprehensive understanding of the root causes of the shortage. This study can investigate factors such as salary, benefits, working conditions, administrative support, professional development opportunities, and the unique challenges faced by special education teachers in our state.

- **Identify needs:** The study should identify the specific needs of special education teachers, including the resources and support they require to be successful. This could include things like smaller class sizes, dedicated paraprofessionals, access to technology and specialized materials, and ongoing professional development.
- **Develop solutions:** Armed with this data, the legislature can develop evidence-based solutions to address the shortage. This could include strategies to improve recruitment and retention, such as competitive salaries, loan forgiveness programs, mentorship opportunities, and streamlined certification processes.

This is not just about numbers and statistics; it's about the future of our children. Every student, regardless of their abilities, deserves access to a high-quality education. By supporting this study, you are investing in our children, our schools, and our state. You are demonstrating a commitment to ensuring that students with special needs have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

I urge you to support this bill and take action to address the critical special education teacher retention and recoupment crisis. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Alexis Rasset
Mandan Public School, Special Education Teacher

INTRODUCTION

By Representative Mary Schneider
of

HB 1530--Special Education Recruitment and Retention Study

Senate Education Committee

Senator Todd Beard, Chairman, and Senator Randy Lemm, Vice Chairman

March 25, 2025

Chairman Beard, Vice Chairman Lemm, and distinguished members of the Senate Education Committee:

I am Representative Mary Schneider, and I proudly represent District 21, central Fargo and West Fargo.

House Bill 1530 seeks to address the critical issue of special education teacher shortages. Its cosponsors are a bipartisan group of representatives and senators, a number of which are connected to and experienced with education. The bill proposes a legislative management study on the challenges impacting the recruitment and retention of special education teachers across the state.

The study will focus on key areas such as workload disparities, student and staff safety concerns, paraprofessional management responsibilities, excessive paperwork demands, and broader systemic issues impacting special education. By evaluating these challenges, the study aims to provide data-driven recommendations for recruitment and retention strategies, for improving working conditions, and for ensuring compliance with state and federal education laws.

Ultimately, House Bill 1530 represents a proactive step toward strengthening North Dakota's special education system by identifying and addressing the factors contributing to teacher shortages and operational inefficiencies. The legislative findings will be reported to the Seventieth Legislative Assembly, potentially leading to policy reforms that enhance support for special education professionals and the students they serve.

Passing North Dakota House Bill 1530 is crucial because it addresses the growing crisis of special education teacher shortages and the challenges that hinder educators' ability to effectively serve students with disabilities. Here's why this bill matters:

- Special education teachers face heavy workloads, burnout, and high turnover rates. By studying the recruitment and retention challenges, the state can develop strategies to attract and keep qualified educators in the field.

- Overburdened special education teachers may struggle to meet the requirements of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and federal and state laws. The study outlined in this bill will help identify gaps and ensure that students receive the legally mandated support they need.
- Many special education teachers are overwhelmed with excessive caseloads, paperwork, and administrative duties. The bill calls for an examination of workload equity and necessary support systems to prevent burnout and improve job satisfaction.
- The bill highlights the lack of adequate crisis plans, de-escalation training, and protective equipment for special education teachers and staff. Addressing these concerns is critical for the safety of both educators and students.
- Special education teachers often bear the responsibility of training and supervising paraprofessionals without additional time or compensation. The study will explore ways to provide proper support and resources for these essential classroom roles.
- Excessive paperwork requirements take time away from direct student instruction. The bill seeks to analyze ways to reduce this administrative burden while maintaining compliance with necessary regulations.
- By conducting a comprehensive study, the bill ensures that future legislative actions are based on accurate data and real-world challenges. This will lead to informed policy decisions that create sustainable improvements in special education.

Passing House Bill 1530 is an essential step toward improving North Dakota's special education system. It prioritizes the well-being of teachers, enhances student support, and ensures compliance with educational standards. Without action, the state risks continued special education teacher shortages, increased burnout, and unmet student needs. This bill lays the foundation for meaningful reforms that will strengthen special education for years to come.



Great Public Schools

Great Public Service

**Testimony Before the Senate Education Committee
HB 1530
Tuesday, March 25, 2025**

Chairman Beard and members of the Committee, for the record I am Nick Archuleta, president of ND United. I am happy to appear before you today in support of HB 1530 and to encourage a do pass recommendation for this long overdue legislation.

Members of the Committee, as you know, North Dakota and every other state remain in the grip of a persistent shortage of teachers that make it difficult to provide the educational services our students need and deserve. This is especially true in the area of Special Education or SPED. In an effort to better understand the particular challenges faced by the professional special educators, ND United staff led by Amber Haskell and Matt Leible formed the ND United Special Education Collective.

To better inform their work, Amber and Matt conducted a survey of special education professionals between January 10 and February 10 of this year. They received responses from 297 teachers who represented 26 of the 31 special education units in ND. The respondents were special education teachers, paraprofessionals, early childhood SPED teachers, speech language pathologists, OTs, PTs, and school psychologists.

Here are some highlights from ND United's Special Educator Survey:

- *71% report their workload has increased since they began working in special education.*
- *86% report they currently feel overwhelmed by their special education workload.*
- *44% report they are considering leaving special education.*
- *56% report their mental health is adversely affected by their current role in special education.*
- *63% of respondents who are responsible for supervising and training paraprofessionals report that they do not have the time or tools to adequately do so.*

- 78% report that the shortage of paraprofessionals adds stress to their jobs.
- 59% report they are unable to take their duty-free lunch 3 or more days a week due to time spent providing direct services to students, responding to crisis, completing due process paperwork, completing observations, meetings, lack of paraprofessional support, or other required duties.
- 74% report they are unable to utilize their scheduled prep time 3 or more days a week for the reasons listed above.
- 85% report they know colleagues who have left special education.
- 83% report their district is having difficulty filling special education positions.
- 81% report that caseloads are a significant factor in the shortage of special education teachers.

Chairman Beard and members of the Committee, HB 1530, if passed, will address the challenges outlined in our survey and more. Our hope is that by doing a deep dive into the circumstances and needs of SPED professionals, we will be able to develop strategies designed to mitigate the challenges of special educators and draw more talented and caring individuals into the field.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will conclude my testimony and urge a ***do pass*** recommendation for HB 1530.

Testimony in Support of HB 1530

Sienna Bowen

March 25th, 2025

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice-Chairman, and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Sienna M. Bowen, and I firmly stand in support of House Bill 1530.

I currently attend Horace High School in the West Fargo school district. While I'm not representing the school or district in any capacity, I'm simply communicating the issues and disparity facing my peers. My school was built incredibly recently, so much so that it hasn't even been completely finished with construction yet. However, despite my school getting many new facilities built, we can still see a lack of progress within my peers with special education needs. There's not adequate enough resources or room for these students, and many times they are separated from the majority of the student body, and they lose their voices in our school. I can tell you for certain: never once have I had the opportunity to share a class with a peer in special education, never have I gotten to share an extracurricular with a peer in special education, and never have I seen the same for many other students.

I can say for certain: there's funding for the special education programs that could be used. My school district has been constantly able to expand athletic and fine arts programs, so tell me why can't we do the same for special education as well? What it truly comes down to is disparities within school culture and observance of others, and with adequate research and knowledge on these disparities, we can gain the ability to fight said disparities and bring true equality among all students.

Additionally, as you may be aware, many states including North Dakota have faced an impending teacher shortage. This INCLUDES paraprofessionals who work with my peers with special needs. And by passing this legislation, we will be able to accurately and effectively determine what is the driving factors of this shortage, and if we can identify the cause, we can address the core issue itself. By solving this shortage, we would increase the quality and quantity of special needs education throughout North Dakota and truly create an equal learning environment for all.

In conclusion, by passing this legislation, we would learn the ways that our special needs students and their teachers are struggling with learning and teaching. And by learning more, we are therefore able to address the problems that they face and help the education quality of our great state flourish. Senators, take it from a student currently in high school, we need a change in the status quo of education for special education. So, I urge you to join me in supporting this legislation. Thank you for your time.

Sienna M. Bowen



House Bill 1530
Tuesday, March 25, 2025

Chair Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Kendra Vander Wal, and I am the executive director at Designer Genes. Designer Genes' mission is to strengthen opportunities for individuals with Down syndrome and those who support them to earn, learn, and belong. I bring with me a background in special education, as I have a minor in the field. I am also a parent of a 7-year-old son with Down syndrome.

I am here today to support House Bill 1530. This bill is an important step toward addressing some of the issues impacting our special education teachers and the students who rely on them across the state. Collaboration with special educators is key when determining these challenges and can allow us to be proactive in finding techniques, preventative strategies, and necessary solutions that benefit the whole special education team. Gaining insight on tasks conducted both during the school day and outside of school hours to accommodate students will help us continue to understand workload needs, trainings that aide student and teacher development, necessary paperwork, as well as paraprofessional support and management.

Nearly all individuals with Down syndrome who access public school-based education receive instruction and support from a special education teacher. These educators play a vital role in adapting curriculum, implementing individualized education programs (IEPs), and providing the specialized instruction necessary for students with Down syndrome to thrive. Special education teachers remain central to ensuring these students receive appropriate academic and developmental supports. A study of special education services would help identify strengths and gaps in the system, ensuring that students with Down syndrome and other disabilities receive the resources and instruction they need to succeed in school.

As a parent, I have seen the importance of collaborating with the special education team through the process of creating my son's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) as well as the ongoing communication needed to help him be successful at school each week. We are new to our elementary school this year, and having our son placed with a new first grade teacher, friend group, and special education team was nerve racking for our family. Questions constantly circled our heads in the weeks leading up to his school year – Will he be welcomed in his new school and classroom? Will his teachers get to know him with large class sizes? Will he be challenged and expectations set high? Will he regress? Will he be kicked out of school if he elopes on playground or if he plays too rough with his peers? Will he advocate for himself?

And through all the worry and doubt- we were met with patience, kindness, and support from his special education teacher. She took the time to hear our concerns, came up with solutions, gathered information from our family, and read through the many documents from our previous school to make sure she understood my son – all in anticipation for the school and done during summer months. Now that we are into the school year, his special education teacher continues to develop creative solutions and problem solve with us, in collaboration with his classroom teacher and paraprofessionals, each day to



make sure our son is supported. That's the kind of teacher my son deserves – that's the kind of teacher all individuals with disabilities deserve.

And yet, through all the wonderful support we have received since starting in August, we have seen paraprofessionals leave. For our son, the transition of paraprofessionals resulted in a change in his school routine and we saw a spike in his behaviors. He was confused as to why he no longer gets to see one of his favorite teachers anymore. Through it all, I recognize these impacts span farther than my son. I now see the teaching team having to address special education team schedule changes and workload disparities to accommodate the missing paraprofessional. I acknowledge the shift in responsibility regarding student and administrative paperwork, special education communication that comes in now after school hours, and dedicated time to train new staff on the students that the previous paraprofessional worked with.

The findings from this study will be invaluable in identifying key areas of need so that we can shape policies that ensure our special education teachers have the resources, training, and support they need to succeed in their roles. Better understanding of safety of staff and students is important for adequate crisis plans, de-escalation techniques, and proper trainings. Lastly, better understanding workload disparities as well as paraprofessional support could improve retention rates for special education teachers but also ensure that all students with disabilities, including those with Down syndrome, have access to high-quality education and the support they deserve.

By taking action, we can begin the process of improving the working conditions for special education teachers and, in turn, enhance educational outcomes for students with disabilities across our state. Designer Genes recognizes this work cannot be done alone and would be willing to partner in any way possible. Thank you for your time and consideration.



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