

2025 SENATE EDUCATION

SB 2295

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Education Committee Room JW216, State Capitol

SB 2295
2/4/2025

Relating to state education funding for all students in the state; and to required reports, school district levy authority, and information displayed on property tax statements; and to adjustments to state aid payments and a property tax levy for tuition payments; and to provide an effective date.

10:01 a.m. Chairman Beard called the hearing to order.

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

Discussion Topics:

- Cost of education compensation
- School funding property tax
- Actual cost for special needs
- Accountability and Oversight
- Impact on rural schools

10:01 a.m. Senator Walen, District 40, introduced the bill and testified in favor with testimony #34485.

10:09 a.m. Derek Turbide, lobbyist State Association Non-Public Schools, testified in favor.

10:10 a.m. Kimberly Efta, Grand Forks, testified in favor and submitted written testimony #34304.

10:16 a.m. Paxtyn Steckler, St. Joseph Montessori Mandan, testified in favor and submitted testimony #34409.

10:18 a.m. Katie Vidmar, Christ the King Montessori Mandan Clinical Tool Kit, testified in favor and submitted testimony #34131.

10:23 a.m. Derek Seright, parent from Minot Bishop Ryan, testified in favor.

10:25 a.m. Jeff Ringstad, District 3 Administrator Our Redeemer's Christian School, testified in favor and submitted testimony #33868 and #34629.

10:35 a.m. Kristy Rose, President Tricity Home Educators Association, testified in opposition and submitted testimony #33860.

10:41 a.m. Nick Archuleta, President ND United, testified in opposition and submitted testimony #34356.

10:45 a.m. Dr. Aimee Copas, Executive Director ND Council of Educational Leaders, testified in opposition and submitted testimony #34345.

10:52 a.m. Mike Heilman, ND Small Organized Schools, testified in opposition and submitted testimony # 34390.

11:06 a.m. Amy De Kok, Executive Director ND Schools Board Association, testified in opposition and submitted testimony #34355.

Additional written testimony:

Amanda Dukart, Employee Christ the King Parish Mandan, submitted testimony in favor #33340.

Christopher Hanson, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #33385.

Jill Rae, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #33394.

Taylor Gall, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #33429.

Keary Aune, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #33473.

Aimee Bachmeier, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #33476.

Chris Ahlers, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #33509.

Reed Mesman, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #33553.

Chantelle Woodbury, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #33574.

Amber P., citizen, submitted testimony in favor #33764.

Laura Gardner, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #33791.

Shawna Helbling, Parent St. Joseph Catholic Montessori School and School of the Holy Family, submitted testimony in favor #33972.

Rachel Pankratz, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #34026.

Alexis Scott, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #34105.

Elizabeth Hoffner, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #34116.

Rebecca Obrigewitch, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #34125.

Sara Dudley, St. Michael's Catholic School Grand Forks, submitted testimony in favor #34152.

John Sisk, Police Office Bismarck Police Department, submitted testimony in favor #34194.

Doug Sharboro, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #34222.

Jeanne Nasers, Christ the King Catholic Montessori, submitted testimony in favor #34286.

Derrick Nagel, Principal Christ the King School Mandan, submitted testimony in favor #34292.

Joan Zander, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #34379.

Dora Tschosik, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #34239.

Leroy Huizenga, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #33987.

Jeremy Schmaltz, School Board Member and parent St. Michael's Catholic School, submitted testimony in favor #34248.

Michaela Larson, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #34249.

Shane Goettle, Lobbyist State Association of Nonpublic Schools, submitted testimony in favor #34277.

Kristin Franzen, citizen, submitted testimony in favor #34280.

Kevin Boden, Home School Legal Defense Association, submitted testimony in opposition #34201.

Shannon Krueger, citizen, submitted testimony in opposition #34238.

Samantha Harrison, District 34, submitted testimony in opposition #33640.

Sarah Lerud, President Valley City Education Association, submitted testimony in opposition #33730.

Melissa Buchhop, citizen, submitted testimony in opposition #33592.

Brenda Seehafer, Teacher Mt. Pleasant School Rolla, submitted testimony in opposition #33523.

Deven Mantz, ND Legislative Director Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way International Brotherhood Teamsters, submitted testimony in opposition #33075.

Eric Hanson, citizen, submitted testimony in opposition #33333.

Trudy Fraase Wolf, Zeeland Public School, submitted testimony in opposition #33887.

Steven Heim, Superintendent Anamoose Public School, submitted testimony in opposition #33915.

Matt Leibel, citizen, submitted testimony in opposition #33934.

Theresa Deckert, Lobbyist ND Home School Association, submitted testimony in opposition #33961.

James Buhr, citizen, submitted testimony in opposition #33967.

Josh Nelson, Northwood Public School, submitted testimony in opposition #33990.

Kristin Nelson, citizen, submitted testimony in opposition #34160.

Amy Barkalow, citizen, submitted testimony in opposition #34161.

Cam Leedahl, citizen, submitted testimony in opposition #34241.

Kelly Pratt, citizen, submitted testimony in opposition #34167.

Kacie Dom, citizen, submitted testimony in opposition #34181.

Joseph Drumm, Vice President Grand Forks Education Association, submitted testimony in opposition #34166.

Darrel Lund, retired teacher, submitted testimony in opposition #34321.

Vicki Voldal Rosenau, concerned citizen, submitted testimony in opposition #34336.

Monica Klein, citizen, submitted testimony in opposition #34362.

Mike McNeff, Superintendent Rugby Public School District 5, submitted testimony in opposition #34383.

Leslie Bieber, Superintendent Alexander Public School, submitted testimony in opposition #34385.

Sandy Hansen, citizen, submitted testimony in opposition #34269.

11:07 a.m. Chairman Beard closed the hearing.

Susan Helbling, Committee Clerk

Vote no on SB 2295

I would like to express my strong opposition to the proposed school education savings accounts. While the intention behind these funds may be good, I believe they ultimately undermine the public education system and add to existing inequalities.

First and foremost, diverting public funds into education savings accounts takes vital resources away from our public schools, which are already struggling to meet the needs of students and staff. These funds, intended for the benefit of a select few, could instead be used to improve facilities, hire and retain teachers, and provide essential services for every child in our community. Our public schools are the backbone of our community, and they deserve our unwavering support.

Additionally, the lack of accountability and oversight with these funds raises serious concerns. Without proper regulation, there is a risk that funds may be mismanaged or used for purposes that do not directly benefit students' education. Public school boards were created to oversee our school districts to account for tax payer dollars. Our children deserve a transparent and accountable system that prioritizes their learning and development.

I urge you to vote no on SB 2295. Instead, let us focus on strengthening our public education system, ensuring that every child has access to a high-quality education. Together, we can build a brighter future for all students in our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Deven Mantz

Minot, ND

District 5

To whom it may concern:

I am writing in opposition to SB 2295.

This bill threatens the integrity of our public education system by using taxpayer dollars for private schools, which are not held to the same transparency, accountability, or accessibility standards as our public schools.

No matter what this bill is called—education savings accounts, scholarship programs, or otherwise—if it diverts public dollars to private schools, it is a voucher. North Dakotans have consistently opposed voucher programs, and I strongly urge you to do the same.

Public funds should remain in public schools, where they serve all students, regardless of ability, background, or financial status. Our public schools are the foundation of our communities, and instead of diverting resources away from them, we should be investing in smaller class sizes, support staff, mental health resources, and competitive wages for educators.

I strongly urge you to vote NO on this voucher bill and to stand with North Dakota's students, families, and educators in preserving a strong public education system.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your service to our state and look forward to your support in keeping public dollars in public schools.

January 31, 2025

North Dakota Senate Education Committee
State Capitol
Bismarck, ND 58501

RE: Endorsement of SB 2295

Dear Senate Education Committee:

My name is Amanda Dukart. I live in the Mandan school district, and I am a parent who has chosen to enroll my children in Christ the King Catholic Montessori School.

I support Senate Bill 2295, but I am in support of all school choice bills that support parent autonomy and the right to provide an education for my child. I support Senate Bill 2295, which would establish a program for state assistance in the payment of non-public school and homeschooling costs, because three of our children currently attend a private school, so this would majorly affect our family directly.

The first reason we support this bill is because we would experience first-hand the benefits of our tax dollars toward education. The second reason is because we currently make many financial sacrifices so that our children can attend a private school. We find that the sacrifice is worth the benefits, but if the bill were passed, we would also be able to save more money to help pay for our children's higher education in later years. The third reason we support SB 2295 is because we are paying tax dollars toward education, but we also reserve the right to choose a private institution that provides a religious and Montessori education.

We have seen the benefits of this approach to education in the lives of our children, forming in them independence and a love of their faith. They love their school and the freedom it provides for them to choose how they learn. I also attended the same institution as a child, so the school feels like home to us. We are grateful for a school that teaches the same exact values as what we teach our children in our home, and we get a say and are very involved in that process.

Please vote in favor of SB 2295. There are numerous great families and schools that will benefit from assistance with private education, and a financial burden will be lifted in each of their households. Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and for your time on SB 2295.

Sincerely,

Amanda Dukart
511 13th St. NW
Mandan, ND 58554

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill No. 2295 – Direct Funding for Nonpublic Schools

Submitted by Christopher Hansen
District 16 Resident & Parent
JPPII Catholic Schools

Hello Senate Education Committee,

My name is Christopher Hansen, and I live in District 16. I am a proud parent who has chosen to enroll my children in JPPII Catholic Schools because I believe in providing them with a strong, values-based education in a safe and structured learning environment.

I am here today to express my strong support for Senate Bill No. 2295, but I also support all school choice legislation that upholds parental autonomy and the right to provide the best education for our children. I support SB 2295 because it ensures that a portion of the state's per-student funding follows the child, rather than being restricted to the public school system. This would provide 75% of the state's per-student cost to private and home-educated students, helping families afford quality education.

My family has experienced firsthand the challenges of affording tuition for our daughters' Catholic education. We have cut expenses everywhere possible to ensure our children receive the education they deserve. We made the choice to move them to private school after seeing a lack of accountability, safety concerns, and declining academic standards in public schools. Our son graduated from a public school, and throughout his time there, we saw troubling trends—including school lockdowns due to fights, legal issues involving educators, and teachers more focused on being students' friends rather than mentors.

SB 2295 would provide much-needed financial relief to families like mine, allowing us—and many others—to continue making the best educational choices without an overwhelming financial burden. School choice should not be limited to families who can afford it; every parent deserves access to state funding that prioritizes their child's educational success.

I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2295 to support parental rights and true educational choice in North Dakota.

Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and for your time on Senate Bill 2295.

Sincerely,
Christopher Hansen

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 2295, which seeks to establish a program providing state assistance for families covering the costs of non-public schooling and homeschooling. As a homeschool parent, I have seen firsthand the financial commitment required to provide a high-quality education outside the public school system.

This bill recognizes the right of parents to choose the best educational environment for their children, ensuring that financial constraints do not limit those choices. Many families sacrifice greatly to provide an education that aligns with their values, learning preferences, and children's unique needs. By offering state assistance, we can help alleviate these financial burdens and empower parents to make the best decisions for their children's education.

Supporting non-public and homeschool families is an investment in educational diversity, fostering innovation and academic excellence. Furthermore, this bill upholds the principle that all families—regardless of income—should have the opportunity to access the education that best suits their children.

I urge you to support SB 2295 and advocate for its passage. Thank you for your time and dedication to ensuring that all children receive the education they deserve. I appreciate your leadership and look forward to your support of this critical legislation.

Sincerely,

Jill Rae

Hello Senate Education Committee,

My name is Taylor Gall. I live in District 25 and I am a parent who has chosen to enroll my child in St. Anne's Catholic School.

I support SB 2295, but I am in support of all school choice bills that support parent autonomy and the right to provide an education for my child. I support SB 2295 because we are trying to raise a family that follows more closely in line with our values and beliefs as Catholics. We are a family of 5 and are on a strict budget with only one person working because we believe in the value of being able to raise our kids on our own at home. We know that going to a private school isn't necessary and is our choice to attend but we feel so strongly about our kids getting the best education. To us, there is nothing better than our child coming home and talking about God and what they learned from the core values that are taught in school.

Being able to get assistance from the state from our tax dollars would help lessen the financial burden of tuition and all of the other costs that are present when attending private schools.

I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2295.

Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and your time on SB 2295.

Hello House Education Committee,

My name is Keary Aune. I live in Bismarck, and I am a parent who is trying to keep my children enrolled in Light of Christ Catholic Schools. I support SB2295, but I am in support of all school choice bills that support parent autonomy and the right to provide an education for my child. I support SB2295 because of the financial strain that choosing private education puts on families. I believe that all families should be able to choose the education that is best for their child, whether public or private, however, many cannot make that choice because they simply cannot afford it. My family is currently trying to figure out how we will be able to continue to choose the best education for our children as more of our children reach school age. We believe that public education is still good, however it is not the best choice for our family, and at times conflicts with our religious views. Choosing Catholic education allows us to maintain our freedom of religion without having to undermine teachers by contradicting them at home. Providing support for private education will allow my family and countless others to make the choice that is the best fit for their children, not choose between their child's education and financial hardship. I understand this would add costs for the state, but it would cost far more for public education to accommodate the closure of private schools who are relieving much of the public burden of education. I urge you to vote in favor of SB2295.

Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and your time on SB2295,

Sincerely,

Keary and family

Hello Education Committee,

My name is Aimee Bachmeier. I live in District 0802, and I am a parent who has chosen many different school choices for my children. I support SB 2295, SB2303, SB2400, HB 1607, HB 1590, HB 1540 school choice bills that support parent autonomy and the right to provide an education of choice for my children. Over the years, I have chosen many different methods of education for my children: private school, homeschool, and public school. Each of these choices was based on each individual child's needs and on our financial status.

For example, my oldest child was enrolled in a private elementary school. We loved the faith that was integrated in the school and the small class size, but he was severely struggling academically. At that time, we didn't feel it was the best choice to enroll him into public school. So, I left my job as an Assistant Professor at Bismarck State College and homeschooled. I homeschooled all 4 of my children for 5 years. It was very difficult financially, as we were living on one income. Due to financial constraints, we had to decline some field trips and activities, and I had to choose affordable homeschool materials. Often the materials were used and prewritten in and sometimes we would borrow materials from fellow homeschoolers. We became very creative and utilized the free resources we had in the community to help our children grow academically and spiritually. Before my eyes, I witnessed leaps and bounds in my oldest child's educational understanding. Eventually, he tested out of the IPP (IEP) program, and I no longer needed to submit my educational plan to the public schools. As he got older, he enrolled in public school. He was point one away from graduating with honors at the public school. This is a huge accomplishment! This was a child that went from barely being able to write in 7th grade to getting an A in high school and college English and is now on the dean's list at University of Mary. I cannot stress enough that parents know what is best for their child. It would have been so helpful to have the option of financial assistance while I was homeschooling and to have the support of my ND government during this time in my children's educational journey. My child's education was successful because we decided to homeschool him and pay for homeschooling using our own financial means. After we left homeschooling, we wanted to enroll our children back into private Catholic schools. However, we were on one income, and it was unaffordable. We still had small children that we were raising. We wanted our children to be raised with faith as a part of their schooling. We believe that it helps them to not only grow and learn academically but also spiritually. Because we had no choice, we enrolled them in the public school system. This is why school choice is so important to me and our family. If our ND government had supported our family with educational financial assistance and had supported school choice, then this would have opened our options and given us more autonomy in making decisions that we feel would be best for our children. Instead, we had no choice but to send our older children to the public school system. Currently, our two younger elementary age children go to the private Catholic school, and we are enduring a financial burden because we made the choice to send our children to Catholic schools. I should be able to use the money I pay for taxes to send my children to the school of choice.

I urge you to vote in favor of these bills SB 2295, SB2303, SB2400, HB 1607, HB 1590, HB 1540. Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and for your time on the Senate Educational Committee.

Sincerely,
Aimee Bachmeier

Hello Senate Education Committee,

My name is Chris Ahlers and I live in the Fargo public schools district. I am a parent who has chosen to enroll all five my in the St. John Paul II Catholic Schools network.

I support SB2295 and I am in support of all school choice bills that help create parent autonomy and the right to provide an education for my child. I support SB2295 because sending my children to a private schools gives them something more than what they could get at a public school. It is not my perspective that North Dakota has inadequate public schools but instead private schools can provide something above and beyond what public schools can provide and that is something my wife and I *choose* to provide for our children.

In 2024, US News and World Report ranked the states and unfortunately we have the lowest overall education ranking in the four state area. Definitely room for improvement.

[Source: <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings/education>]:

- North Dakota as #28 in education (#34 in Pre-K - 12 and #12 in higher education)
- South Dakota was #15 in education (#29 in Pre-K - 12 and #7 in higher education)
- Minnesota was #17 in education (#17 in Pre-K - 12 and #18 in higher education)
- Montana was #22 in education (#27 in Pre-K - 12 and #16 in higher education)

We all value choice in our daily lives and where we put our money and our time is how we "vote" for the choice we make. As parents, we want a different education for our children. We desire to have our Christian values woven into their daily instruction and education. We desire the opportunity to make that choice and a voice to choose and we wish more families had the same opportunity to make that choice without significant financial burdens.

I urge you to vote in favor of SB2295 and to give parents a voice and the opportunity to make the choice that they feel is best for their children.

Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and your time on SB2295.

Chris Ahlers
Fargo, ND

Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am Brenda Seehafer, an elementary Title I reading and math teacher from Rolla, ND. I am asking you to oppose the following three bills: SB 2295, SB 2303, and SB 2400. All three of these bills relate to educational savings accounts.

Public dollars belong in public schools, which is the bottom line of my opposition to these bills. Private schools are just not held to the same transparency, accountability, or accessibility standards as our public schools; private schools don't have to take **all** students. Private school vouchers/educational savings accounts do not save taxpayers money and have resulted in multi-million-dollar deficits and tax increases in places like Arizona. Only 17 of our 53 counties or about 32% of North Dakota counties have access to a private school, so why would we do this? Why should rural North Dakotans foot the bill to send city kids to private schools, because that is just what these bills do to rural North Dakotans.

I am asking you to oppose SB 2295, SB 2303, and SB 2400. Don't use our public dollars on vouchers or educational savings accounts because that is not what North Dakota needs or wants.

Hello House Education Committee,

My name is Reed Mesman. I live in District 3 and my wife and I have chosen to enroll our children in the Our Redeemer's Christian Christian School in Minot, ND. I support this bill, and I am in support of all school choice bills that support parent autonomy and the right to provide an education for my children. I support this bill because I have strong beliefs, values, and morals in not only my faith and religion but also our individual rights as parents in our personal responsibility for the raising and upbringing of our own children however parents seem fit. My wife and I both grew up and attended private Christian schools from K-12. Our parents did not have much money back then but believed so strongly in the kind of faith-based education we received that they made great financial sacrifices for us. My wife and I feel this way as well and choose to do the same with our children. It's not that we don't like or that we disagree with the public school system, rather it is about the choice to choose the education system for our children that we deem best when we have the option available. I believe as North Dakotans we all share these God-given rights and beliefs in our hearts and the same care about our children. This is not always an easy choice as it comes with a great financial burden. Not only do we pay for private education for our children but we also pay taxes for the local public school system, which we do not benefit at all from. In this sense we pay double for our choice, but we have no say in the matter of where our tax money goes. As tax payers, we would like to see our tax money benefit our own children as well and the school system they are part of.

I greatly urge you to vote in favor of this bill. Thank you for your service to the great State of North Dakota and your time and dedication to this bill.

Sincerely, Reed & Carrie Mesman

Hello House Education Committee,

My name is Chantelle Woodbury. I live in District 8 and I am a parent who has chosen to enroll my children in St. Mary's Catholic School. I support SB2295, but I am in support of all school choice bills that support parent autonomy and the right to provide an education for my children. I support SB2295 because while I have been fortunate enough to be able to afford to send my children to the school of my choice I have friends and family members who have not been so lucky. My niece recently was having problems with bullies at her local public school which led my brother to look into the local private school but it was not an option financially for his family. Please put children first in our state by opening up more options for families so our children can receive the best education possible. I urge you to vote in favor of SB2295. Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and your time on SB 2295.

Chair Elkin and the members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Melissa Buchhop and I am a 4th grade teacher in the Grand Forks Public Schools. I urge a DO NOT PASS on SB 2295. No matter what these bills are called—education savings accounts, scholarship programs, or otherwise—if they divert public dollars to private schools, they are vouchers. Public funds should NOT be going to private schools. Taxpayer money is for public entities.

As a taxpayer, I pay for public parks and our local park district in Grand Forks. As a parent I can decide that I don't want to take my child(ren) to the public park and instead put up a playset in my yard. This does not mean that I now get to ask for public funds to fund my playset because I am not using the public parks. The same goes for schools. I can choose to send my child to private school or homeschool, but I do not and should not get tax money to pay for that private school or to homeschool.

Private schools don't have to follow the same rules as public schools, they can choose to reject students based on disability or socioeconomic status. Public dollars should be used to strengthen our public schools (our teachers, support staff, mental health resources, and students), which are for everybody, not to subsidize private institutions that serve only a few. We need the legislature to invest in public education, not dismantle it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Melissa Buchhop

February 3rd, 2025

Chair Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Samantha Harrison, a current resident of Mandan and former public school teacher. I am writing to you to urge a “Do Not Pass” recommendation and a “No” vote on SB 2295.

This testimony will, exhaustingly, mirror testimony I am submitting for five other bills that have been introduced this session. No matter what they are called, education savings accounts, scholarships, or tax credits—if they take money from public schools and funnel it to private institutions, they are vouchers, and I and other public educators current, former, and future vehemently oppose them.

The purpose of the public school system is to serve every child, regardless of income, ability, or background. Private and religious schools are not held to the same standards, and as a taxpayer in North Dakota, I oppose my tax dollars being used to support private education in any way. The State should be investing in the public school system, rather than be complicit in funnelling money away from it.

I urge a “Do Not Pass” recommendation from the committee and a “No” vote on the floor on SB 2295.

Sincerely,

Samantha K. Harrison
District 34

Vote No: HB 1540, HB 1590, HB 1607, SB 2295, SB 2303, SB 2400

I am sharing my testimony to express my strong opposition to all forms of voucher bills – education savings accounts, scholarships, tax credits. Funneling public money into private schools is not right. Keep public dollars in public schools. Voucher schemes support private schools in large ND communities. Rural Communities would be helping foot the bill for these wealthy private schools when only 32% of ND counties have access to private schools.

North Dakota families already have school choice. Parents can choose which school is best for their kids. They can choose to homeschool, they can choose the closest public school, they can open-enroll their student to a nearby public school, or they can choose a private school. Those are the choices.

I do not want my tax dollars funding private already wealthy schools or homeschools.

Sincerely,

Sarah E. Lerud

ND Senate Education Committee:

My name is Amber. I live in District 7 and I am a parent who has chosen to enroll my children in Light of Christ Catholic Schools. Thank you for taking the time to read my comments and for studying SB 2295!

I support SB 2265, but I am in support of all school choice bills that support parent autonomy and the right to provide an education for my child. I support SB 2295 because I believe parents should have another option if they know government/public school is not a safe place for their children to be taught.

I wish I could say religion is what initially made us chose Catholic school, but it was truly fear of what has engulfed public schools. I can't say choosing to pay for private school is easy! It is a tremendous financial undertaking! But as a parent, protecting your children is your top priority.

There are many terrifying things in our government schools today that where not there when us older generations went to school. Phones and all that comes with them, homosexual pornographic books in the libraries, gender confusion- boys in the girls' bathrooms and girl sports and kids identifying as animals and using strange pronouns, mental instability in peers, indoctrination to hate our Country, teaching white guilt/privilege, pushing equity instead of equality, many are not able to speak English, and drugs to name a few most concerning to me. These are the reasons I knew I didn't want my children in the government school environment.

My husband has a background in Law Enforcement. Conversations with youth officers are what led him to favor a private school for our children. School Resource Officers have said they see less crime in the private schools, also kids' "innocence" seems last longer in the private schools. They just stay kids a little longer. This was another rationale that drove us to look elsewhere from government education.

There is a reason many school choice bills are passing in states around our Country. Something in our government schools is broken. Kids are not as safe. Kids test scores are declining rapidly, many cannot even read. And our youth has never been this depressed and mentally ill. I am afraid government schools are more influenced by the teacher union interests than that of students and parents. I believe the unions are what drives the hostility to school choice bills. Because if you really want what is best for each child, wouldn't you be more than happy to see them at the school that is going to bring out their full potential, not just the school government-assigned to them down the street? Since we started at our Catholic school, I have seen the class sizes grow in just a few short years. More and more parents are taking the better option for their kids education.

I wanted to point out there are many more reasons than only religion as to why parents may want to choose a nonpublic school. I firmly believe parents know what is best for their children, not the State or teacher unions. Which is why I believe it is important to support parents' fundamental right to do what they know is best for their children. Bill 2295 will help more parents do what's best no matter their finances.

Thank you very much for your service to the state of North Dakota doing what is best for our state's future generations. I urge you to support SB2295.

To whom it may concern:

This bill would greatly help our family. We believe our children need to incorporate their faith into their every day lives. They have teachers and friends that work with them and spend time with them and learn together at their schools each and every day. We need to send them to these schools because this is where they learn the best and where they learn what our family wants them to learn and HOW our family wants them to learn. It is very important to us that we educate our children in these ways and at these schools. We have 4 children not attending the public schools in Bismarck/Mandan, they are all at private schools for many reasons, and this is important to our family. We would greatly appreciate this bill helping us best educate our children in the ways we need to for in household.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Laura Gardner

Mandan, ND

Kristy Rose
6725 Apple Creek Drive
Bismarck, ND 58504
kristywrose@gmail.com

ND Legislature
69th Assembly

RE: SB 2295

I am writing in opposition of SB 2295 state aid payments for public schools, nonpublic schools and students receiving home education.

I could list many reasons why the “money follows the child” is a bad idea regardless of what type of school the parents choose for their children. But, my primary concern is home education and keeping it parent-led and parent-funded, independent of any government or tax payer money in any form whatsoever.

Parents choose home education because they want something different than the government-funded public schools, something that even private schools can't provide. As the president of North Dakota's largest homeschool support group, Tricity Home Educators Association, here in the Bismarck-Mandan-Lincoln area, I know that the vast majority of home educators do not want any sort of government funding, aid, subsidy or contribution. Because we don't want to complicate our homeschools with bureaucracy and paperwork that will distract from our mission. We don't want to be handcuffed to philosophies and resources that limit our children's success. And we know that a quality education at home does not need to be expensive because a quality education is more than just good curriculum.

I fully support limiting the levies school districts can inflict on tax payers, but because this bill lays out a plan for the “money to follow the child” I urge you to not pass this bill.

Sincerely,
Kristy Rose

Chairman Beard and members of the Education Committee,

My name is Jeff Ringstad, I am the school administrator at Our Redeemer's Christian School

I would like to provide testimony regarding two common arguments from our opposition when it comes to providing state support for parental choice in education. We commonly hear that it is not fair if we do not admit every student that wishes to attend our schools, and if state funding is made available to private schools the accountability should be the same as public schools.

Admissions

As a Christian non-public school, I am often asked about how we admit students. Must families meet certain criteria in order to receive an invitation? This question is easier to answer from a standpoint of what would disqualify a family.

1. Faith is our primary reason for denying families. If families intend to enroll students, but cannot offer any applicable testimony, no church home, or actively oppose Christian ideals – they are denied. The mission of our school really focuses on two key areas: knowing each student so that we can challenge each according to their abilities with a level of rigor that will spur educational growth, and to share the Gospel every day to spur spiritual growth.
2. Available space. Just as a public school can and will deny open enrolled students once the physical space has all been utilized. Non-publics do not have a defined district and thus may deny admission once a class is full.

The truth for us is that over 80% of our revenue comes from collection of tuition. It is our goal to have a full school of tuition paying families. We have students that are denied, but this is a very small number.

A common misconception that I hear from families interested in attending my school are that students with disabilities are not admitted. We admit many students with disabilities, but because we do not receive state funding we are limited in resources and ability to meet the needs of all students. In certain rare cases, we have shared with parents that a public school would be capable of offering additional needed services that would be best for the child. We have students with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, students on the autism spectrum, and a wide range of learners.

Once we have admitted students, they are our students, and we exhaust our resources to find a successful outcome. I ask that the state of North Dakota take the same viewpoint. The students at Our Redeemer's Christian School are North Dakota students in which families have made the choice to pay tuition. Our request is simple, provide the financial support to educate all students residing in North Dakota. This bill requests a modest dollar amount, much less than what public schools receive via state aide.

Accountability

North Dakota public schools have different measures of accountability than non-public schools. Public school leaders point to the differences in open meeting laws and school board century code, being accountable to the state within their budgets, and student test scores. Non-public schools are not part of these same accountability standards, but we are held to a different standard. The families that are willing to make a financial investment in their child's K-12 education hold the school very accountable. Our parents are also our customers, and there are very high expectations that are communicated daily. Our school is held accountable by 175 parents that are very aware of what is happening within the school at all times.

Summary

We are different than public schools because of faith and funding. We are similar to public schools in that we are educating students and preparing them for the world after high school. Our teachers are licensed through the ESPB the same way public school teachers are licensed. Our students are assessed and found to be learning at expected rates. Our Redeemer's Christian School has been successful without state funding, but this bill is not for the school. This bill is right move for the families desiring a choice in education and supporting the education of every ND student.

Respectfully,

Jeff Ringstad
School Administrator
Our Redeemer's Christian School
Minot, ND
701-797-7118 (cell)

February 3, 2025

Written testimony against ESA and EEA:

To Whom it may concern:

As a public school superintendent, I have some concerns over upcoming bills establishing various EDA and EEA to support families enrolling students in non-public or home schooling programs.

1. My first concern regards oversight. As a public school, we have many state laws we must follow and much data to report to the state. As is appropriate, there is a significant amount of oversight as to how we spend public money and can show student accountability. Private schools, charter schools, and home schooling lacks this oversight. This does not seem fiscally responsible or fair.

Indeed, I have had inquiries about enrolling former home schooled students in my school district where the parents have stated that they actually did NO schooling for several years. Under the current system, home schooling parents have no requirements to prove that their children are receiving an education. They can take the state exams but may also choose to opt out. Will the state hand out money to families without making sure that it is used toward education? How will the home-schooled families demonstrate that the funds were used appropriately?

Should the legislature approve any of these measures, the entities receiving the funding should be subjected to the same oversight that public schools work under.

2. My second concern regards equity. Private schools and, I presume, charter schools if passed, are generally located or will be located in the large cities of ND and therefore not available to rural students. Some private schools may set up a virtual academy, but I can tell you from much experience, that many students do not do well under this learning model. It would have limited appeal.

Also concerning equity is that private school may select which students to accept. They can choose to accept only the highest-performing students while denying entry to students with greater (and more expensive) needs. Public school, by law, must educate ALL students regardless of cost.

Will providing money to private, charter, and home-schooled families reduce the amount of money available to fund public schools, who provide the most equitable education by accepting and educating ALL students? Will it take away funding from rural schools, who already struggle with less funding (because of fewer students) and less access to services? If so, this would hardly be considered increase equity for our ND students.

3. Is providing public funding to religious-based schools legal? Are we violating ND Century Code?

Subject: Oppose Educational Savings Accounts – Protect Public Education

Dear Senate Committee

I urge you to oppose any legislation promoting Educational Savings Accounts (ESAs), which funnel taxpayer dollars away from public schools under the misleading promise of “school choice.” These programs weaken our education system by diverting funds to private institutions, often with little accountability or oversight.

Public dollars should stay in public schools. ESAs primarily benefit families who can already afford alternative education options while leaving behind the vast majority of students who rely on well-funded public schools. Instead of improving education, ESAs create a two-tiered system that drains resources from the very institutions that serve most children. Most rural district students do not have the option to attend a private institution due to the travel involved to commute to a more rural community.

Rather than propping up private and unregulated education programs with public money, we should focus on strengthening our public schools—hiring more teachers, reducing class sizes, and improving resources. Every child deserves access to a strong public education, not a system where only a select few get the best opportunities.

I urge you to stand against ESA expansion and protect public education for all students.

Sincerely,

Steven Heim

Dear Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB 2295. Regardless of the name given to these initiatives—whether education savings accounts, scholarships, or tax credits—if they divert funds from our public schools to private institutions, they are effectively vouchers. This is a dangerous path that threatens the integrity of our public education system, which is designed to serve every child, regardless of their ability, income, or background.

Instead of funneling public dollars to private schools that lack the same standards of accountability and accessibility, we should focus on investing in our public schools. Our educators, support staff, mental health resources, and students deserve our support and funding. This investment is crucial for maintaining a robust educational environment that benefits all children in our community.

I urge you to reconsider the implications of SB 2295 and to prioritize our public education system. The future of our children and the strength of our community depend on it.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. VOTE NO on SB 2295.

Sincerely,
Matt Liebel



North Dakota Home School Association

Serving Home Educators since 1985

SB 2295

No

Chairman Beard and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the North Dakota Home School Association (NDHSA) urging a “do not pass” on SB 2295. **Our concern as an association has to do with page 2, lines 16 - 28.** As I study the bill, it is hard to determine if home educated students will be receiving state aid or not. Line 16 - 18 make it appear that a home educated student would enroll in their local district in some way as would be prescribed by the superintendent of public instruction. Line 28 and 29 of the same page seem to indicate that a home educated student can apply for these funds. This bill needs some clarification in this area.

The North Dakota Home School Association is fundamentally opposed to the funding of private and home education through state dollars. We are particularly concerned about the implications this bill has for home educators especially as the bill seems to contradict itself.

We are hearing a lot about school choice this session. Often this conversation is not really about choice, but funding “my” choice. Adding charter schools and microschools to North Dakota’s current choices of public, private, parochial and home education does expand school choice. Providing monies for their choices, in essence, truly is not about choice.

Please give SB 2295 a **do not pass** as currently written.

Sincerely,

Theresa Deckert 701-662-4790

Legislative Liaison/Lobbyist

North Dakota Home School Association

TESTIMONY on SB2295**February 3, 2025****Submitted by James B. Buhr (701-840-1570)****James.b.buhr.md@gmail.com****and****Sharon E. Buhr (701-840-0973)****Sharon.e.buhr@gmail.com****613 Chautauqua Blvd****Valley City, ND 580722**

Members of Senate Education Committee:

Please Vote NO on SB2295. North Dakota public schools have a right to be proud of their achievements, but they are always operating on something approaching a shoestring, and have trouble hiring and maintaining good teachers, and providing good curriculum. Locally our school has recently drastically cut its arts education program. Due to lack of funds.

No one should be requiring our school district to forward 50% of their state assistance to home-schooled students in their district, nor of course 75% to private schools for those enrolled there. As far as we can tell that is illegal. Article VIII section 5 of the ND Constitution states that “no money raised for the support of public schools shall be appropriated or used for the support of any sectarian school.”

People in my community who send their children to private schools, as we have in the past, are not in favor of that diversion of funding away from our public schools. Please recommend a Do Not Pass on HB2295. Thank you for your consideration.

February 1st, 2025

RE: Testimony for SB 2295

Dear Legislators of North Dakota,

Greetings! My name is Shawna Helbling and I reside in Mandan, ND, where I have been a life-long resident. My husband and I have been married for almost 17 years and we have 3 children, ages 14, 12, and 9. All our children are currently enrolled at Saint Joseph Catholic Montessori School and School of The Holy Family in Mandan.

When I was young, my parents chose Catholic education for my brother and me. My husband went to public school. Catholic education has been something that has been especially important in my family. My grandmother and her siblings all attended St. Mary's High School. My parents both attended Catholic Schools. Many of our extended family have either worked or attended St. Mary's in Bismarck, Bishop Ryan in Minot, and Trinity in Dickinson. We are a big Catholic Family that have been formed and rooted in Catholic Education.

My grandmother was the school secretary at St. Joseph School in Mandan for 24 years. I was blessed to be able to have her in my school for the 7 years that I was there, and I know my brother feels the same way. My Catholic education instilled in me so much of who I am today. I had the best teachers, great opportunities, low classroom ratios, and most of all I had the opportunity to learn a deep love for Jesus and my Catholic faith. I know that it was a hardship for my parents to send us to a private school back in the 90's, but I know how important it was for my parents to at least give us the best start to our education and our faith life. They made it work with the resources that they had. Though I did not go to Catholic School after 6th grade, I am forever thankful to them for the education that I was given.

When it came time for our children to start school, there was a conversation that my husband and I had. We are a lower end middle class family and funds can be tight from time to time, especially raising 3 children, ensuring that can be provided for, and owning our own home. It was a tough conversation and I had to convince my husband that we needed to try to make it work for our family. He agreed on a temporary basis, because he was not sure how we would be able to afford it once it came to 2 more children. We are blessed to say that all our children have been attending Catholic School since they were 3 years old. It has never been easy to continue paying their tuition, but with great people around us, to support us, we have found a way to do so.

I honestly believe more people would choose private education if it were not for the tuition. It is a hard sell for many people. One thing we learned from our time in private schools is that not all children are created equal. Some students need a better environment to be in than a classroom that is overcrowded because schools are getting too big. Some children need more structured learning environments. Some need more one-on-one attention. Some need to feel more validated and the list goes on.

I would like to tell you about our daughter. Sarah is one of the most kind, heart of gold 14-year-olds you will ever meet. She is bubbly and knows no strangers, she gets that from her great grandpa. Our daughter has been riddled with much anxiety from an early age. She has seen specialists, been to counseling, taken to occupational therapy, and the list goes on. In 2019, our school could no longer afford a counselor, so they forfeited that position in the school. We were devastated. How would she function? How would she survive? Would there be anyone at the school who would be willing to do what the counselor did? God knew there was a plan. In 2020, our school made a radical change to the Montessori Method of learning. I will tell you, even as a former employee and life-time supporter, I had my doubts. Should we pull her? Does she need more structure? How would she be able to handle this change? We started looking at public schools, more private schools, and anything education related to see what would fit her the best. Little did we know, it was right there in the school that she was going to thrive! The first 2 years, there were many growing pains, many doubts for us as parents, and it was all new to us as we were learning and understanding Montessori, right along with our children. Today, not only our daughter, but all our children have grown so much and are becoming the best that they can be. They are excelling in their schoolwork. They enjoy going to school. We have some of the BEST guides (teachers) you will ever meet, and they all care deeply about each student they encounter. Our pastor, Fr. Josh Waltz, is 110% vested in Catholic education, just listen to his homily from last weekend. Next year, my middle child gets to experience middle school in a whole new way. We now have the first Catholic High School in Mandan, and we have brought back our Catholic middle school, which has not existed in Mandan for many years.

Why did I feel like it was important to share my story with you? Catholic Education has profoundly changed my family for the better. It has not been without some hardships, but those hardships make us stronger and cling to our faith more. I know there are 100 more stories just like ours out there. We want more people to be able to experience what we have experienced. That is where you come in. Please, help pass this bill to ensure that more people can truly experience what my family has been able to experience. To get a quality education in an environment where children are treated as Individuals, and not as just "the next student" to come along. Help us to be able to give the proper salary to our teachers who labor tirelessly for the mission of Private Education! Catholic Schools is one of the very first institutions that formed the founders of this country and the world. Please help us continue to form the world and our community for the better. Give more families the opportunity for private education with the help from the State of North Dakota.

Thank you for your time and attention and reading this testimony. May God continue to bless you all.

Sincerely,

Shawna Helbling
303 3rd Ave NE
Mandan, ND 58554

February 3, 2025

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Dr. Leroy Huizenga, and my wife Kari and I live in District 35 in Bismarck. We are writing in support of SB 2295.

My wife and I have homeschooled our three children. The eldest (now 16) has attended St. Mary's High School the past couple years, while our 14-year-old and 10-year-old are yet at home. While now employed in a different sector, I used to be in higher education in the Chicago area and Bismarck.

Given our experience in educating our children and my experience as an educator, we have come to the conviction that parents are in the best position to decide what the best course of education is for their particular children in a particular season. For some children, that could be public schools (as it happens, I'm a product of Minot Public Schools, while my wife is a product of Park River and Devils Lake Public Schools), for others, private schools, for others, home school.

For instance, when our eldest son hit a certain age, it became apparent a traditional school setting would serve him best, so we explored part- and full-time options at Legacy, the Career Academy, and St. Mary's. We decided St. Mary's full-time would serve him best. He's thriving there, while the other two are thriving at home. And as we go forward, we as parents will continue to evaluate what's best for each.

As residents of ND and taxpayers, my wife and I are therefore of the conviction we should be empowered to make decisions for our children's education in line with what's best for them, as education is about the formation of children – indeed, each particular child in his or her particularity. Systems of schooling and taxation regimes should support that, not the other way round.

For these reasons, we urge you to vote in favor of SB 2295 and similar bills that empower parents to exercise options in education.

We appreciate your service to our State and your time spent in consideration of this bill.

Best,

Dr. Leroy & Mrs. Kari Huizenga

February 3rd, 2025

To Chris Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Josh Nelson. I am a resident of Northwood, ND located in Legislative District 20. I am also a public-school teacher in my 16th year working in public education. The views in this letter reflect my views alone and not necessarily those of my school district. I am writing this letter in opposition to SB 2295.

I urge the Senate Education Committee to weigh heavily the negative impacts of SB 2295 and any other bills in consideration that divert or allocate public tax dollars away from public education towards private and home school education.

I personally have no problem with a parent or family choosing to privately educate or homeschool their children. That is a choice and a right every parent in North Dakota currently has. My issue is with the funding of private school or homeschool is with public dollars comes with a multitude of issues. Such as.

1. **Violation of the Establishment clause in the constitution.** Giving state aid to private schools that may be religious in nature is in direct violation to separation of church and state.
2. **The Draining of public funds.** Giving a voucher, or direct aid, only further depletes the ability for our state to fund public education. We are a state which has historically prided itself on our strong public education system. This bill does nothing but undermine the potential quality for our public schools. We currently have an aging public-school infrastructure with many communities still using century old schools. North Dakota also has some of the lowest paid teachers in our country. We are facing teacher shortages in almost every subject, and grade level in our state. Passing bills like SB 2295 only further exacerbates the problem.
3. **Lack of oversight and accountability.** SB 2295 is no different than the bills from the last session or some other bills this session, in that there is no accountability for using public money. Our public schools are held to a high standard in the accounting process, and the requirements that must be met in order to receive public tax dollars from the state. Where is the accountability on private and home schools that would be receiving public tax dollars shrouded as a voucher? These are still public funds no matter what name is given to them. SB 2295 and similar bills never provide for this oversight.
4. **Education Inequality.** SB 2295 could possibly cause inequities of education. A majority of North Dakota's students live in rural areas, located an hour or more away

from private school options. Only urban children would gain a benefit. And who is to stop private schools from raising their rates when they know students are being backed by the state. One could look no further than our university systems that do that very same thing when they already know each student has access to Federal Financial Aid, which has led to astronomical tuition costs. Leading to only wealthy students gaining benefit from legislation like SB 2295. This creates a class system for education. Which goes against many of our North Dakota traditions. As for homeschooling, how many parents of disadvantaged children could afford to stay home and educate their children even with bills like SB 2295. Only those families who are well off could still afford to do this. Again, SB 2295 benefits very few in North Dakota and has the potential to great harm to our public education system.

Thank you for hearing my testimony in opposition to SB 2295. Again I urge the committee to weigh the pros and cons of bills like this and the potentially great harm that can come from essentially defunding public education.

Sincerely,

Josh Nelson

Resident of District 20

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this testimony in support of SB 2295. This bill is a step toward empowering parents to make the best educational choices for their children. This bill restores parental rights, allowing families to have greater control over how their children are educated. Every child is unique, and parents are in the best position to determine what approach will serve their child's needs and future. By passing SB 2295, North Dakota can ensure that education remains flexible, personalized, and ultimately, a decision guided by the parents who know their children best.

Sincerely,

Rachel Pankratz

Christ the King Catholic Montessori School Teacher

Hello House/Senate Education Committee,

My name is Alexis Scott. I live in District 6 and I am a parent who has chosen to enroll my child(ren) in John Paul II Catholic School(s).

I support SB2295, but I am in support of all school choice bills that support parent autonomy and the right to provide an education for my child. I support SB2295 because as a parent of high school age to kindergarten I no longer felt after COVID my children's educational needs were met. A few examples on why I chose to remove my children from public school:

1. **Lack of Academic Progress Transparency** – For years, I struggled to get meaningful academic updates from my children's public school teachers. My 4th grader fell behind in math without any notification, and when I inquired, teachers couldn't specify his struggles or offer additional support. Requests for extra homework were dismissed, leaving me helpless in guiding his progress. After switching to Catholic schools, I experienced a complete shift—weekly grade updates, prompt responses to questions, and immediate academic support. I finally felt engaged in my child's education again rather than shut out of the process.
2. **Effective Reading Support** – My child struggled with reading throughout 1st grade, receiving school-provided reading support with little improvement—managing only 7 WPM at 50% accuracy by year's end. Upon transferring to JP2, he received consistent, individualized 1:1 instruction. By the end of the year, he was reading 86 WPM with over 95% accuracy. The tailored support not only accelerated his progress but also built his confidence and love for learning in a way I hadn't seen before.
3. **Middle School Environment & Academic Expectations** – My oldest child's public middle school experience was chaotic—regular fights, constant classroom disruptions, and an overall apathy toward learning. At Discovery Middle School, there were no classroom controls, no cell phone policies, and no clear academic expectations. Despite being labeled “nice” and “easy to work with,” he struggled to write a basic paragraph. In contrast, his first day at JP2 was “the best first day of school ever.” The school fostered respect, discipline, and high academic standards in a safe, structured environment. By year's end, he proudly handed me a three-page essay, amazed at his own progress. The transformation in confidence, learning, and overall well-being has completely changed our family's experience with education.

I support school choice because it allows my family to thrive in an education system that is supportive, engaging, and exceeding our expectations. It would ease our financial burden and make quality education accessible without sacrificing our financial stability. We have taken extra jobs, cut expenses, and relied on scholarships to provide this opportunity—something families shouldn't have to do to ensure a strong education. Every child deserves access to a school that meets their needs, and our tax dollars should support families in making that choice. I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2295.

Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and your time on SB2295.

Regards,

Alexis Scott

Hello Senate Education Committee,

My name is Liz Hoffner, we live in the Grand Forks school district. I am the proud mother of two boys who attend Holy Family-St. Mary's School in Grand Forks. I support SB2295, but I am in support of all school choice bills that support parent autonomy and the right to provide an education for my children.

Our journey into Catholic education began when our eldest son was preparing to enter kindergarten. At the time, he was very shy and uncomfortable in large group settings. Although we live just two blocks from an excellent public elementary school, we knew that its large class sizes and multiple sections per grade would not provide the nurturing start he needed. We wanted him to feel comfortable, confident, and supported—something that simply didn't seem possible in a large public-school setting.

As parishioners at HFSM, we began exploring other educational options. When we toured the school, we were warmly welcomed by older students who eagerly shared what they loved about being part of HFSM. We met with the principal, spoke with other families, and immediately knew this was the right place for our children. From the moment we stepped inside, we felt at home. The love, passion, and dedication of the teachers and students were undeniable. HFSM is more than just a school—it's a community that nurtures not only academic excellence but also the whole child: mind, body, and soul.

At HFSM, students are held to a high moral standard through a faith-based approach to education, creating a warm, inclusive environment where every child is valued. They learn respect—for themselves, their peers, and their teachers—rooted in the belief that each of them is perfectly created and deeply loved by God. This atmosphere of acceptance and encouragement has transformed my once-shy kindergartener into a confident and outgoing fifth grader.

Beyond academics, HFSM instills a spirit of service and leadership. Students actively participate in community service, from raising funds for local charities and disaster relief to organizing food drives and forming meaningful connections as pen pals with elderly parishioners. They also develop leadership and teamwork skills by leading weekly Mass through readings, music, and altar serving.

Choosing HFSM for our children has been one of the greatest blessings of our lives. However, this decision has required financial sacrifices—sacrifices that many families may not be able to make. I truly believe that every family should have the ability to choose the best educational environment for their children, regardless of financial constraints. It's time to empower families with school choice, ensuring that every child has access to an education that meets their unique needs and helps them thrive.

I urge you to vote in favor of SB2295. Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and your time on SB2295.

Sincerely,

Liz Hoffner and Family

February 3, 2025

North Dakota Senate Education Committee

State Capitol

Bismarck, ND 58501

RE: Endorsement of SB 2295

Dear House Education Committee,

My name is Rebecca Obrigewitch, and I live in District 32. As a parent, I have chosen to enroll my children in a local private school.

I support Senate Bill 2295, but I am in support of all school choice bills that support parent autonomy and the right to provide an education for my child. Our children's enrollment in the school has been an incredibly positive experience. I firmly believe that all parents should have the opportunity to choose the educational experience for their children that aligns with their faith, values, and educational priorities. This bill's financial impact would be a great benefit.

I urge you to vote in favor of Senate Bill 2295.

Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and your time on Senate Bill 2295.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Obrigewitch

Testimony for SB2295

Chairman Heinert, and members of the committee:

My name is Katie Vidmar, I am a native of Mott, ND and my life trajectory was shaped by my parents' exercising school choice. I graduated the 8th grade from St. Vincent's Catholic school, a small rural parochial school that closed in 1998. I received an incredible education from this tiny place, and I wonder if it may have lasted longer if school choice policies had been adopted earlier.

As for my husband Jeremy and I, being able to exercise school choice has made all the difference for our family. This is especially true for our oldest daughter Mary Claire who has a non-specified neurodevelopmental disorder, as well as a cognitive disability.

Our family had been living in Mott, North Dakota, and while the local school district was doing the best they could, it was clear their capacity to serve our daughter was limited. As an early elementary student, spending 80% of her time in a resource room was very isolating for Mary Claire and we began to be concerned for her social and emotional well-being. It was then that we began to seriously consider moving from our beloved rural community to be closer to better support for Mary Claire, as well as an educational system equipped to be more inclusive of our daughter. It was then that we discovered Christ the King Catholic Montessori School in Mandan.

We were drawn to Montessori education and Christ the King specifically because by nature of the educational philosophy embraced at the school, having children of varying ages and abilities present in the same environment is the norm. Administration was clear they didn't have the same LD supports as a Public School, but they were willing to work with us to find creative solutions to integrate Mary Claire into the CTK community. We moved in October of 2021, and our oldest three children are now enrolled at the school.

Mary Claire is thriving. She's fully integrated in a lower elementary environment, where her presence as a member of her community is valued and even treasured. We've partnered with a local outpatient pediatric therapy group that sends PT, OT, and Speech Therapists to treat Mary Claire in the context of her school day, allowing for collaboration between her teachers and therapists. We feel we've found the setting that is truly the best fit for our daughter.

Christ the King has been wonderful for our other children as well. Our 8 year old son has dyslexia, and an embodied approach to reading meets him at the point of his need. Our 6 year old daughter is an extremely precocious Kindergartner. She's doing academic work well above her same-age peers, while also enjoying the leadership she has as one of the oldest children in her 3 to 6 year old environment.

Jeremy and I have 3 more children at home, which means at some point we'll be paying private school tuition times 6. This is a significant financial commitment on our behalf, and the burden is real.

Some may hold the opinion that perhaps if rural school districts received more funding for special education, perhaps our family could have been better supported in Mott. While more

support is always helpful, what we have found at Christ the King is a unique philosophy of education that allows Mary Claire to be integrated with her peers, leading to her growth socially, emotionally and spiritually in a way that even a very well-funded public school cannot accommodate. Simply appropriating more dollars to our rural public school would not have been enough to keep us there, as it would have been simply “more of the same,” not the kind of holistic educational support we are receiving now at CTK.

As taxpayers and parents, we are grateful to the Senate for considering this assistance to families. For us, it would make all the difference.

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to address you today. My name is Sara Dudley, and I am the principal at St. Michael's Catholic School in Grand Forks. I am here to advocate for school choice not only in this bill but in all bills that bring parent school choice to North Dakota. I am also here to dispel some common misconceptions regarding non-public schools.

1. Accessibility for All Families:

One of the most pervasive falsehoods is that non-public schools are only for the wealthy. At St. Michael's Catholic School, 28% of our student population is enrolled in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program. This statistic highlights that our school is accessible to families from various economic backgrounds. School choice allows families, regardless of their financial situation, to select an education that they believe will best serve their children. It is crucial that we continue to support policies that enable all families to access quality education and empower parents.

2. Serving Students with Disabilities:

Another misconception is that non-public schools do not serve students with disabilities. I want to clarify that at St. Michael's Catholic School, we take pride in our inclusive environment. Currently, we serve 17 students with various needs, representing 11% of our K-5 student population. These students face challenges such as dyslexia, ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, learning disabilities, speech and language needs, and emotional needs. However, we receive \$0 of the per pupil formula to support these students. With additional resources, we could serve even more students and strive to meet their diverse needs effectively.

We work in partnership with the public school system when serving students with identified special education needs, but the lack of funding limits our ability to provide comprehensive support because we depend on tuition and serve a population that receives scholarships so we cannot hire specialists or more interventionists.

Again, the reason that we are limited in our services for students with special needs is based upon available resources because we receive \$0 from the state to serve them and we keep our tuition rates low so families can access the education of their choice in Catholic schools. It is cruel to suggest that it is because of discrimination rather than a lack of state support to serve students.

3. High Standards of Accountability:

Another misconception is that non-public schools lack accountability. I want to assure you that we maintain high standards of accountability. Non-public schools are required to complete reports mandated by the Department of Public Instruction, along with undergoing the Cognia accreditation process, which evaluates our schools by the same standards as public schools. Additionally, we have a Board of Education elected by our school community, ensuring that our

leadership is accountable to the families we serve and the parish that financially supports our school and families.

Furthermore, we are mandated to employ highly qualified educators who participate in required professional development mandated by the Department of Public Instruction and the Education Standards and Practices Board. Our curriculum aligns with state learning standards ensuring that we provide a rigorous educational experience for all students.

4. A Diverse Student Body:

It's also important to note that not all students who attend Catholic schools are Catholic. At St. Michael's Catholic School, approximately 12% of our student body comes from different faith backgrounds. These families choose our school because they seek an alternative to what public schools can offer—smaller class sizes, a focus on character development, and a values-based education, close relationships with teachers and administrators to create meaningful partnerships in their child's education. The choice of a school should not be limited to religious affiliation; it should be about finding the best fit for each child's unique needs.

5. The Importance of School Choice:

School choice is essential for fostering an educational landscape that is diverse, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all students. It allows families to seek out educational environments that align with their values and meet their children's specific needs. By supporting school choice, we are advocating for equitable access to quality education for every student, regardless of their background or abilities.

6. A Call to Action:

I urge this committee to support policies that promote school choice, ensuring that all families have the opportunity to choose the educational path that best fits their children. Together, we can dismantle the falsehoods surrounding non-public schools and create a more inclusive educational system that truly serves all students.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you will support policies that enhance school choice for all families. I will stand for any questions.

Sincerely,
Sara Dudley
sara.dudley@stmichaelsgf.com

515-231-8102

504 5th Ave. N.

Grand Forks, ND 58203

Kristin Nelson

2/3/25

5409 20th Street South

Fargo, ND

District 46

DO NOT PASS SB 2295

Senator Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee:

I urge a **DO NOT PASS** on SB 2295. **Public dollars belong to public schools.** Our schools struggle with funding as it is, we cannot allocate dollars away from public use. Public dollars must stay to **support public education.**

Again, I urge a **DO NOT PASS** recommendation on this bill.

I am a homeschooling parent of 4 and I oppose this pseudo-voucher program. If North Dakota wants to provide greater parental flexibility in education options, then we should instead consider a tax credit for families choosing to educate in private or homeschool settings. Public dollars for public schools make sense. Public dollars for private education is not only illogical but largely unwelcome.

There are better methods. Oppose this bill.



To Whom it may concern;

My name is Joe Drumm. I'm reaching out in opposition to SB 2295, a bill which takes public dollars and moves those funds to support private schools (otherwise commonly known as vouchers).

Most conversations involving education from my perspective revolve around state funding and the need for increases. Most observing the state and national educational scene agree that we are in the midst of a recruitment and retainment crisis in public education. Many colleges and institutions that traditionally produce teachers are reporting a lack of candidates interested in or graduating from their programs.

Locally to my district, UND acts as a litmus in the state of education in North Dakota. In the 2011-12 school year, UND reported 823 enrollees in their school of Education and Human development, 5.6% of their total enrollment. This last academic year, UND reported 607 enrollees in the same school, 4.28% of total enrollment**. This drop isn't atypical, and has drawn national attention as schools and districts scramble to deal with the fallout of these decreases in enrollment.

Positions are left vacant for months at a time with few to any qualified candidates applying for the position. At a local and national level, it's becoming harder and harder to find people who are willing to do the work and commit the time required to work in this profession.*** As of 2024, at least 27 governors have called for legislative action to address the sinking number of teachers seeking to enter the field*. These shortages aren't specific to Red or Blue states, and are impacting the country on a fairly consistent trend.

And yet, here we are, arguing if moving money out of public education is the correct way to address this issue. When viewed from this perspective, the entire conversation becomes almost comically nonsensical. In the midst of a crisis, it makes little sense to further expound the problems that add to the severity of the crisis. In other words, it's equivalent to pouring water into a sinking boat. Working to draw funding down from an already struggling and critically important sector solves nothing and draws the problem out, forcing further emergency measures that hurt schools and hurt the public good. Only 32% of North Dakota counties have access to a private school. 2 out of 3 North Dakotan families wouldn't benefit from this sort of legislation in any meaningful way.

I strongly urge a Do Not Pass recommendation on these bills in committee. Pulling public funding to private entities solves nothing and directly hurts North Dakotans.

Thank you for your time,
Joe Drumm



Sources:

* <https://www.nga.org/news/commentary/state-education-trends-for-2024/>

** <https://und.edu/analytics-and-planning/data-and-reports/2024.html>

*** <https://www.inforum.com/news/north-dakota/north-dakotas-teacher-shortage-creating-imminent-peril-as-board-seeks-emergency-rule>

I am a homeschooling mom, and small business owner, who believes in the educational freedom that homeschooling allows.

I strongly OPPOSE SB 2295.

The person (state or other entity) who provides the funding, will want to control how it's used. Homeschooling parents wish to school their children without the regulation strings that would come with any "free" money.

This bill would likely call for regulation, mandated curriculum, increased testing, and loss of data privacy. Do not push North Dakotan children into uniform products of the state, which would force transparency and accountability on taxpayer-funded projects. Homeschooling parents do not want this.

As a homeschooling parent, we should fight for the right to homeschool in peace and freedom. We do not believe that one educational plan fits all children and parents should be empowered to make that determination based on their child's unique gifts, talents, and needs.

Dear Senate Committee,

My name is Kacie Dorn and I am writing this testimony to express my opposition to SB 2295 and any and all legislation promoting Educational Savings Accounts, voucher programs, or any programs that divert public funds to privatized education.

I have lived in North Dakota my entire life and have completed various levels of education in this state, including elementary school, middle school, high school, university, and graduate school, all in public schools. Additionally, I am the daughter of two public school teachers. My experiences have shown me firsthand how successful public schools can be for children of all backgrounds, but public schools MUST receive appropriate funds to achieve this success.

The use of public funds to support private school tuition and homeschooling is not in the best interest of North Dakota's children. Private schools can reject students based on disability or socioeconomic status, financially supporting these institutions with government funds sends a clear message: the government in this state does not prioritize public education. Public dollars should be used to strengthen our public schools which provide equal opportunity for all children, not to subsidize private institutions that serve only a few.

Parents have a choice to send their children to private schools or pursue homeschooling, no one is forcing them to make this decision. The taxpayers in this state should not be forced to fund these decisions.

Sincerely,

Kacie Dorn

District 22

North Dakota Legislature,

I am writing as a strong proponent for SB 2295. My wife and I are firm believers in the education and faith based community granted through a private Catholic education. The costs associated with sending our daughter to an institution that aligns with our spiritual and cultural values can be troublesome at times and there are definite sacrifices that must be made. I am a police officer and my wife is a teacher's aide. While we both enjoy having impactful and fulfilling jobs, they are certainly not the highest of paying. Any manner of tuition relief granted by this proposed legislation would be of great benefit to numerous families like ours in the region.

We greatly appreciate the time and consideration of this proposed bill and hope everyone stays healthy and well.

At a time when our state is proposing bills intended to make the lives of registered sex offenders easier, I would sincerely hope that some of our lawmakers would perceive the need to augment the lives of parents and their children as well.

Warmest regards,
John Sisk



Home School Legal Defense Association

PRESIDENT	James R. Mason III, Esq. DC, OR
LEGAL DIRECTOR	Scott A. Woodruff, Esq. MO, VA
LITIGATION COUNSEL	Peter K. Kamakawiwoole, Esq. MO, VA
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ASSOCIATE ATTORNEY	Samuel S. Johnson, Esq. AL
PRESIDENT EMERITUS	J. Michael Smith, Esq. VA
OF COUNSEL	Tom Sanders, Esq. TX

February 3, 2025

The Honorable Todd Beard
Chairperson
Senate Education Committee

RE: *Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 2295*

Dear Chairperson Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee:

By way of introduction, Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) is a national organization committed to advocating for homeschool freedom and homeschool families. With over 95,000 member families, we are the world's largest homeschool advocacy organization. Thank you for your service to North Dakota families and for considering this written testimony in opposition to SB 2295.

Simply put, we believe that public tax-payer aid directly to home educating families is poisonous to the homeschooling movement. We oppose the public funding of private home education.

The modern homeschool movement over the past 40+ years has been successful not because of government funding, but because of the voluntary association of parents who love their children and desire the best for them.

First, the public, taxpayer funding of private home education places, at least in some small manner, the responsibility for approving decisions of home educating families in the hands of the state. After all, when the government collects tax dollars from residents and gives those taxes dollars to others (in the form of state aid), the state ought to know how that aid is being spent.



Second, there is ample evidence that public funding of private education has not produced the results many desire. Just look to the examples of Arizona, Florida, West Virginia, Arkansas and others to find recent examples of the cost of these programs and the bureaucratic hurdles they create.

Third, this legislation does not expand meaningful educational options for any North Dakota children. S.B. 2295 does nothing to provide any additional choice, but simply provides state aid to the choice that parents already (or want to) make. It forces the tax-payers of North Dakota to pay for the private educational decisions of other families and does not provide any additional education options for families in the state.

Finally, state aid to home education is premised on the notion that the education of children is a state responsibility based on the interests of the state. We disagree. We agree with the Supreme Court when it stated 100 years ago in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*: “The child is not the mere creature of the State; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.” (268 U.S. 510 (1925)). It’s the parent who has this duty, not the state.

For over four decades, HSLDA has stood for homeschool freedom. S.B. 2295, as drafted represents a step away from liberty.

Please oppose S.B. 2295.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kevin M. Boden".

Kevin M. Boden, Esq.
Staff Attorney

**Do Pass Testimony
of Doug Sharbono, citizen of North Dakota
on SB2295
in the Sixty-ninth Legislative Assembly of North Dakota**

Dear Chairman Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing as a citizen and believe SB2295 is much needed legislation. This legislation will fund the education of the North Dakota student no matter where they are educated. Yet, it will ensure the public school has adequate funds to operate based on a proration of non-public school funds which it will receive. This is excellent, well-thought out legislation. This legislation finally brings the appropriation of education back into compliance with the North Dakota Constitution.

Please give SB2295 a Do Pass.

Thank you,

Doug Sharbono
1708 9th St S
Fargo, ND 58103

**House Judiciary Committee
SB 2295 - Testimony in Opposition
February 4, 2025**

Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Shannon Krueger and I am writing in opposition of SB 2295. I have worked in public education for nearly twenty years and have seen the effects of inadequate funding in every school I have had the privilege to work in. Whether it's a dying heating system, a building without enough classrooms, a shortage of supplies, or cuts to staffing, our communities' educational needs are never fully met. Public education needs every bit of funding available. Any amount diverted to private education is an increased shortage to an already strapped system.

I urge you to please vote NO on SB 2295.

Thank you.

Hello House Education Committee,

I'm Dora Tschosik, a resident of District 34 and a parent who has chosen to enroll a child in Light of Christ Catholic School.

I firmly support SB 2295 and all school choice bills that uphold parent autonomy and the right to provide an education for my child. I support because it provides my child an environment he wishes to gain an education. We made the switch from public to private school 6 weeks into the current school year. Despite our efforts, the public school system was much too large for him. He was refusing to go to school and at just 10 years old we knew we needed to make a change quickly. We chose a faith-based education in order for him to succeed. He enjoys Light of Christ Catholic School and happily goes each and every day. Some of the reasons he enjoys going are smaller class size, the close connections with teachers and peers, religion, engagement in the classroom and day to day activities/education. I strongly feel if we kept in the public school system, we would've set him up for failure in continuing his education. What works for many isn't always the best fit for every child.

I believe that having school choice/parent choice will positively impact my family. I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2295. Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and your time on SB 2295.

Sincerely,
Dora Tschosik

Testimony against Senate Bill 2295

Dear members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Cam Leedah. I live in rural Leonard. I graduated all of my children from homeschool and now have grandchildren being homeschooled. I urge a Do Not Pass on SB 2295.

Whether it be this bill, or ESAs, or vouchers, any taxpayer dollars spent towards non-public and homeschools create serious issues. Here are a few:

- 1) Bigger government. More money will be spent on administration, bringing a greater burden to taxpayers.
- 2) Accountability will follow the money. Non-public schools and homeschools will eventually be subject to rules and regulations that they currently are not under. They will lose their uniqueness, autonomy, innovation, freedom to choose any curriculum, and other hallmarks that have made them different from public school.
- 3) Costs for tuition, curriculum, and supplies will rise, as they have in states that have had ESAs and vouchers for more than a few years. This is a burden for the non-public schools and homeschools that do not take the taxpayer dollars, and may indeed cause the end to some or many of them.

Non-public schools or homeschools that use public money become **just a different type of public school**. That is not true school choice. In the end, the parent is simply deciding which type of public school they want.

Give this bill a Do Not Pass.

Greetings, Senate Education Committee,

My name is Jeremy Schmaltz. I live and work in District 42 and I am a parent and school board member who has chosen to enroll my child in St. Michael's Catholic School in Grand Forks, ND. I work as a clinical counselor in the area.

I support SB 2303, SB 2295, and SB 2400, but I am in support of all school choice bills that support parent autonomy and the right to provide an education for my child. I support SB 2303, SB 2295, and SB 2400 because having previous experience in both the public and private sector of education in my community as a former music educator, I believe that parents should have the right to choose where their tax dollars are allocated to provide their children with the best future they can provide. The public schools here in Grand Forks have chosen to include ideological content that is harmful to the natural development of elementary aged and middle school aged children. Kids are bullied for not being LGBTQAI + in GFPS. There has been a rise in kids who identify as transgender and non-binary ever since these policies have been adopted. Several students have gone as far as taking puberty blockers, have begun and nearly finished the process of transition. This is biologically and psychologically damaging on many levels, not to mention, banned in the EU. I find it sad that I must protect my child against this environment at my local public elementary school. As such, I do so voluntarily, but feel no other option but to send my child to a private institution. I personally choose a Catholic education for its rigorous academics, quality educators, the instillment of character and values that promote community service and leadership, and for its faith-based approach that aligns with our family's core values.

Having school choice will aid 100s of families in the Grand Forks area and 1000s throughout the state to have the ability to choose where their tax dollars go regarding their children's education, so that they can have the confidence and freedom that their tax dollars are being spent in accordance with their conscience and values. It also empowers the diversity of educational approach for those students who the traditional model of education does not work for.

I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2303, SB 2295, and SB 2400. In the United States, 11 states have universal private school choice programs, and 21 states have limited private school choice programs. It is time ND adopt these school choice programs to further empower its citizens and invest in the future of its children.

Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and your time on SB 2303, SB 2295, and SB 2400.

I support school choice!

Testimony in Opposition to SB2295

Submitted by Sandy Hansen, resident of Barnes County, ND

I would like to encourage the committee to give this bill a "Do Not Pass" recommendation. More studies need to be done to determine the effect on the state's budgeting for education and how this could benefit some to the detriment of others.

Studies in states that have invested in these private school funds show that the programs year did not always roll out in predictable ways: certain programs have proven more expensive than anticipated, drawing down state coffers if not state education budgets directly. The primary beneficiaries have of some programs have been affluent families with students already enrolled in private schools. Princeton University researchers have found evidence of Iowa private and parochial schools raising tuition to take advantage of state subsidies, which may make it harder for lower-income families to participate in the programs. It's not possible to know how much students are learning under some of the programs – it's likely to present state policymakers with difficult decisions about the size and shape of the new choice plans – given their emerging impact on state budgets, public school funding and enrollments, longstanding efforts to strengthen educational opportunities for low-income students, and even the sustainability of public charter schools. (Information from "First Results from the New Wave of Public Funding of Private Schooling," www.future-ed.org)

We are a rural state with limited funds available for our public schools. Re-routing public tax dollars needed for those unable to afford private education to non-public education seems a misuse of those funds without further investigation of consequences. Our public dollars would be better used on supporting our public schools and their staff.

PLEASE VOTE NO ON SB2295. Thank you.

Testimony on Senate Bill 2295

**Presented by Shane Goettle on Behalf of the State Association of Nonpublic Schools
February 4, 2025**

SB 2295

Chairman Beard and Members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Shane Goettle and I represent the State Association of Nonpublic Schools.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony regarding **Senate Bill 2295**, which proposes modifications to state education funding to ensure that all North Dakota students receive equitable financial support, whether they attend public schools, nonpublic schools, or receive home education.

While Senate Bill 2295 takes steps toward improving funding equity, my primary focus today is on the constitutional foundation for this approach and the accountability of nonpublic schools.

These are the two issues that must be clearly understood as this committee considers this bill and other related bills.

Constitutional Argument for Funding Choice in Education

The opponents of funding for choice in education frequently invoke North Dakota's constitutional provisions to argue against funding for nonpublic schools. However, these arguments are legally outdated and no longer hold merit.

- **Full Context of Article VIII of the North Dakota Constitution:**
 - **Section 1:** Establishes the requirement for a system of public schools that are free from sectarian control, emphasizing the importance of public education as a foundation for democracy.
 - **Section 2:** Mandates a uniform system of free public schools, extending through higher education, but explicitly allows for tuition, fees, and service charges to assist in financing higher education.
 - **Section 3:** Requires that all schools provide instruction on civic virtues such as truthfulness, public spirit, and respect for labor.
 - **Section 4:** Grants the legislature broad authority beyond public schools, stating that it must take additional steps to prevent illiteracy, ensure uniformity in education, and promote industrial, scientific, and agricultural improvements.
 - **Section 5:** Limits funding raised specifically for public schools from being allocated to sectarian schools but does not apply to general state funding.
- **Section 4 and Its Legislative Authority Beyond Public Schools:**

- Sections 1, 2, and 3 focus exclusively on public education, specifically the establishment, maintenance, and governance of the public school system, ensuring free public education and directing state resources toward public schools.
 - However, Section 4 shifts the focus from public schools alone to broader educational responsibilities, instructing the legislature to take any necessary steps to improve literacy, standardize education, and support scientific, industrial, and agricultural progress.
 - This section does not limit legislative action to public schools alone, but rather affirms the Legislature's responsibility to improve education as a whole, including through nonpublic schools.
 - This section grants the legislature the authority to promote education broadly, including funding initiatives beyond public schools, such as parental choice programs, nonpublic school support, and specialized learning initiatives.
 - By authorizing the legislature to address educational needs beyond the strict confines of the public school system, Section 4 provides clear constitutional justification for policies like the Bill you have before you.
- **Article VIII, Section 5 and the Limits of Its Application:**
 - This section states that *"No money raised for the support of the public schools of the state shall be appropriated to or used for the support of any sectarian school."*
 - However, it is critical to recognize that this applies only to funds specifically raised for public schools, such as local property taxes and state-allocated funds ("school lands") earmarked for public education.
 - General state funds, such as the general fund, strategic investment and improvement funds, or legacy fund earnings, are not subject to this restriction and may be lawfully allocated to support parental choice initiatives.
- **Legal Precedents Supporting the Constitutionality of Parental Choice:**
 - The Blaine Amendment, a late 19th-century provision, was introduced as an effort to prohibit public funds from being used for religious education. Though an attempt at a federal constitutional amendment failed, many states, including North Dakota, incorporated similar provisions into their constitutions. These provisions were largely driven by religious discrimination rather than neutral funding policies. Over time, legal challenges have significantly weakened the enforceability of these amendments.
 - The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that excluding religious schools from generally available public benefits violates the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment.
 - *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue* (2020): The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a state cannot exclude religious schools from generally available public benefits simply because they are religious in nature. Montana's attempt to prohibit religious schools from receiving funds under a tax credit scholarship program was deemed unconstitutional under the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment.

- Carson v. Makin (2022): The Court expanded on *Espinoza*, ruling that if a state provides a public benefit program that includes private education options, it cannot prohibit funds from being used for religious schools solely based on their religious identity.
- Pierce v. Society of Sisters (1925): This landmark case affirmed that parents, not the state, have the fundamental right to direct the education of their children, reinforcing the validity of school choice initiatives.
- **North Dakota Attorney General's Opinion 2022-L-07** made it clear that the Blaine Amendment language in the North Dakota's constitution is unenforceable under federal law. The opinion affirmed that state policies must align with U.S. Supreme Court rulings, which have struck down state attempts to exclude religious schools from generally available public benefits. While the opinion addressed teacher support grants, its broader legal implication is that state restrictions based on religious affiliation cannot be upheld where they contradict federal constitutional protections.

Accountability of Nonpublic Schools

Another concern often raised regarding choice in education is whether nonpublic schools operate without sufficient oversight. This is simply not true.

- **North Dakota has some of the strictest nonpublic school regulations in the country:**
 - North Dakota is one of only two states in the nation where nonpublic schools must meet approval requirements identical to public schools.
 - It is the only state that requires all nonpublic school teachers to be state-certified, ensuring that students receive high-quality instruction.
 - **SOURCE:** See attached "*Regulation of Nonpublic Schools*" and "*How does North Dakota rank in its treatment of nonpublic schools?*"
- **Nonpublic schools must adhere to extensive state regulations, including:**
 - Approval by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction to operate any elementary or secondary nonpublic school. *N.D. Cent. Code §15.1-06-06*.
 - Mandatory teacher certification. *N.D. Cent. Code §15.1-18-07, -08, & -09*.
 - Same length of school year and days. *N.D. Cent. Code §15.1-06-04 (sections 3 and 6)*.
 - Meet state curriculum standards. *N.D. Cent. Code §§15.1-21-01 & -02, 15.1-21-02, §15.1-21-24*
 - Compliance with health and safety codes applicable to all educational institutions. *N.D. Cent. Code §§15.1-06-10, 23-07-16, 15.1-06-12, 15.1-18.2-04, 15.1-19-22.3*.
- **Nonpublic schools are directly accountable to parents.** Unlike public schools, which assign students based on geography, nonpublic schools must continuously earn parental trust and enrollment through academic quality, transparency, and student success.

Conclusion

While Senate Bill 2295 may require additional discussion regarding its implementation, it is fully constitutional and provides strong accountability measures for nonpublic schools.

- The constitutional concerns raised by opponents are legally unfounded, as state funds may be used for nonpublic education without violating Article VIII, Section 5.
- Nonpublic schools in North Dakota are already held to a higher level of accountability than most other states, ensuring that students receive a quality education.
- This bill respects the rights of parents to determine the best education for their children while ensuring fair and transparent funding.

I encourage the committee to support education choice while continuing to refine policy provisions to best serve all North Dakota students.

Thank you for your time.

Regulation of Nonpublic Schools

Eight States Require All Nonpublic Schools to be Approved by the State

Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts
Michigan
New Hampshire
North Dakota
Rhode Island
Washington

In Only Two of those States are the Approval Requirements for Nonpublic Schools Identical to the Requirements for Public Schools

Massachusetts
North Dakota

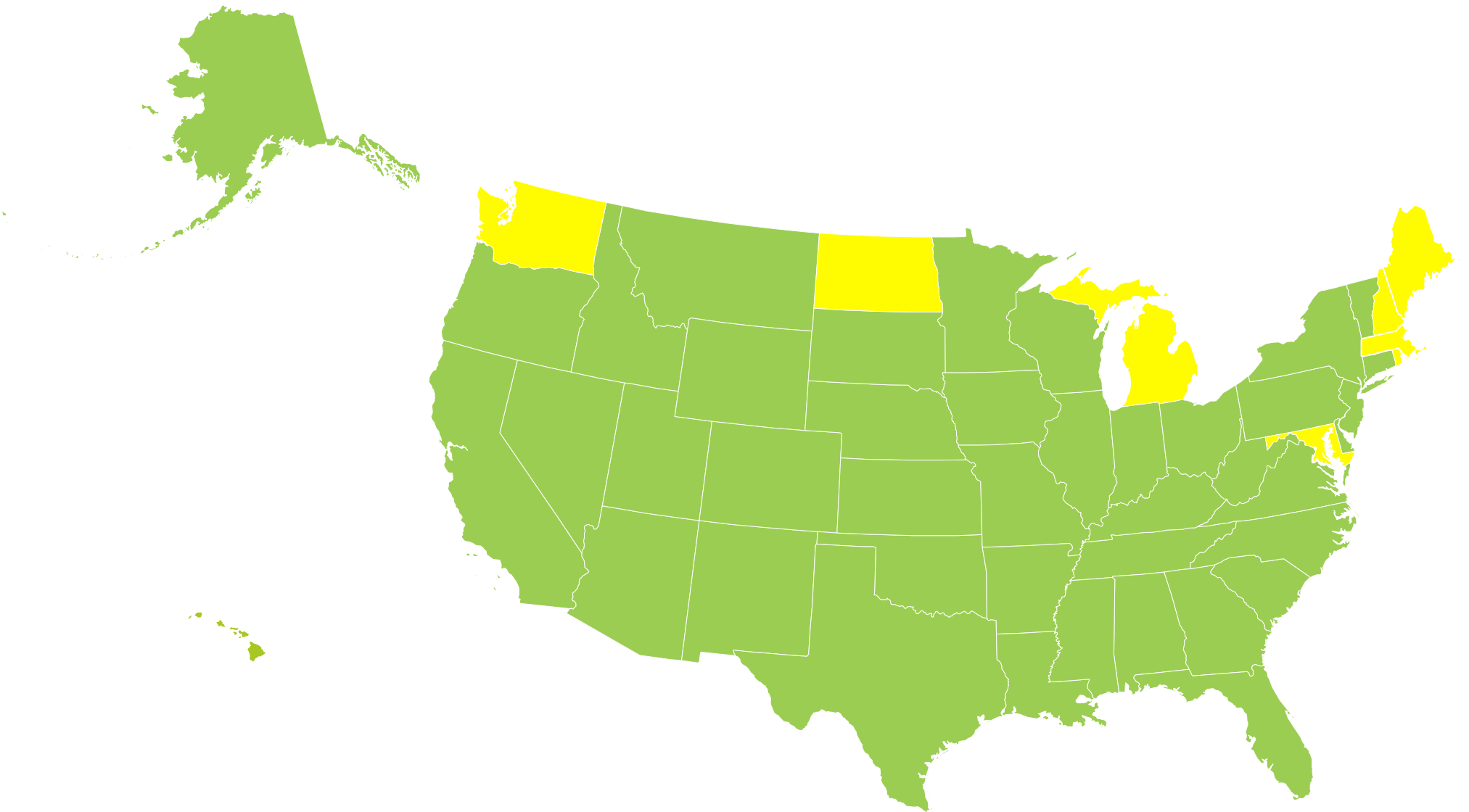
Only one of those Two States Requires Nonpublic School Teachers to be Licensed by the State

North Dakota

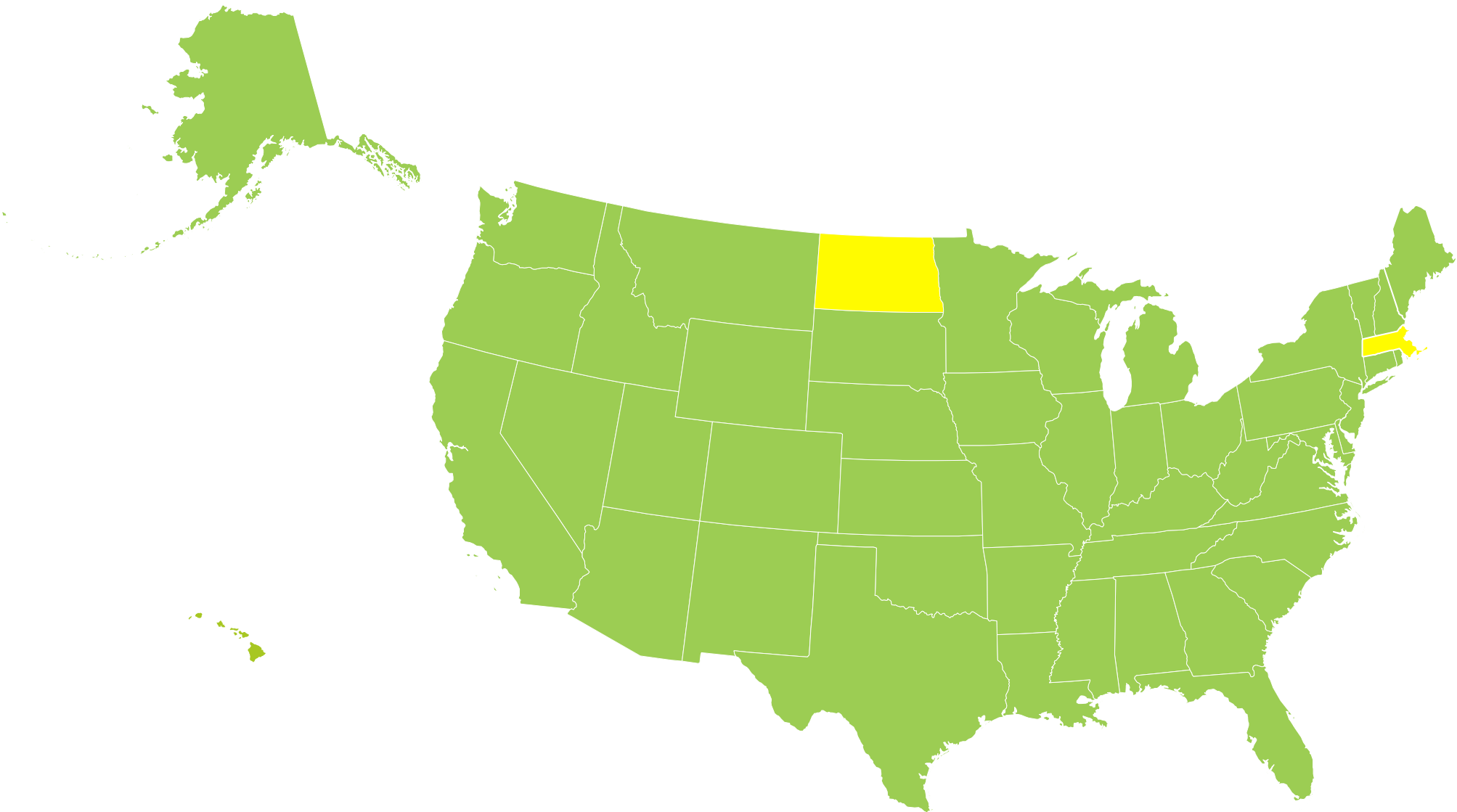
This leaves North Dakota as the only state in the nation that mandates both state approval for nonpublic schools identical to that for public schools and state licensed teachers in nonpublic schools.

SOURCES: STATE REGULATION OF PRIVATE AND HOME SCHOOLS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, 2025; SPECIFIC STATE LAWS.

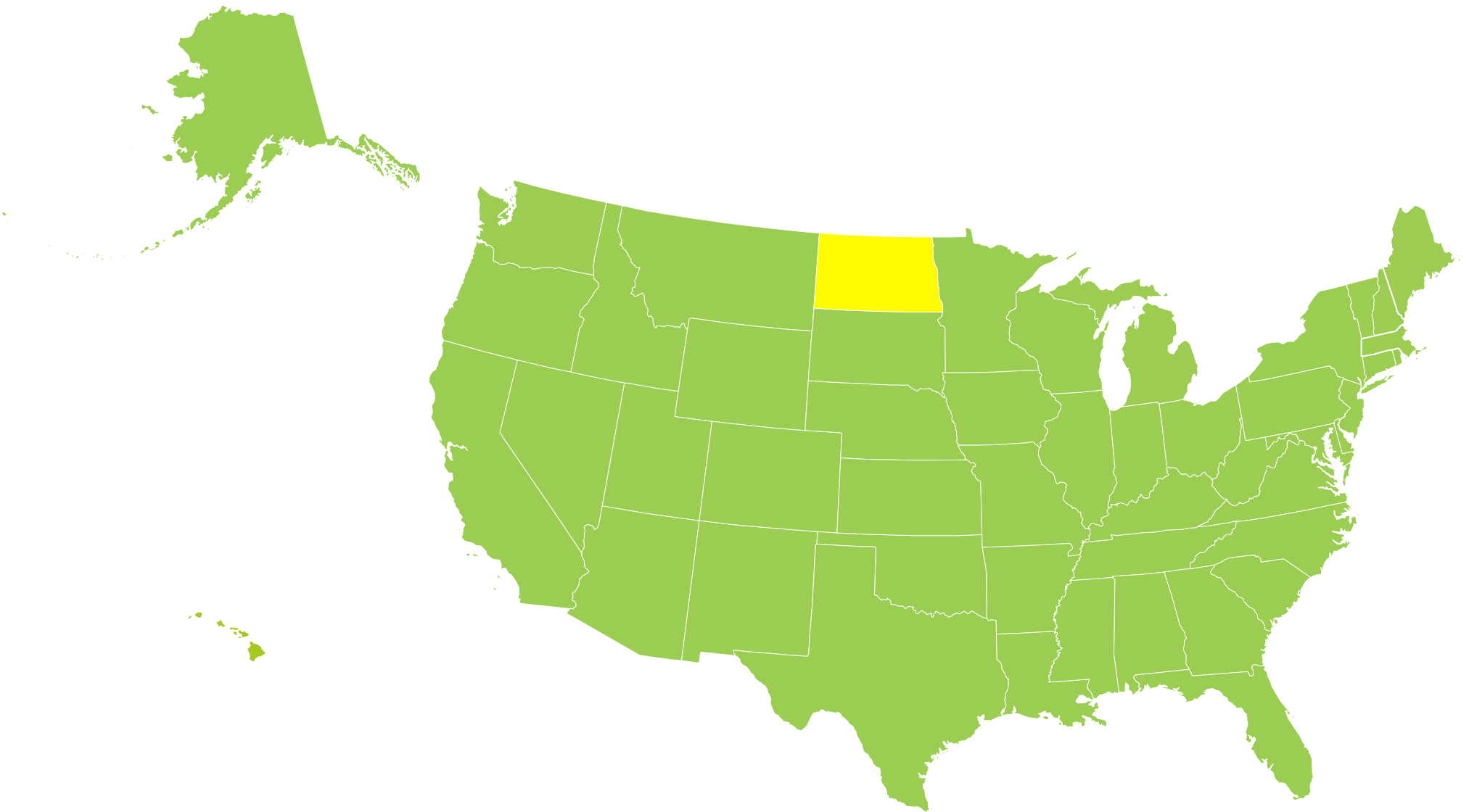
How does North Dakota rank in its treatment of nonpublic schools?



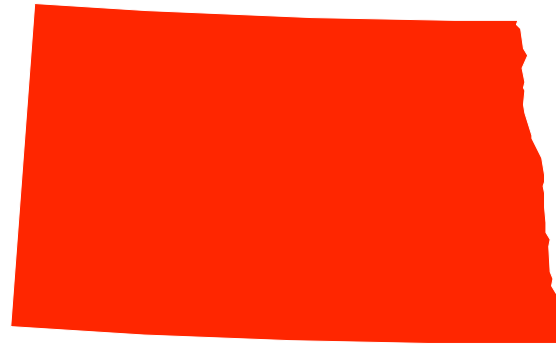
Only eight states require state approval of all nonpublic schools.



In only two of those states are the approval requirements identical to public schools.



Of those two states, only one requires classes to be taught by certified teachers.



This leaves North Dakota as the only state that mandates both state approval identical to public schools and state certified teachers.

Sources: State Regulation of Private and Home Schools, U.S. Department of Education, 2025; specific state laws.

To the ND Senate Education Committee,

Hello,

My name is Kristin Franzen. I live and pay taxes in District 36. My 4 children attended non-public schools in this district from 1995 – 2014. I also currently have grandchildren attending non-public schools in District 35 and I own a business in District 32 that has been paying local taxes in that District since 2001.

I support SB 2295, and I am in support of all school choice bills that empower parents to choose the right educational option for their children.

Parents partner with schools to provide an education for their children and parents should be primary in their education. As a parent who therefore wants to be involved with my children's and my grandchildren's education and to have a choice, and a voice in the academic, cultural, social and spiritual environment that surrounds them, I support SB 2295.

Most non-public schools in ND were established to empower parents to partner in their children's education through shared standards and beliefs. They were not established for the well-off or for the elite. While we were paying both the taxes for our public school system and the tuition for our children to attend the school of our choice, our financial situation was such that we qualified for reduced hot lunches. We and many others made many sacrifices to send our children to the school of our choice, because of our strongly held belief that it was the right educational environment for our children.

The financial burden of non-public education has eliminated the "choice" for many families in ND. For the sake of our children and grandchildren, it's time to recognize our freedom of choice in education through appropriation of funds for all students in this state.

I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2295.

Thank you for your service to the State of North Dakota and for your time on this important bill.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Kristin Franzen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'K' and 'F'.

Testimony of Jeannie Nasers

Before the North Dakota Senate Education Committee on SB 2295

SUPPORT

February 3, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Beard, and members of the Senate Education Committee for providing the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 2295. My name is Jeannie Nasers. I live in District 34, and I am product of Catholic school education and a parent who has chosen to enroll my four children in Christ the King Catholic Montessori School.

I strongly support Senate Bill 2295, as well as any legislation that upholds parents' right to direct their child's education. Every child deserves an education that meets their unique needs, nurtures their dignity, and reinforces the values instilled at home. My family currently makes significant financial sacrifices so that our children can attend a private school, and while we believe the investment is worth it, the assistance provided by SB 2295 would greatly ease this burden. More importantly, it would allow more families the opportunity to choose the best educational environment for their children, regardless of financial means.

As both a former student and now a parent, I have personally experienced the profound impact of a faith-based education. Growing up, my Catholic school provided more than just academic instruction—it offered a community that fostered character, independence, and a deep sense of self-worth. As a child with a learning disability, I was not just another student; I was surrounded by teachers who saw my potential and classmates who shared a commitment to virtue and personal growth. Now, I want my children to experience that same kind of nurturing environment—one where faith and education are seamlessly integrated, where they hear at school the same truths we teach at home: that they are valuable, that they matter, and that they have a responsibility to serve others.

SB 2295 would ensure that families **who are already contributing tax dollars to education** have the ability to direct a portion of those funds toward the schooling option that best serves their children. This bill would relieve a financial strain on many families while empowering them to make the best educational choices for their children. I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2295 so that all parents, regardless of income, have the ability to choose the educational path that best fits their child's needs. Thank you for your service to North Dakota and for your time on this important matter.

Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and for your time in considering Senate Bill 2295.

Sincerely,

Jeannie Nasers

February 3, 2025

My name is Derrick Nagel and I am submitting my testimony in support of educational choice.

I am currently the Head of School at Christ the King Montessori School in Mandan, ND, where I have been for the past 8 years. I am also a parent to 5 children, 3 of whom currently attend Christ the King, a non-public school. Therefore, I am submitting my testimony from the perspective of a Bismarck, ND resident and parent, as well as an administrator in education.

As a parent, it is my primary goal to help my children thrive and ultimately be successful in life. There is no secret that having the ability to choose an educational model that best fits a child's or family's unique needs is one of the ways parents accomplish that very important mission. A diverse education selection in a community offers the best chances for meeting a communities diverse needs as well. Giving more choice to families in North Dakota is good for North Dakota.

As principal of a school with an education model very different from most in the region, I've encountered countless parents looking to transfer their children to Christ the King due to their children not "fitting in" in one way or another. I hear from parents worried about their students with low academic ability looking for a change in mode of education, something that might engage their senses through hands-on work or increase engagement through independence and small group lessons. Adversely, I often hear from parents looking to challenge their children academically, that their students are bored and looking to be filled with content at their own, quick pace. I hear from parents whose children are being picked on and looking for a closer social community that their child can plug into and learn to develop their emotional maturity. Finally, there are many families who choose CTK due to the lack of emphasis on technology.

The educational philosophy of Maria Montessori promotes the freedom of the child. Children are encouraged to do as much as possible for themselves and for their community as appropriate to their stage of development, promoting the child's confidence and self-esteem. Children are invited to learn through encounters with their environment that address all their senses. Embodied learning has many advantages from an academic perspective, but most importantly, living this way promotes mental health and a feeling of being at home in the world. Montessori education also values community. "How ought we to live together?" is just as important a question in the Montessori setting as "Can you name all the continents?" Finally, Children learn to experience their own inner life in Montessori. They learn to give their sustained attention, are given opportunities to be quiet, alone with their thoughts, leading to emotional maturity. It is widely understood that early exposure to technology, whether for entertainment or educational purposes, affects the neurological development of children and renders them less able to name their emotions, give voice to the scripts that run through their heads, or regulate their emotions. While technology has its place within the Montessori environment, it is never the primary mode of learning or interacting with reality. This is very different from many of the mainstream educational models available to ND families. At Christ the King, not only do we take pride in the academic formation we are giving our students who will one day be leaders in our community, we also especially see the extreme importance of educating the whole person.

Though we are a Catholic School, almost half of our enrollment is non-Catholic. Additionally, while located in Mandan, half of our enrollment comes from Bismarck. Others are from Lincoln, Center, St. Anthony, and beyond, with some families traveling over 45 minutes one way to get to our school. To have the option to send my own children to a Montessori School is invaluable to me, and this bill would help many more families

like my own, choose an educational model that might better fit their children. CTK is home to many families that send some or even most of their children to another school, but have one child who they describe as “not fitting the mold”.

Though we do our best at Christ the King to offer additional services to children in need, there are indeed times that we do not have the funds to offer the best solution. Many times, parents choose to send their children anyway, as they feel the Montessori Method has so much to offer and decide to choose to forego the potential extra help they might receive elsewhere. It is commonplace to hear from other Montessori Schools around the United States that their school has become home to a high number of neurodivergent children. Parents do not choose if, or how, their children were created to think, behave, etc. regardless of their income and ability to pay tuition. Having the ability to choose the best fit school, public or nonpublic is something North Dakota needs to support.

I have many friends who are administrators and teachers in the public schools, or who went through the ND public school system themselves and I continue to think we have good public schools. However, one size does not fit all and so though our public school partners might be a safe haven for many students, there are many families who have found a home in nonpublic schools. With educational support in ND, there would be so many more families able to best support their own children by giving more options than just the public school down the block. Giving students what they need will only better our state in the long run, as our children now will be our leaders tomorrow. Are you able to say you helped ALL children reach their full potential? Giving our diverse learners diverse educational options is a guaranteed way to bring about success in our community and state from ALL of our residents.

The number one concern I hear from prospective parents, and a top most frequently visited page on our website is regarding financial assistance. I know there are many families interested in Montessori education that do not have the freedom to pursue it based on their financial state in life. Many other states have already or are progressively seeking change to assist families and students. It is my right as the parent of my children, and as a ND citizen to educate my children how I see best fit.

Please support school choice in ND. Thank you.

Mr. Derrick Nagel
Head of School
Christ the King Catholic Montessori School
Mandan, ND

Good morning, Chairman Beard, Vice Chair Lemm, and Committee Members.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of SB 2295. My name is Kimberly Efta, and I am a resident of District 42 in Grand Forks (zip code 58203). I am a full-time real estate agent, and my husband, Deven, is a farmer. We are grateful to call North Dakota home and are raising our three children, ages 9, 8, and 6, here.

Both my husband and I were educated in public schools and had wonderful experiences. In fact, my family has long supported school choice. When I was in second grade at Unity Elementary in Petersburg, my parents fought for open enrollment in North Dakota. To ensure my older sisters could participate in extracurricular activities, they made the difficult decision to move our family more than 20 miles to Larimore. They traveled to Bismarck 19 times during the 1993 legislative session to advocate for open enrollment, and their concern for our education left a lasting impression on me.

Today, we are still debating whether parents should have the right to choose the best school for their children. As a parent, I find it deeply concerning that public school district boundaries dictate where my child must attend school based solely on our home address. The recent Grand Forks Public Schools boundary map changes will force some children to switch schools, regardless of what may be best for their individual needs or proximity to their current school.

As a real estate agent, I have already received calls from homeowners who feel they have no choice but to sell their homes and move—simply to keep their children in their current school. This is a costly and unnecessary burden that could be avoided with expanded school choice policies.

There are also clear disparities between schools in Grand Forks. The highest-performing elementary schools are concentrated in wealthier neighborhoods, particularly in the Kelly Elementary, Discovery Elementary and Century Elementary boundaries, where the average sold home price in the past year was \$494,272. Meanwhile, in the N Grand Forks neighborhoods in the 58203 zip code, the average sold home price is \$226,693, and our assigned elementary school ranks 8th out of 11 in the district. Families should not have to purchase a half-million-dollar home just to ensure their children receive a top-quality education.

This creates an inequitable system where the wealthiest families have access to the best schools while lower-income families are left with fewer options. No parent should be forced to uproot their family due to a school district's redrawn boundaries.

I urge you to support SB 2295 and expand school choice in North Dakota, ensuring that all families—**regardless of income or address**—have access to the best possible education for their children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kimberly Efta, District 42 Resident, Grand Forks, ND

February 3, 2025

Chairman Senator Beard, Vice chairman Senator Lemm, Senators Axtman, Boschee, Gerhardt, and Wobbema, my name is Darrel Lund and I am a retired teacher of 42 years in the West Fargo Public School system. I am opposed to SB 2295 relating to state education funding for all students in the state.

I urge a DO NOT PASS on SB 2295. No matter what these bills are called—education savings accounts, scholarship programs, tax credits, vouchers or otherwise they divert public dollars to private schools.

Public funds should NOT be going to private schools. Taxpayer money is for public entities. As a taxpayer, I pay for public parks and our local park district in West Fargo. Parents can decide that they want their children to play golf at a private country club rather than a public golf course. Would anyone expect that public money would be used to subsidize that choice? Of course not. The same goes for schools. Parents can choose to send their child to private school or have them educated at home. Private schools don't have to follow the same rules as public schools, they can choose to reject students based on disability or socioeconomic status. Public dollars should be used to strengthen our public schools (our teachers, support staff, mental health resources, and students), which are for everybody, not to subsidize private institutions that serve the chosen few. We need the legislature to invest in public education, not dismantle it.

- Private schools are funded by student tuition, private donations, tax credits, and other means, while public schools are funded solely through public funding.
- Rural communities receive no benefit, and their schools will be at greater risk for consolidation.
- Private schools do not have the capacity to educate students with varying educational needs.
- Nothing in this bill prevents a private school from raising tuition after receiving the reimbursement.
- This bill does not expand on parent choice. It merely benefits parents who have already made the choice to send their child to private school.
- SB 2295 requires no accountability for these expenditures on the part of the private schools who will receive them.

When considering bills that use public dollars to support nonpublic schools, answer this question; **How does this bill strengthen our public schools?**

I urge you to vote against SB 2295 and continue to strengthen public-schools by covering 100% of the cost to educate every North Dakota student in K-12 public schools.

Thank you,

Darrel Lund

Senate Bill 2295
Senate Education Committee - Sen. Todd Beard, Chair
February 4, 2025
Testimony in Opposition to SB 2295

Chairman Beard and Members of the Senate Education Committee, I am Vicki Voldal Rosenau, a parent and lifelong resident of Valley City, ND. Thank you for this opportunity to offer my testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 2295.

Yesterday Supt. Kirsten Baesler addressed this committee regarding a recent Presidential Executive Order on enhancing educational freedom and opportunities. In North Dakota, the only logical and responsible way for education planners to expand such opportunities is to build on the considerable (and commendable) targeted investments that the State has very recently made in educational innovations WITHIN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS SYSTEM.

Because HB 2295 would actually undermine that system, it should be rejected. In support of this position, I would like to offer four points:

- 1) A strong majority (68%) of the ND voters whom you represent do NOT want any diversion of public money to pay for private "school" tuition. Yet, 65% of voters do support increased spending for Public schools.
<https://www.kvrr.com/2025/01/06/north-dakota-united-survey-show-residents-oppose-private-tuition-vouchers/>
<https://northdakotamonitor.com/2025/01/06/poll-north-dakotans-support-free-school-lunches-sour-on-public-dollars-for-private-tuition/>
<https://ndunited.org/news-media-center/press-releases/new-polling-highlights-north-dakotans-priorities-expectations>
- 2) There is strong evidence that academic achievement is actually LOWERED for students who are removed from Public schools and instead placed in private facilities. At best, research is inadequate and conflicted. As James Vukelic of Bismarck has publicly stated, **"Apparently, when it comes to homeschooled students we really don't know, to quote former President George W. Bush, 'Is our children learning?'"** https://bismarcktribune.com/opinion/letters/letter-serious-research-needed-before-spending-public-money-on-school-vouchers/article_4d1376c8-da71-11ef-9b48-b399fe74e40a.html
- 3) Nobody has a "right" to demand tax dollars for their family's use of private schooling facilities. That's because, when the public as a whole has **covenanted** to provide a certain service for everyone (**by collectively paying taxes for that purpose**), then no person has the right to demand that we all help to pay for a private "alternative facility" just because that individual prefers it. Furthermore, if an individual deems any public service to be of unacceptably-low quality, it is his **civic duty** to roll-up-his-sleeves and help the community as a whole to upgrade that service in accordance with the will of the majority. That's local democracy in action, and that's what our wonderful nation was founded upon.
- 4) The claim that ND can appropriate TAX dollars for private schooling without defunding cash-strapped Public schools is flatly dishonest. Allocating our finite tax dollars IS a "zero-sum game," because taxpayers cannot and will not go along with paying ever-increasing taxes. Future allocations for Public schools will inevitably be lessened if ANY tax dollars are diverted to private facilities.

Particularly in light of the challenges described by Supt. Baesler, we need to work together to strengthen our currently-underfunded public schools, instead of siphoning off public money for non-public entities. As you heard in compelling testimony yesterday morning, public schools across the state are already creating wonderfully-innovative educational opportunities for all our students. Let's redouble those already-launched initiatives in order to meet the demand for increased educational opportunities – all within our traditional public school system.



Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill No. 2295

Chairperson and Members of the Committee - Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am here representing NDCEL and your school administrators as I strongly oppose Senate Bill No. 2295 due to its constitutional, financial, and policy implications. While supporting educational opportunities for all students is commendable, this bill undermines public education and imposes an unsustainable financial burden on taxpayers.

Unconstitutional Use of Public Funds

This bill violates the North Dakota Constitution, which explicitly prohibits public funds from being appropriated to private or sectarian schools (Article VIII, Sections 1 and 5). The state has a constitutional obligation to provide a system of free public education, and redirecting state aid to private institutions undermines that responsibility. Public funds should remain dedicated to strengthening our public school system, which serves all students regardless of background or financial status.

Diverting Public Funds Without Accountability

Public schools are held to rigorous accountability measures, including open records laws, standardized testing, and non-discrimination policies—requirements that private schools do not have to meet. This bill allows public dollars to flow into private institutions without the same level of transparency or oversight, leaving taxpayers without assurances that funds are being used equitably and effectively.

Equity Concerns and Impact on Rural Schools

This bill disproportionately benefits families who can already afford private school tuition while offering little to students in rural areas, where private school options are scarce or nonexistent. Meanwhile, public schools across the state—particularly in small and rural communities—stand to lose essential funding, deepening educational disparities and limiting opportunities for students who rely on public education.

\$2.1 Billion Cost Burden

The bill's staggering \$2.1 billion price tag poses a severe risk to the state's budget. Without a clear funding source, taxpayers would likely face increased financial burdens, either through higher property taxes or cuts to other essential state services. At a time when public schools need



1 additional support for teacher salaries, classroom resources, and infrastructure improvements,
2 redirecting state funds to private education is fiscally irresponsible and shortsighted.

3 **Conclusion**

4 Public education is a cornerstone of our society, and state resources should be used to strengthen,
5 not undermine, it. Senate Bill No. 2295 violates the constitution, reduces transparency,
6 exacerbates inequities, and places an unsustainable financial burden on North Dakota taxpayers.
7 For these reasons, I strongly urge the committee to reject this bill.

8 Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions the committee may have.



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SB 2295
Testimony of Amy De Kok
Senate Education
February 4, 2025

Chairman Beard and members of the Senate Education, my name is Amy De Kok. I am the executive director of the North Dakota School Boards Association. NDSBA represents all 168 North Dakota public school districts and their governing boards. I am writing to express our opposition to SB 2295, particularly Section 2, which directly allocates state public education funds to private and home-school students. While NDSBA supports the right of parents to choose the best educational path for their children, we firmly believe that public tax dollars should be used exclusively to support and strengthen public education, which serves all students and is accountable to taxpayers.

Public Funds Should Support Public Schools

Public schools are the foundation of our democracy, providing equitable access to quality education for all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background. Directing state aid to private schools and home-educated students diverts critical resources from public schools, which already face funding challenges. This shift threatens the ability of public schools to maintain high-quality instruction, reduce class sizes, and support necessary programs such as special education and mental health services.

Lack of Accountability and Oversight

Unlike public schools, private schools and home-education programs are not subject to the same rigorous state oversight, academic standards, and accountability measures. Public dollars should be used in a manner that ensures transparency and measurable educational outcomes, and SB 2295 does nothing to ensure accountability for the billions of dollars of taxpayer funds that would shift to private and homeschool education. Without these safeguards, taxpayer money could be funneled into institutions that do not meet the same requirements for curriculum, teacher certification, or non-discrimination policies that public schools must adhere to.

Potential for Increased Inequity

Section 2 of SB 2295 disproportionately benefits families who already have the financial means to enroll their children in private schools or provide home education. This policy could widen the gap

between affluent and lower-income students by subsidizing private education at the expense of public school funding. Public education funding should prioritize serving all students equitably rather than subsidizing private choices that do not serve the broader community.

Significant Increase in Cost to the State

The financial implications of SB 2295 are substantial. According to the fiscal note, the most recent average cost per pupil is \$14,345. Under the proposed funding formula, this amount is multiplied by the projected weighted average daily membership for students enrolled in public schools, nonpublic schools, and those receiving home education. This results in a total projected cost of \$4,420,706,009. In contrast, the cost to continue the current funding formula is \$2,268,704,483, meaning SB 2295 would increase costs by \$2,152,001,526. This significant rise in state expenditures would place a substantial financial burden on taxpayers, diverting funds from other critical public services and priorities.

The Role of Public Education in Economic Development

Public schools serve as economic drivers in our communities by preparing students for the workforce and fostering civic engagement. Weakening public education through funding reductions could have long-term negative consequences for our state's economic health. Investing in public schools benefits all North Dakotans, ensuring that we cultivate a well-educated and prepared workforce.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to oppose SB 2295 and preserve public education funding for its intended purpose—supporting and improving the public school system. Public tax dollars should not be redirected to fund private and home-school education, which lack the same accountability and mission as public schools. I respectfully request that the committee reject this bill and instead focus on strengthening our public education system.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



*Great Public Schools**Great Public Service*

**Testimony Before the Senate Education Committee
SB 2295
February 4, 2025**

Chair Beard and members of the Committee, for the record, my name is Nick Archuleta, and I am the president of North Dakota United. On behalf of our 11,000 members, I rise today in opposition to SB 2295 and urge a ***do not pass*** recommendation for this proposed legislation. North Dakota United has a long history of opposing proposals that divert monies raised for public education and other public purposes to non-public educational entities. Unfortunately, SB2295 is yet another such proposal, albeit a bit more creative than most. While we appreciate the effort of the sponsor to try to make it so that some public schools may benefit from the bill, it remains a bill that we cannot support.

I want to make it very clear that North Dakota United DOES NOT oppose school choice. We believe that parents already enjoy the choice of sending their children to private schools, parochial schools, or to homeschool their children. Our issue is when public dollars are used to fund that choice.

North Dakota's public schools have the responsibility of educating every student that walks, runs, rolls, or is carried through our schoolhouse doors. This is a responsibility unique to public schools and we embrace it wholeheartedly because we agree with the principles enshrined in the North Dakota State Constitution.

Private schools and parochial schools do not share that responsibility. They do not have an obligation to educate every student. They alone determine who will and will not attend their schools or avail themselves of their services. They can discriminate against any student for any reason. An example of this is that most private schools do not accept students based on ability because the financial costs of educating students with cognitive impairments are quite high. As a result, and with immense pride, public schools almost exclusively educate these students. And we are honored to do so.

Mr. Chairman, SB 2295 threatens the integrity of North Dakota's public education system by redirecting funds that should be used to support our public schools, and other public prerogatives. Public education is a cornerstone of our democracy, and it is our state's responsibility to ensure that all children have access to quality education regardless of their socioeconomic status or zip code. By diverting resources away from public schools, SB 2295 undermines the ability of school districts to provide adequate staffing, up-to-date learning materials, and essential student services.

Furthermore, this bill would exacerbate existing inequities between school districts. Most rural and mid-sized schools have no access to private schools so all the funding from this bill will just go to large districts that have private schools.

Members of the Committee, public schools are accountable to taxpayers, with locally elected school boards providing direct oversight of the funds allocated to the school district. SB 2295, however, introduces a system in which public funds may be used without the same level of public scrutiny, reducing transparency, and limiting taxpayers' ability to ensure their money is spent responsibly. Without clear oversight mechanisms, the public cannot be confident that their tax dollars are being spent for the purposes intended.

Now more than ever, our focus should be on strengthening North Dakota's public schools, not weakening them. Rather than passing legislation that undermines public schools, we should be striving to ensure that every child in North Dakota receives a high-quality education in a well-funded and well-supported public school system as the framers of our North Dakota State Constitution intended.

With that, I'll conclude my testimony and urge a ***do not pass*** recommendation for SB 2295.

I was a student in public schools in a community where many of my friends were in the local Catholic elementary school connected to our church. My family could send my brother and me to the local public school. It was hard as a kid to understand why my friends from church and activities went to a different school than me, but as an adult, I now understand. My brother had needs that could not be met at a private school. I struggled with reading, and our local public school had reading specials to enhance the instruction I received in the classroom. Now, as a public-school teacher and mother believe wholeheartedly that their choice was the best for our family. Those services we received wouldn't have been as possible if public funds had gone to the private school in our area. As a kindergarten teacher, I see students start in private schools and then come into public school classrooms after their needs have not been met in those locations. As a mother, I have a child who is on an IEP for dyslexia and receives not only special education services but also reading interventions through a reading specialist. Private schools do not have to accept everyone. Private schools do not have to meet the needs of every student like public schools. Private schools do not have the same regulations and expectations as public schools. Therefore, public dollars should not be used for private education. Every parent should have a choice on what is best for their child. However, public dollars are meant for the free inappropriate education that public schools provide. I encourage you to oppose any bill that gives public dollars to private schools.

Thank you for your time

Monica Klein

When voting on this bill, please keep in mind the profound impact private schools have not only on our children but on the communities in which they serve and they are doing this with very little money from the government.

I can see how the public schools would be threatened by this bill but my question is, why are they receiving funds for children they are not educating? In our community of Williams County, they are receiving these funds and still don't have all the resources they need to educate our children, children are denied access to special education services, then struggle to find teachers (I understand this is a large scale problem) and cannot find substitute teachers or paras to meet the demands of the system they are running. They have more money than they are technically supposed to receive- imagine if they had to educate the hundreds of students who choose to go to the private schools in Williams county- it wouldn't work! Continuing to give this money to the school district won't fix the problem because it isn't as simple as a lack of money, it's a mismanagement. So why continue to throw money at them for children they aren't serving?

Our private school recently lost their funding for speech services from the government and somehow, they made it work for our children to continue to receive the service- because they know it would be detrimental to their education to lose this service. Money given to the schools who are educating the students who choose not to go to public schools will have a greater impact on their education because these schools acknowledge the needs of the students and make sacrifices to meet those needs.

I urge you to think outside of the box and consider this change in how our state money is distributed among the schools. We aren't asking for money that doesn't belong in our schools, I understand choosing private school is an option and that choice comes with private school tuition, but the tax dollars allotted for these children could certainly follow them, after all, it's about the kids right?

Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 2295

Chairman Beard and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mike McNeff, and I serve as Superintendent for Rugby Public School District. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 2295, which proposes redirecting public education dollars to private schools and home education with no meaningful oversight or accountability.

As a fiscally responsible, conservative state, North Dakota must ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent in a transparent, equitable, and accountable manner. SB 2295 fails to meet that standard. The bill mandates that school districts forward 75% of the per-student cost to private schools and 50% to homeschool families while still counting these students in public school enrollment for state funding calculations. This diverts public dollars away from the schools that serve the vast majority of North Dakota's students and instead subsidizes private education without requiring accountability, financial transparency, or adherence to state education standards.

This bill also undermines public education funding stability. Public schools must serve all students, regardless of background, ability, or financial status. They must adhere to state curriculum requirements, standardized assessments, and financial reporting mandates. Meanwhile, SB 2295 allows public money to flow into private institutions and homeschools with no assurance that students are receiving an adequate education. There are no required performance measures, no mandated reporting on student outcomes, and no protection against fraud or misuse of funds.

Additionally, this bill disproportionately benefits urban areas at the expense of rural communities. The majority of North Dakota's 170 school districts are in rural areas where private school alternatives do not exist. By allocating funding to private schools, this bill creates an incentive for urban families to benefit while leaving rural students with no comparable options. We should not enact policies that favor urban areas while weakening rural public schools. If the goal is fairness, then any state aid program should provide equal funding to all 127,500 students in North Dakota, regardless of whether they attend public, private, or home school. SB 2295, however, funnels money to a select group of students while reducing resources for public education.

Furthermore, SB 2295 raises serious constitutional concerns. North Dakota's Article VIII, Section 5, and Article X, Section 18 explicitly prohibit the use of public funds for sectarian schools. This bill attempts to bypass those protections by allocating public dollars directly to private schools, many of which are religious institutions. This creates a clear legal risk for the state and could invite costly legal challenges.

Lastly, this bill weakens financial transparency and accountability. Public school budgets and expenditures are subject to strict audits, reporting requirements, and taxpayer oversight. Under SB 2295, there is no clear financial accountability for how private schools and homeschool

families spend public money. The bill does not specify auditing procedures or how to ensure funds are used appropriately. Without clear financial safeguards, taxpayer dollars could be misused without recourse.

If North Dakota is going to invest in education, those funds must be distributed fairly and with full accountability. SB 2295 fails to meet that standard. Instead of diverting public school funds to private education without oversight, we should be working to strengthen public schools and ensure that every student in North Dakota has access to a quality education.

I urge you to oppose SB 2295 and any legislation that redirects public school funding to private education without accountability, transparency, or fairness.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

Testimony in Opposition to SB2295

Chairman Beard and Members of the Committee,

My name is Leslie Bieber and I am the Superintendent of Alexander Public School. I am in opposition to Senate Bill 2295, which proposes the expansion of Education Savings Accounts (ESA) to direct public funds toward private schools and home education without requiring the same level of transparency, accountability, or adherence to state education standards as public schools.

Impact on Public Schools and Rural Districts

Public education serves as the foundation of our democracy, ensuring every child has access to a free and fair education. By diverting public funds away from public schools, we risk weakening the very institutions that serve the majority of North Dakota's students, especially in small, rural communities where public schools are often the only viable option.

Redirecting ESA Funds for Universal School Meals

If the Legislature is committed to ensuring all students benefit from state funding, a more effective and equitable use of these funds would be to guarantee free breakfast and lunch for every student in North Dakota. No matter where a child receives their education—public, private, or home school—all children need access to nutritious meals to thrive.

Providing universal school meals would:

- Ensure no child in North Dakota goes hungry during the school day.
- Support families by alleviating the financial burden of meal costs.
- Improve student focus, behavior, and academic outcomes.

Using ESA funds to cover the cost of school meals would benefit every student by still supporting their education choice.

Senate Bill 2295 undermines the principles of public education by diverting taxpayer dollars to schools that are not subject to the same public accountability. Rather than creating an inequitable funding structure that benefits a select few, I urge the Legislature to redirect these funds toward a universal meal program that serves **every** child in North Dakota, ensuring that no student goes hungry, regardless of where they receive their education.

I respectfully ask this committee to oppose SB 2295.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



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1 Testimony in Opposition to SB 2295

2 Chairman Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee

3 My name is Michael Heilman, I am the Executive Director of North Dakota Small Organized Schools. The
4 140+ schools that are members of NDSOS stand in opposition to SB 2295, which seeks to provide state
5 funding to home education and private schools. While the bill is framed as an opportunity for school
6 choice, it does little to enhance choice and simply funds current home education and private schools.

7 The major concerns with SB 2295 is the huge fiscal note of over \$2 billion, the lack of private school
8 options in rural areas of North Dakota, and funding home education at a level that seems extreme. SB
9 2295 directs taxpayer dollars primarily to the urban private school families who have already made the
10 choice to attend private schools, while leaving rural students with no comparable choices. Four metro
11 areas representing six communities, Bismarck/Mandan, Fargo/West Fargo, Minot and Dickinson make
12 up the vast majority of private school enrollment. This creates a disparity that unfairly favors one
13 segment of the population over another. There are currently fewer than twenty communities in North
14 Dakota with a private school option and less than half of those offer a high school option.

15 Additionally, private schools receiving state funds must be subject to the same level of oversight and
16 regulation as public schools. If the state is going to fund private education and home education, NDSOS
17 strongly believes that the education providers must comply with all regulations and rules that public
18 schools are required to follow, including accepting of all students, open records laws, open board
19 meetings, participation in TFFR and all other state laws, rules and regulations that apply to public
20 schools. Public funds should only be allocated to educational institutions that are required to meet the
21 rigorous accountability and transparency measures that are applied to public schools.

22 SB 2295 does little to serve the students in rural areas. It simply directs funding to existing private
23 schools and home schools without the same regulations of public schools and diverts critical funding
24 away from public schools. I respectfully urge you to oppose SB 2295 and prioritize policies that
25 strengthen our public schools for the benefit of all North Dakota students.

26 Mr. Michael Heilman – Executive Director
27 North Dakota Small Organized Schools
28 mheilmanndsos@gmail.com
29 701.527.4621

Board of Directors

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The mission of NDSOS is to provide leadership for the small/rural schools in North Dakota and to support legislation favorable to their philosophy while opposing legislation that is harmful.

Hello, thank you for having us here today. My name is Paxtyn Steckler, I'm a stay at home mom and full time Realtor here in Bismarck/Mandan. My husband and I reside in Lincoln and we have three little boys. Two of our children attend Saint Joseph's Catholic Montessori School in Mandan. You're probably sitting in your seats right now thinking "why on earth are they driving from Lincoln to the middle of Mandan every single day, that's a trek." Well, you'd be right, it is a trek. I spend about one and half to two hours in my vehicle dropping off and picking up our children each day, depending on weather. We don't do that for fun or because we really enjoy racking up the mileage on my vehicle.

We do it because Saint Joes is the absolute best place our children could possibly be right now for their needs. School to us is not just about sitting in a classroom learning from a textbook. Our children are in that building, surrounded by their peers, and being cared for by their teachers from 8:30 in the morning until 3:20 in the afternoon. That's 7 hours. They spend more time at school than they do awake with us at home Monday through Friday. We are extremely aware that the school we choose to send our kids to plays a massive role in raising our boys. It's not JUST education they are receiving. They are being formed mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Being able to send our children to an institution that aligns with our values and our morals is essential to us. But it is not easy and it has brought up difficult conversation in our household every year when we get that re-enrollment email. Tuition is not cheap. School lunch is not cheap. Uniforms are not cheap. Gas is not cheap. Frequent oil changes and new tires are not cheap. We are prioritizing the development and care of our boys whole person above many many other things, and it's not cheap. Having the financial support for educational choice would benefit our family substantially. We simply do not have proportionate support for our children and their educational needs compared to those who attend public schools. If we did, I believe our community would be better balanced. It would ease the stress of being able to make those payments so that we can always prioritize our children needs and well-being over our financial situation. We'd have the ability to help above what is asked in the classroom and we would have more to contribute to support our local businesses.

Being able to send our children to a school that supports them in every aspect of their life is a gift that I don't take for granted. But receiving proportionate support to do so is a right I believe we should have as parents. It's incredibly unfortunate that families who attend non public schools contribute just as much to society and our local community yet are inadequately supported. This isn't "just school". This is our next generation, and having educational choice to allow us to choose how the most important and valuable little people in our lives are formed each day, is crucial. Thank you.



North Dakota Senate

STATE CAPITOL
600 EAST BOULEVARD
BISMARCK, ND 58505-0360



Senator Chuck Walen

District 4
422 Eagle Drive
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COMMITTEES:

Finance and Taxation
State and Local Government

2/4/2025

Senate Education

SB 2295

Chairman Beard and Committee members:

For the record my name is Chuck Walen, District 4 Senator and grandfather of 19 children who either home school or go to public school.

SB 2295 is a bill to meet the state's obligation to fund education of K-12 students per our state constitution. This will take over the property tax portion of most of the school funding. This includes the 70 mills general fund, 12 mills for educational services, 12 mills for miscellaneous purposes and expenses, and tuition mills. They retain any mills for buildings, safety plans and special reserve funds.

We have a total of 154,850 students in the state, of these 7904 are non public students, and 5009 are home school students. The weighted per student cost in our state are \$14345. Total of 4.421 billion per biennium, 370 million for non public and Home school students.

Parents of all these students pay taxes and should be entitled to compensation to pay for the cost to educate their children wherever they go to school.

In this bill I have reduced the amount paid to Non public to 75% and Home school to 50% of the per pupil payment. Non public and Home schools may choose to opt in to have the payment and are not required to take it. The public schools are to receive the difference between the non-public and home school payments.

It is also my intent that any special needs children are paid the actual cost to educate those students.

This type of bill has been talked about for many years, and it is time for the state to fulfill its promise to the citizens.

Please vote to do pass on SB 2295

I stand for any questions

SB 2303 @ 2:50

J216 in the judicial wing

Senator Beard, members of the education committee, thank you for hearing my testimony in support of SB2295.

My name is Jeff Ringstad and I am the administrator of Our Redeemer's Christian School in Minot.

Reside in district 3

I have had people question me why a Christian education is so important. They ask if there is really that big of a difference. I want to share how we are similar and how we are different so that this committee can see why this decision about education that parents face is so important. *Why choice must be supported*

First of all, we are similar in that we are educating ND students. We want to see all students find success and go on to find meaningful careers. It is important that the future leaders in business, education, skilled trades, and other professional areas are being cultivated at all times through the ND education system. Both private and public schools find success in these areas. We look to educate in innovative ways as we work to develop 21st Century skills in communication, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking.

It is the differences between public and private schools that exist that are so vital to our families. I can speak directly to my school, Our Redeemer's Christian School, but believe that each of the non-public schools is very similar in many ways. Our students have many of the same classes that you would find in public schools from Biology, Physical Science, Chemistry, and a host of other sciences. We have English and English electives, a progression of math courses, World History, US History, Government, Econ, and social studies electives. The big difference is not what is taught, but the manner in which they are taught. A public school will teach these courses from a secular worldview, and they will be taught at my school with a Biblical worldview.

Our mission and purpose for existence is to deliver a solid education to prepare our students for their next life steps, and to develop a biblical worldview. Education is always either secular or it is faith based – it is NEVER neutral. Every course a student completes at Our Redeemer's incorporates Jesus and a biblical worldview. This occurs in math classes as students look at how God followed a process in creation, how He is systematic, provides order, patterns, and ultimately, He created math. We find a similar approach to all of our content areas. Our students become proficient in state standards, but all standards are evaluated to offer a biblical worldview.

Additionally, every student has Bible as a class every day, just as they would have other content courses. We have chapel on Wednesdays, prayer is common in the classroom at the start of each day and at the start of many classes during the day. We use scripture to motivate students

Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as if working for the Lord, not for human masters

We use scripture to address behavioral issues

Romans 12:16: Live in harmony with others, with humility, gentleness, and patience

We use scripture to focus on achievement through using the gifts they have been given.

James 1: 17 *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

As I visit with public school administrators, I hear about their biggest problems: to motivate students to do well, the violent and aggressive behaviors, attendance, and the achievement shortfalls. There are reasons families want choice and deserve choice. In the end our students do well as they have averaged 23.2 on their ACT scores over the past 5 years, nearly 90% attend college right out of HS and 85% of those graduate college with a degree, and they become valuable tax paying ND citizens.

Going to a public school does not mean that students will receive an atheist education and become atheists themselves. We know that there are many Christian students and teachers in public schools. But.... students that attend public school will absolutely receive is a secular education and 30-35 hours of school per week will develop a secular worldview no matter the involvement a family has in their church.... a Christian school supports what the family is doing at home, and what is being instilled within the church – a 3-legged stool. That is how we are different, and that is why parents deserve to be supported in the educational choices they make for their families.

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Education Committee Room JW216, State Capitol

SB 2295
2/5/2025

Relating to state education funding for all students in the state; and to required reports, school district levy authority, and information displayed on property tax statements; and to adjustments to state aid payments and a property tax levy for tuition payments; and to provide an effective date.

3:57 p.m. Chairman Beard called the hearing to order.

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

Discussion Topics:

- Educational funding
- Property tax funding

3:57 p.m. Senator Wobbema moved a Do Not Pass.

3:57 p.m. Senator Axtman 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 Beard will carry the bill.

4:00 p.m. Chairman Beard adjourned the meeting.

Susan Helbling, Committee Clerk

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
SB 2295 ([25.0736.01000](#))

Education Committee (Sen. Beard, Chairman) recommends **DO NOT PASS** (6 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING). SB 2295 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar. This bill does not affect workforce development.