

2025 SENATE EDUCATION

SB 2362

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Education Committee Room JW216, State Capitol

SB 2362
2/11/2025

Relating to the accreditation of schools.

3:05 p.m. Chairman Beard called the hearing to order.

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

Discussion Topics:

- Expand accreditation options
- Select best options
- Eliminates duplication

3:05 p.m. Senator Schaible, District 31, introduced the bill and submitted testimony #36896.

3:10 p.m. Kevin Hoherz, Special Projects and Legislative Relations ND Council of Educational Leaders, testified in favor.

3:18 p.m. Dr. Ben Johnson, Secondary Assistant Superintendent of Bismarck Public Schools, testified in favor and submitted testimony #37170.

3:23 p.m. Dr. Chris Larson, Superintendent Milnor Public School, testified in favor and submitted testimony #36936.

3:25 p.m. Kirsten Baesler, Superintendent ND Public Instruction, testified in favor and submitted testimony #37175.

3:39 p.m. Dr. Cory Steiner, Superintendent Northern Cass School District, testified in favor and submitted testimony #36864.

3:45 p.m. John Dryburgh, Superintendent Hillsboro Public School, testified in favor and submitted testimony #37091.

3:49 p.m. Pamela Mack, Director of Program Services ND Protection and Advocacy Project, testified in opposition and submitted testimony #36693.

Additional written testimony:

Dr. Aimee Copas, Executive Director ND Council of Educational Leaders, submitted testimony in favor #36984.

Marcus Lewton, Superintendent Dickinson Public Schools, submitted testimony in favor #36829.

Senate Education Committee

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3:54 p.m. Chairman Beard closed the hearing.

Susan Helbling, Committee Clerk



Protection & Advocacy Project

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Bismarck, ND 58501

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Senate Education Committee

Senate Bill 2362 - February 11, 2025

Pamela Mack, P&A Director of Program Services

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

P&A fully supports the accreditation processes, which will create standards and expectations that have been researched and developed following best practices within the education system. While creating multiple options for accreditation within our school systems may allow for flexibility across school districts, this practice may create challenges that will not be helpful to students and school districts in our state. By utilizing a uniform accreditation process across all school districts, North Dakota will be able to consistently collect, interpret, and analyze data. This will result in an ability to track and trend school performance without creating an inadvertent need to start

manipulating data to compare similar information and derive conclusions. We also see movement in our state of students from one district to another. If a receiving district utilizes a different method of assessing student progress, the previous data is not meaningful to the receiving district. This also creates an inability for students and their parents to know if their child is making adequate progress, or perhaps falling behind in their learning. P&A encourages the committee to amend the bill so that a single accreditation process is selected with input from the identified entities so that a uniform system is applied across all school districts in the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Pamela Mack
P&A Director of Program Services
pmack@nd.gov
(701) 328-2950



Dr. Marcus Lewton – Superintendent

701-456-0002

444 4th Street West

mlewton@dpsnd.org

Dickinson, ND 58601

Senate Education Committee,

February 10, 2025

I respectfully submit my testimony in support of Senate Bill 2362, which would allow the North Dakota State Superintendent to provide schools with accreditation options. I believe this flexibility is in the best interest of our students.

The current Cognia model has served our state well, but many schools implement school improvement models that better align with their specific needs. Dickinson Public Schools, for example, utilizes the High Reliability Schools (HRS) model developed by Robert Marzano.

Since 2020, the HRS model has been an integral part of our district's strategic plan. To meet Cognia's accreditation requirements, we currently use an HRS-Cognia crosswalk—a process that is both time-consuming and resource-intensive, requiring us to duplicate efforts unnecessarily.

Having participated in seven Cognia reviews as both an educator and a review team member, I recognize the value Cognia provides to many districts. However, allowing schools the flexibility to use a more applicable accreditation model that best supports their improvement efforts would be a significant benefit.

It should be noted as I read opposition to this bill that the accreditation process would not change the school accountability model adopted under ESSA. We would still be required to assess and survey those items outlined in the state's ESSA plan. This change would simply allow schools to use more rigorous and applicable school improvement models.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 2362 and give schools the ability to utilize an accreditation process that best serves their students and communities.

Dr. Marcus Lewton
Superintendent
Dickinson Public Schools

Success for all!



Testimony of Dr. Cory Steiner

Northern Cass Superintendent

Senate Bill 2362

Tuesday, February 11th, 2025

Chairman Beard, Vice-Chair Lemm, and members of the committee, my name is Dr. Cory Steiner, and I am the Superintendent of the Northern Cass School District. I'm testifying in support of Senate Bill 2362 and as for a 'do pass' recommendation.

For the past 8 years, Northern Cass has engaged with Marzano High Reliability Schools (HRS). The HRS, based on 40 years of educational research, defines five progressive levels of performance that a school/district must master to become a high reliability school. It ensures all learners are proficient in key content and develop the skills necessary to graduate choice ready. Certification is a rigorous process which involves outside evaluation while ensuring high standards are met.

Many North Dakota districts are already implementing the HRS model throughout their initiatives, and many educators are already practicing research-based strategies which are ingrained in the framework. The HRS Framework provides a model for how best practices work together and provides indicators to empower districts to measure their progress against five increasing levels of reliability. HRS also provides a wealth of resources and support which make continuous improvement something that is no longer jargon but actually practice in a school/district. The levels are:



Northern Cass provides evidence to support the fact that our district has met key indicators and objectives. The process of certification is rigorous but also meaningful. It requires the district to identify leading and lagging indicators while utilizing data to inform decision-making. We have engaged more educators in HRS than we ever were able to with Cognia. Using the framework and indicators, our district has created permanent, positive, and significant impacts on achievement by synthesizing multiple complex initiatives into one system.

When we held our last Cognia accreditation visit, we utilized all the materials we had prepared for our ongoing certification as part of being a HRS district. We were recognized with distinction. When we complete our strategy maps, we utilize our strategic plan which is completely based on the HRS model. Northern Cass is a district which prides itself on being innovative. Utilizing Cognia does not align with our district's goals and objectives. Although I respect the work of Cognia as an accrediting

organization, it has become a checklist for our district to meet state requirements. It has led to duplication of effort in our district. HRS has become the foundation of our innovation and is truly about continuous improvement. It has provided our district with a relevant model for accreditation. HRS allows districts or individual schools to engage, which provides even further flexibility.

The state of North Dakota has provided a variety of pieces of legislation (HB 1478, SB 2186, and SB 2196) to encourage innovation. This is the next key piece of legislation which will now provide a full pathway to innovation. This bill would further encourage districts to innovate at a systems level and to truly engage in continuous improvement instead of 'checking a box' which has unfortunately done little to move the needle in terms of achievement in our state. As a state, we value local control. By allowing districts to utilize a different but state-approved accreditation model, you are ensuring local control while also guaranteeing every learner receives the education they deserve.

I ask you for your support of this bill and recommend a 'do pass'



North Dakota Senate

STATE CAPITOL
600 EAST BOULEVARD
BISMARCK, ND 58505-0360



Senator Donald Schaible

District 31
9115 Highway 21
Mott, ND 58646-9200
dgschaible@ndlegis.gov

COMMITTEES:

Appropriations

February 11, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairman Beard and Senate Education Committee, for the record, I am Senator Don Schaible, here to introduce SB

This bill amends 15.1-02-11 of the North Dakota Century Code, which pertains to the accreditation of schools in North Dakota. This legislation is crucial to ensuring our schools have the flexibility to pursue accreditation models that align with their unique instructional goals, operational needs, and community needs and desires, ultimately enhancing student achievement and school performance while also limiting or eliminating unnecessary duplication.

North Dakota's schools are committed to continuous improvement and innovation. Many districts, such as Dickinson, Bismarck, Hope-Page, and Hillsboro, among others, have already adopted or are in the process of achieving certification as High-Reliability Schools (HRS) as an excellent example of another continuous improvement model. The HRS model, based on four decades of educational research, provides a structured framework for school improvement through five progressive levels of reliability. This evidence-based approach ensures that students are equipped with the necessary content and skills to graduate ready for their future endeavors.

The proposed bill before you seeks to expand accreditation options by allowing schools to choose from a state-defined accreditation process or nationally recognized school improvement models, such as HRS. By doing so, schools will no longer be confined to a one-size-fits-all model that often reduces accreditation to a mere compliance exercise. Instead, they will have the opportunity to engage in meaningful, research-backed frameworks that drive real, measurable progress.

Districts like Northern Cass have demonstrated the power of HRS in transforming their educational approach. Their experience has shown that HRS provides actionable indicators, meaningful resources, and a strategic alignment that fosters continuous improvement at every level. During their last Cognia accreditation visit, they used all their HRS documentation as their evidence for Cognia accreditation. Northern Cass was recognized with distinction by leveraging their HRS work, proving the framework's effectiveness and alignment with their strategic goals.

This bill will ensure that each accreditation option meets or exceeds state standards, aligns with North Dakota's educational goals, and provides measurable outcomes for student achievement. Furthermore,

it will grant schools autonomy to select an accreditation pathway that best aligns with their vision for student success, subject to approval by the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Schools such as Northern Cass, Hillsboro, Bismarck, and others have been asking for an option for quite some time and this bill provides them with this option, which for their districts, might be a vastly better option and method of continuous school improvement.

North Dakota has a strong track record of fostering educational innovation through past legislation and to continue that approach with SB 2362. By passing this bill, we continue that tradition, empowering our schools to move beyond compliance and truly engage in practices that improve learning outcomes for all students.

I urge your support in passing this legislation to provide our schools with the flexibility and tools they need to thrive in an ever-evolving educational landscape. Chairman Beard, that concludes my testimony and I would try to answer your questions.

Milnor Public School District No. 2

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Chris Larson, Superintendent and Activities Director

Ryan Weber, High School Principal

Theresa Wittich, Elementary Principal

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill No. 2362

Sixty-ninth Legislative Assembly – North Dakota

Presented by: Dr. Chris Larson

Superintendent, Milnor Public School

Date: February 11, 2025

Chairperson Beard, members of the committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of **Senate Bill No. 2362**, which provides schools across North Dakota with greater flexibility in meeting accreditation requirements while maintaining a steadfast focus on student achievement. As Superintendent of Milnor Public School and a dedicated advocate for high-quality education, I strongly support this bill's approach to accreditation reform.

Key Benefits of SB 2362

1. Increased Flexibility to Meet Local Needs

- Every school district has unique instructional goals and operational challenges. This bill allows schools to choose an accreditation pathway that aligns with their specific needs, whether through state-defined accreditation or a nationally recognized accrediting body.
- Schools can adopt best practices from formal school improvement or continuous improvement organizations, ensuring that accreditation is not just a compliance exercise but a meaningful tool for progress.

2. Maintaining High Standards with Multiple Accreditation Options

- The bill does not lower expectations but rather ensures that any accreditation option must meet or exceed state standards and provide measurable student achievement outcomes.
- Schools are still accountable for student success, and the requirement for periodic reviews by the Superintendent of Public Instruction guarantees ongoing evaluation and improvement of these accreditation pathways.

3. A Collaborative and Transparent Process

- The inclusion of a steering committee with education stakeholders—including representatives from North Dakota United, school administrators, principals, and school boards—ensures that decisions about accreditation options are made with broad input from those directly impacted.
- This collaborative approach strengthens the partnership between the state and local schools, reinforcing our shared commitment to academic excellence.

4. Empowering Schools to Focus on Student Achievement

- Accreditation should be a tool for continuous school improvement, not a rigid, one-size-fits-all requirement.
- This bill allows schools to focus on instructional strategies, innovative programs, and student success initiatives while still meeting accreditation standards.

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Chris Larson, Superintendent and Activities Director

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1 Conclusion

2 Senate Bill No. 2362 strikes the right balance between **accountability and flexibility**. It upholds
3 rigorous academic standards while giving schools the ability to select an accreditation process that best
4 supports student learning and school improvement efforts.

5 I urge you to support this bill to empower North Dakota schools with **choice, flexibility, and high**
6 **expectations**—all of which are critical to advancing education in our state. Thank you for your time,
7 and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

8 Respectfully submitted,

9

10 Dr. Chris Larson

11 Superintendent

12 Milnor Public School

13 Chris.larson@k12.nd.us



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill No. 2362

I stand before you today in **strong support** of Senate Bill 2362, which provides a **modernized, flexible, and results-driven approach** to school accreditation in North Dakota. This bill represents a significant step forward in ensuring that schools can **focus on what truly matters—student achievement—while eliminating unnecessary duplication and inefficiencies.**

Currently, our schools navigate a complex and sometimes redundant accreditation process, one that demands time, resources, and personnel while offering little in return if the system does not align with their school improvement models that is working for their school community. **We know that certain accreditation pathways, such as the High Reliability Schools (HRS) framework, have demonstrated measurable success in improving student outcomes, teacher effectiveness, and overall school performance.** Senate Bill 2362 acknowledges this reality by allowing schools to **select an accreditation model that best aligns with their instructional goals and operational needs**, rather than forcing them into a **one-size-fits-all** system.

By recognizing **nationally and internationally validated school improvement models**, this bill:

- ✓ **Eliminates redundant accreditation processes**, allowing schools to focus on **actual improvement rather than compliance checklists.**
- ✓ **Empowers schools to choose the accreditation model** that best aligns with their mission and instructional framework.
- ✓ **Ensures accountability** by requiring all accreditation models to meet or exceed **state standards for student achievement and school performance.**
- ✓ **Brings education stakeholders to the table**—including administrators, teachers, and school boards—to guide the accreditation process in a way that is both **practical and effective.**

North Dakota's educators and administrators work tirelessly to ensure that students receive a high-quality education. **Forcing schools into outdated accreditation models that do not align with their improvement efforts wastes time, energy, and taxpayer dollars.** Instead, we should **trust our schools** to choose pathways that **work best for their communities** while still holding them accountable for results. For some the current accreditation model works well, for others a different model may fit their school better.

Senate Bill 2362 is a **commonsense approach** that removes barriers, reduces duplication, and supports schools in their mission to continuously improve. I urge this committee to support this legislation and give North Dakota's schools the flexibility they need to **focus on excellence, not bureaucracy.**

Both **High Reliability Schools (HRS)** and **Cognia** offer school improvement and accreditation models, but they differ in their approach, flexibility, and focus. Here's why **HRS might be a better choice** for many schools compared to Cognia:

NDCEL is the strongest unifying voice representing and supporting administrators and educational leaders in pursuit of quality education for all students in North Dakota.

Executive Director: Aimee Copas-----Government Lead and Special Projects: Kevin Hoferz



1. HRS is Built on a Research-Based, Continuous Improvement Framework

HRS, developed by **Dr. Robert Marzano**, is based on **decades of educational research** and focuses on creating a **safe, supportive, and high-performing school environment**. Unlike Cognia, which is **primarily an accreditation organization** that evaluates compliance with broad standards, HRS is a **structured, actionable school improvement model** aimed at **real, measurable progress in student achievement**.

2. HRS is a Continuous Improvement Model, Not Just a Compliance Process

- **Cognia Accreditation** is largely **compliance-driven**, requiring schools to meet **preset organizational standards** that may or may not align with a school's actual instructional goals.
- **HRS focuses on progressive, evidence-based school improvement**, with schools working through **five key levels**:
 1. **Safe, Supportive, and Collaborative Culture**
 2. **Effective Teaching in Every Classroom**
 3. **Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum**
 4. **Standards-Referenced Reporting**
 5. **Competency-Based Education**

These levels **build upon each other** to create a **clear pathway for school improvement**, rather than just a check-the-box evaluation.

3. HRS is More Flexible and Tailored to Schools' Needs

- Cognia's accreditation process follows a **rigid, standardized framework** that may not always align with a school's strategic vision.
- **HRS allows schools to implement improvement strategies at their own pace**, ensuring that changes are **meaningful and sustainable**, rather than rushed for accreditation purposes.

4. HRS Offers Immediate, Actionable Feedback

- **HRS focuses on evidence-based practices** that lead to **tangible school improvement** rather than just accreditation status.
- Cognia's accreditation **typically results in a report** with **broad recommendations**, but schools may struggle with **how to translate that into day-to-day improvements**.
- In contrast, HRS includes **self-assessment tools, stakeholder surveys, and targeted strategies** that schools can immediately apply to improve instruction, leadership, and student learning.

5. HRS Directly Measures What Matters – Student Achievement

- Cognia's process **evaluates schools based on broad organizational effectiveness** but doesn't necessarily lead to improved student outcomes.

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Executive Director: Aimee Copas-----Government Lead and Special Projects: Kevin Hoherz



- **HRS directly ties school improvement to student performance**—ensuring that schools **implement proven strategies** that lead to higher student achievement.

6. HRS Eliminates Redundancy and Bureaucracy

- Cognia often requires **extensive paperwork, site visits, and documentation** that can become **time-consuming and redundant**, especially for schools already using other improvement models.
- HRS is **streamlined and practical**, allowing educators to **focus on meaningful improvements** rather than bureaucratic requirements.

7. HRS Aligns Better with Local and State Priorities

- Since HRS focuses on **creating a high-performing school system** rather than just accreditation status, it **better aligns with district and state-level strategic goals**.
- Cognia is a **broad, one-size-fits-all accreditation process** that may not take into account the **unique challenges and goals of North Dakota schools**.

Key Takeaway:

For some schools, HRS is a **more effective, flexible, and research-driven model** for **continuous school improvement**, focusing on **real outcomes rather than compliance**. It eliminates duplication, **empowers schools to take ownership of their improvement journey**, and ensures that every step taken is backed by **proven strategies** that directly benefit students and educators. This is a great reason why SB 2362 is a bill that makes sense. Please vote yes.

Testimony of Jon Dryburgh

Hillsboro Public School Superintendent

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 2362

Chairman Beard, Vice-Chair Lemm, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jon Dryburgh, and I am the superintendent at Hillsboro Public School District #9. I am speaking in support of **Senate Bill 2362**, which seeks to open additional means for North Dakota schools to be accredited. Please return this bill to the Senate Floor with a “Do Pass” recommendation.

I had the opportunity on January 28, 2025 to sit next to Senator David Clemens during the afternoon session of the Senate. We heard remarks from Commander Trey Kennard, the commanding officer of the USS North Dakota. As I reflected on what Commander Kennard was saying, he was describing a High Reliability Organization. If anyone in a High Reliability Organization sees something inconsistent with what they should see, they have the ability and responsibility to take immediate action. High Reliability Schools are supposed to work in a very similar way. We are constantly monitoring our culture, our instructional practices, and our curriculum. We conduct surveys, have people come in and provide feedback, and set aggressive goals for our staff and ourselves. We analyze data on a monthly basis and track student progress over time. When students are struggling, we ask ourselves what that student needs in order to be successful.

The help that our school receives to be a High Reliability School costs the district money and requires some difficult conversations when things are getting off track. The company that reviews our information is independent of the people we work with. This last summer Hillsboro Public School achieved Level 3 Certification, which means we have a Safe and Collaborative Culture, we have Effective Teaching in every classroom, and we now have a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum. This is constant and consistent improvement.

Senate Bill 2362 would allow us to use this process for our accreditation process instead of using Cognia. I’m sure Cognia helps schools, but my experience has been that schools jump through hoops which allow them to be accredited and then do very little until it is time to be accredited again. Cognia also costs our school money, but the money we spend would be better spent by continuing down the HRS path. The work we do as a High Reliability School requires constant monitoring, just like a submarine, or an aircraft carrier, or an air base. High Reliability Organizations are all around us. Please give schools the freedom to use the same process for accreditation.

Thank you for your time. I ask for your support of this bill and recommend a “Do Pass” vote from your committee.

North Dakota Senate Education Subcommittee
SB 2362

Presented by Dr. Ben Johnson

Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Schools
Bismarck Public Schools

Chairperson and esteemed members of the North Dakota Senate Education Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about a critical issue that directly impacts our schools, our educators, and most importantly, our students. I stand before you to advocate for the option to allow local school districts the choice to use Marzano's **High Reliability Schools (HRS) Framework** as an alternative to Cognia for accreditation.

At its core, accreditation is about ensuring quality and fostering continuous school improvement. But the question we must ask is: **How do we make accreditation not just a compliance exercise but a meaningful driver of progress?** This is where the **HRS Framework** stands apart.

HRS: A System That Works for Schools

The **HRS framework is not just a label—it is a process** that fundamentally shifts how schools approach improvement efforts. It **operationalizes** school improvement efforts by providing a **clear roadmap** for continuous improvement that is **actionable at the building level**. Unlike traditional accreditation models that often focus on broad institutional compliance, **HRS embeds improvement directly within the daily practices of teachers and leaders**.

1. A Practical, Research-Based Approach:

HRS is rooted in decades of educational research and focuses on five progressive levels that schools work through—from ensuring a

1. **Safe, Supportive, and Collaborative Culture,**
2. **Effective Teaching in Every Classroom, and**
3. **A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum to**
4. **Standards-Referenced Reporting of Student Progress, and**
5. **implementing Competency-Based Education.**

This step-by-step process creates a **culture of striving to sustain excellence**.

2. Empowering Schools with Data-Driven Improvement:

The HRS framework provides **clear, measurable Leading Indicators** for each level, empowering schools to think about, self-assess, and **take ownership of their growth**. **HRS measurement process ensures there are programs and practices in place for each Leading Indicator through Lagging Indicators within each level**. The emphasis is on **evidence-based progress** that produce their desired effects rather than external validation alone.

3. Alignment with North Dakota's Vision:

Our state values **local control and accountability**. HRS aligns seamlessly with this philosophy by allowing districts to **own their improvement efforts** while still meeting

rigorous standards. It is a **process** – not about requiring a **specific program**. It **ensures consistency in quality and measuring the effectiveness of your local initiatives all while allowing flexibility to meet local needs**.

4. **Operationalizing Continuous School Improvement:**

Perhaps the most significant advantage of HRS is that it **operationalizes the process of improvement** within schools. This means teachers, principals, and district leaders are continuously working on improvement **in real time, not just in preparation for an accreditation visit**. Accreditation becomes a **living, breathing process**—not a once-every-five-year event to ensure we are improving our systems and programs.

Why Choice Matters

Currently, Cognia remains the sole accreditation pathway, but school districts should have the **option** to select another research-based framework that best aligns with their improvement efforts. It allows districts to **select a model that is embedded in school operations and the daily teaching-learning process rather than merely an external compliance check**.

Bismarck Public Schools, and many others across the state, have already embraced HRS as a guiding framework to improve our systems because **it works**—for our schools, our teachers, and our students. Our work with Dr. Phil Warrick, here at BPS and across many other North Dakota school districts, has been invaluable to **empower** our teachers and leaders to guide a systematic path forward. Giving LEAs the ability to **choose HRS for accreditation** means recognizing the **effectiveness of a model that directly connects accreditation with daily school building level improvement efforts**.

In closing, I urge this committee to support **district flexibility** in selecting HRS as an accreditation option. By doing so, we ensure that our local schools are not just accredited but are **actively improving every single day**.

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

TESTIMONY ON SB 2362
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Tuesday, February, 11 2025
By: Kirsten Baesler, State Superintendent
701-328-4570

Chairman Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee,

For the record, my name is Kirsten Baesler, and I serve as the Superintendent of the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on SB 2362 regarding the accreditation of schools and to provide an amendment.

I am here today in support of this legislation **only if** the language in the amendments are adopted. I have discussed these amendments with the bill's prime sponsor, Senator Schaible, and he has no objections to them. The Assistant Attorney General assigned to NDDPI drafted these necessary changes so they are aligned with honoring the intent of the legislature and affirming the authority provided to the state superintendent in the ND century code.

I request that the language in the first subsection 1(c) be amended to change the words "shall" to "may" and "must" to "may." As written, the language in the bill in Section 1 letter "c" unduly mandates the involvement of specific special interest lobbying organizations in the process of selecting accreditation options.

Although I respect and appreciate the work of our educational stakeholders for the work they are hired to do in representing specific adults in their membership groups, such a requirement clearly infringes on the responsibility of the elected Superintendent of Public Instruction, as authorized by the North Dakota Legislature in NDCC 15.1-02-04.

The Department does not make decisions in isolation or in an authoritarian manner—in fact, it is quite the opposite—the department actively engages teachers, principals, school board members, families, and students in the decision-making process frequently and consistently to ensure our work reflects the desire of the people who elected me.

However, the current prescriptive language overreaches and forces the law into administrative areas that the people of North Dakota have elected me to direct. It shifts decision-making power and influence into the hands of unelected special interest groups, undermining the superintendent's role in executing responsibilities specifically granted by the Legislature. Then, going even further, requiring me to select a dues-paying member or executive director as a representative of an association also registered as a lobbying organization - rather than any educator and administrator best positioned to provide meaningful feedback - is simply unreasonable.

As Superintendent, I will always vigorously oppose any and all attempts to erode the authority vested in this office or unnecessarily restrict my ability to carry out

my duties as the chief administrator of K-12 education in North Dakota, which I have sworn in an oath of office to do. It is imperative that the decisions impacting our students and schools remain with those who are elected to serve the people—not with special interests seeking to overtly control the state processes of education through legislative mandates that diminish the state superintendent’s ability to lead.

Therefore, the amendment changes the first subsection 1 (c) from “Shall” to “May” on page 1, line 17, and “must” to “may” on page 1, line 19 to allow the superintendent to exercise the administration authority already provided by the legislature in NDCC. This continues the permissive language of subsection 1 (a) - that details the superintendent’s ability to write administrative rules approved by you, the ND lawmakers – and subsection 1 (b).

There is a new subsection 4 that requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction to secure a state contract with an accreditation organization or vendor to create a state-provided accreditation option that is available to all school districts **at no charge to the districts**. This ensures that all districts have access to a high-quality accreditation process without financial barriers, maintaining a consistent standard across the state.

New Subsection 5 – This provision specifies that if a district chooses an accreditation process from the state-approved list rather than the state-provided option, the district will be responsible for any associated costs. This approach balances

flexibility with **fiscal responsibility**, ensuring that districts retain the ability to choose an accreditation pathway that aligns with their needs but assuming the costs for a contract not negotiated for a larger-scale state contract.

The amendment's language in Subsection 5 exactly mirrors the language the North Dakota Legislature passed last session regarding interim assessments, which provided a state contract for assessments at no cost to school districts while creating an approved list of other assessments districts could choose at their expense. That model has worked quite well, giving schools financial support while maintaining local flexibility. Ironically, Senator Schaible was the prime sponsor of that bill language as well. In speaking with him, he also recalled the interim assessment language we used last session and recognized the consistency in approach.

In summary, this bill introduces flexibility in school accreditation and as amended, maintains a cost-free state-provided option for districts. However, without all the changes in this amendment being adopted, NDDPI would not support this bill. The Superintendent of Public Instruction must retain the authority to execute the responsibilities granted by the Legislature without undue influence from special interest membership groups and the ability to fulfill their constitutional responsibility of Article VIII, Section 2, to provide for a **uniform** system of education

I respectfully ask the committee to adopt these necessary amendments to ensure that the accreditation process remains accountable to the students, families, and

taxpayers of North Dakota through their elected officials and then vote in favor of a “do-pass” recommendation.

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

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO

SENATE BILL NO. 2362

Introduced by

Senators Schaible, Lemm, Weber

Representatives Jonas, Pyle

A BILL for an Act to amend and reenact section 15.1-02-11 of the North Dakota Century Code relating to the accreditation of schools.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:

SECTION 1. AMENDMENT. Section 15.1-02 1 of the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

15.1-02-11. Superintendent of public instruction- Accreditation of schools- Rules.

1. The superintendent of public instruction ~~may~~:

a. May adopt rules governing the accreditation of public and nonpublic schools. Any rule adopted under this section must incorporate measures of student achievement and bear a direct relationship to improving student achievement.

b. May provide schools with a choice of accreditation options, including:

(1) Accreditation through a state-defined accreditation process established by the superintendent of public instruction; or

(2) Accreditation through a nationally recognized accrediting organization, a formal school improvement organization, or a continuous improvement organization approved by the superintendent of public instruction.

c. ~~Shall~~ May establish a process to select the accreditation options for schools and a process for schools to select an accreditation option. Development of the process must may include input and participation from a steering committee, including representatives of education stakeholder groups, including North Dakota united and state associations of school administrators; secondary and elementary school principals; and the North Dakota school boards association.

d. Periodically shall review and evaluate the effectiveness of each accreditation option in improving student achievement and school performance.

- 1 2. Each accreditation option must:
- 2 a. Meet or exceed the state standards to ensure consistency in the quality of
- 3 education.
- 4 b. Provide measurable outcomes for student achievement, aligning with the
- 5 state goals.
- 6 3. A school may select the accreditation statement option best aligning to the
- 7 instructional goals and operational needs of the school, subject to approval by the
- 8 superintendent of public instruction.
- 9 4. The superintendent of public instruction shall contract with an accreditation
- 10 organization or vendor to create state-provided accreditation and offer to each
- 11 public school district, at no charge to the districts.
- 12 5. If a district chooses to use an accreditation process from the state-approved list,
- 13 the district is responsible for any accreditation-related costs.
- 14

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Education Committee Room JW216, State Capitol

SB 2362
2/17/2025

Relating to the accreditation of schools.

9:17 a.m. Chairman Beard called the hearing to order.

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

Members Absent: Senator Wobbema

Discussion Topics:

- Process of state approval
- Replace shall with may

9:17 a.m. Chairman Beard discussed the proposed amendment testimony #37881.

9:23 a.m. Senator Gerhardt moved Amendment LC #25.1049.01001.

9:23 a.m. Senator Axtman seconded the motion.

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

Motion Passed 4-1-1

9:27 a.m. Senator Axtman moved Do Pass as amended.

9:27 a.m. Senator Gerhardt seconded the motion.

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

Motion Passed 4-1-1

Senator Lemm will carry the bill.

9:30 a.m. Chairman Beard closed the hearing.

Susan Helbling, Committee Clerk

February 17, 2025

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO

SENATE BILL NO. 2362

Introduced by

Senators Schaible, Lemm, Weber

Representatives Jonas, Pyle

HD
2/17/25
Page 1 of 2

1 A BILL for an Act to amend and reenact section 15.1-02-11 of the North Dakota Century Code,
2 relating to the accreditation of schools.

3 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

4 **SECTION 1. AMENDMENT.** Section 15.1-02-11 of the North Dakota Century Code is
5 amended and reenacted as follows:

6 **15.1-02-11. Superintendent of public instruction - Accreditation of schools - Rules.**

7 1. The superintendent of public instruction ~~may~~:

8 a. ~~May~~ adopt rules governing the accreditation of public and nonpublic schools. Any
9 rule adopted under this section must incorporate measures of student
10 achievement and bear a direct relationship to improving student achievement.

11 b. ~~May~~ provide schools with a choice of accreditation options, including:

12 (1) ~~Accreditation through a state-defined accreditation process established by~~
13 ~~the superintendent of public instruction; or~~

14 (2) ~~Accreditation through a nationally recognized accrediting organization, a~~
15 ~~formal school improvement organization, or a continuous improvement~~
16 ~~organization approved by the superintendent of public instruction.~~

17 c. ~~Shall~~~~May~~ establish a process to select the accreditation options for schools and a
18 process for schools to select an accreditation option. Development of the process
19 ~~must~~~~may~~ include input and participation from a steering committee, including
20 representatives of education stakeholder groups, ~~including North Dakota united~~

1 and state associations of school administrators; secondary and elementary
2 school principals; and the North Dakota school boards association
3 board members.

4 d. Periodically shall review and evaluate the effectiveness of each accreditation
5 option in improving student achievement and school performance.

6 2. Each accreditation option must:

7 a. Meet or exceed the state standards to ensure consistency in the quality of
8 education.

9 b. Provide measurable outcomes for student achievement, aligning with the state
10 goals.

11 3. A school may select the accreditation option best aligning to the instructional goals
12 and operational needs of the school, subject to approval by the superintendent of
13 public instruction.

14 4. The superintendent of public instruction shall contract with an accreditation
15 organization or vendor to create state-provided accreditation to offer to each public
16 school district at no charge.

17 5. If a district chooses to use an accreditation process from the state-approved list, the
18 district is responsible for any accreditation-related costs.

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
SB 2362**

Education Committee (Sen. Beard, Chairman) recommends **AMENDMENTS** ([25.1049.01001](#)) and when so amended, recommends **DO PASS** (4 YEAS, 1 NAY, 1 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). SB 2362 was placed on the Sixth order on the calendar. This bill does not affect workforce development.

25.1049.01000

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO

SENATE BILL NO. 2362

Introduced by

Senators Schaible, Lemm, Weber

Representatives Jonas, Pyle

1 A BILL for an Act to amend and reenact section 15.1-02-11 of the North Dakota Century Code
2 relating to the accreditation of schools.

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15 ~~formal school improvement organization, or a continuous improvement~~
16 ~~organization approved by the superintendent of public instruction.~~

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18 a process for schools to select an accreditation option. Development of the
19 process ~~must~~ ~~may~~ include input and participation from a steering committee,
20 including representatives of education stakeholder groups, ~~including North~~
21 ~~Dakota united and state associations of school administrators; secondary and~~
22 ~~elementary school principals; and the North Dakota school boards association.~~ ^{members}

23 d. Periodically shall review and evaluate the effectiveness of each accreditation
24 option in improving student achievement and school performance.
25

- 1 2. Each accreditation option must:
- 2 a. Meet or exceed the state standards to ensure consistency in the quality of
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- 14

2025 HOUSE EDUCATION

SB 2362

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Education Committee Coteau AB Room, State Capitol

SB 2362
3/17/2025

Relating to the accreditation of schools.

2:29 p.m. Vice Chairman Schreiber-Beck called the meeting to order.

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

Discussion Topics:

- Credits Students need to graduate
- Cognia accreditation visits
- Culture, Impute and improvement
- Staff Surveys
- School improvement efforts

2:29 p.m. Senator Schaible introduced the bill and submitted testimony. #42340

2:38 p.m. Kristen Baesler, Superintendent, NDDPI, testified in favor and submitted testimony. #42437

2:51 p.m. Kevin Hoherz, Legislative Relations, ND Council of Educational Leaders, NDCEL, testified in favor.

3:00 p.m. Dr. Ben Johnson, Assistant Superintendent, Secondary Schools, testified in favor and submitted testimony. #41612

3:05 p.m. Keith Harris, Assistant Superintendent, Dickinson Public Schools, testified in favor and submitted testimony. #42189

3:14 p.m. Jon Dryburgh, Superintendent, Hillsboro Public Schools, testified in favor and submitted testimony. #42338

3:20 p.m. Cory Steiner, Superintendent, Northern Cass School District, testified in favor and submitted testimony. #42096

3:24 p.m. Chairman Heinert closed the hearing.

Leah Kuball, Committee Clerk

**North Dakota House Education Subcommittee
SB 2362**

Presented by Dr. Ben Johnson

*Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Schools
Bismarck Public Schools*

Chairperson and esteemed members of the North Dakota House Education Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about a critical issue that directly impacts our schools, our educators, and most importantly, our students. I stand before you to advocate for the option to allow local school districts the choice to use Marzano's **High Reliability Schools (HRS) Framework** as an alternative to Cognia for accreditation.

At its core, accreditation is about ensuring quality and fostering continuous school improvement. But the question we must ask is: **How do we make accreditation not just a compliance exercise but a meaningful driver of progress?** This is where the **HRS Framework** stands apart.

HRS: A System That Works for Schools

The **HRS framework is not just a label—it is a process** that fundamentally shifts how schools approach improvement efforts. It **operationalizes** school improvement efforts by providing a **clear roadmap** for continuous improvement that is **actionable at the building level**. Unlike traditional accreditation models that often focus on broad institutional compliance, **HRS embeds improvement directly within the daily practices of teachers and leaders**.

1. A Practical, Research-Based Approach:

HRS is rooted in decades of educational research and focuses on five progressive levels that schools work through—from ensuring a

1. **Safe, Supportive, and Collaborative Culture,**
2. **Effective Teaching in Every Classroom,** and
3. **A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum to**
4. **Standards-Referenced Reporting of Student Progress,** and
5. **implementing Competency-Based Education.**

This step-by-step process creates **a culture of striving to sustain excellence**.

2. Empowering Schools with Data-Driven Improvement:

The HRS framework provides **clear, measurable Leading Indicators** for each level, empowering schools to think about, self-assess, and **take ownership of their growth**. **HRS measurement process ensures there are programs and practices in place for each Leading Indicator through Lagging Indicators within each level**. The emphasis is on **evidence-based progress** that produce their desired effects rather than external validation alone.

3. Alignment with North Dakota's Vision:

Our state values **local control and accountability**. HRS aligns seamlessly with this philosophy by allowing districts to **own their improvement efforts** while still meeting

rigorous standards. It is a **process** – not about requiring a **specific program**. It **ensures consistency in quality and measuring the effectiveness of your local initiatives all while allowing flexibility to meet local needs**.

4. **Operationalizing Continuous School Improvement:**

Perhaps the most significant advantage of HRS is that it **operationalizes the process of improvement** within schools. This means teachers, principals, and district leaders are continuously working on improvement **in real time, not just in preparation for an accreditation visit**. Accreditation becomes a **living, breathing process**—not a once-every-five-year event to ensure we are improving our systems and programs.

Why Choice Matters

Currently, Cognia remains the sole accreditation pathway, but school districts should have the **option** to select another research-based framework that best aligns with their improvement efforts. It allows districts to **select a model that is embedded in school operations and the daily teaching-learning process rather than merely an external compliance check**.

Bismarck Public Schools, and many others across the state, have already embraced HRS as a guiding framework to improve our systems because **it works**—for our schools, our teachers, and our students. Our work with Dr. Phil Warrick, here at BPS and across many other North Dakota school districts, has been invaluable to **empower** our teachers and leaders to guide a systematic path forward. Giving LEAs the ability to **choose HRS for accreditation** means recognizing the **effectiveness of a model that directly connects accreditation with daily school building level improvement efforts**.

In closing, I urge this committee to support **district flexibility** in selecting HRS as an accreditation option. By doing so, we ensure that our local schools are not just accredited but are **actively improving every single day**.

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

Testimony of Dr. Cory Steiner

Northern Cass Superintendent

Senate Bill 2362

Monday, March 17th, 2025

Chairman Heinert, Vice-Chair Schreiber-Beck and members of the committee, my name is Dr. Cory Steiner, and I am the Superintendent of the Northern Cass School District. I'm testifying in support of Senate Bill 2362 and ask for a 'do pass' recommendation.

For the past 8 years, Northern Cass has engaged with Marzano High Reliability Schools (HRS). The HRS, based on 40 years of educational research, defines five progressive levels of performance that a school/district must master to become a high reliability school. It ensures all learners are proficient in key content and develop the skills necessary to graduate choice ready. Certification is a rigorous process which involves outside evaluation while ensuring high standards are met.

Many North Dakota districts are already implementing the HRS model throughout their initiatives, and many educators are already practicing research-based strategies which are ingrained in the framework. The HRS Framework provides a model for how best practices work together and provides indicators to empower districts to measure their progress against five increasing levels of reliability. HRS also provides a wealth of resources and support which make continuous improvement something that is no longer jargon but actually practice in a school/district. The levels are:



Northern Cass provides evidence to support the fact that our district has met key indicators and objectives. The process of certification is rigorous but also meaningful. It requires the district to identify leading and lagging indicators while utilizing data to inform decision-making. We have engaged more educators in HRS than we ever were able to with Cognia. Using the framework and indicators, our district has created permanent, positive, and significant impacts on achievement by synthesizing multiple complex initiatives into one system.

When we held our last Cognia accreditation visit, we utilized all the materials we had prepared for our ongoing certification as part of being a HRS district. We were recognized with distinction. When we complete our strategy maps, we utilize our strategic plan which is completely based on the HRS model. Northern Cass is a district which prides itself on being innovative. Utilizing Cognia does not align with our district's goals and objectives. Although I respect the work of Cognia as an accrediting

organization, it has become a checklist for our district to meet state requirements. It has led to duplication of effort in our district. HRS has become the foundation of our innovation and is truly about continuous improvement. It has provided our district with a relevant model for accreditation. HRS allows districts or individual schools to engage, which provides even further flexibility.

The state of North Dakota has provided a variety of pieces of legislation (HB 1478, SB 2186, and SB 2196) to encourage innovation. This is the next key piece of legislation which will now provide a full pathway to innovation. This bill would further encourage districts to innovate at a systems level and to truly engage in continuous improvement instead of 'checking a box' which has unfortunately done little to move the needle in terms of achievement in our state. As a state, we value local control. By allowing districts to utilize a different but state-approved accreditation model, you are ensuring local control while also guaranteeing every learner receives the education they deserve.

I ask you for your support for this bill and recommend a 'do pass'.

Thank you for your service. Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee and submit testimony in support of SB2362.

I would like to begin by saying that I am committed to the idea of continuous improvement. I firmly agree with Alberta Lee Cox when she stated, "It is not enough to be good if you have the ability to be better. It is not enough to be very good if you have the ability to be great."

Because I believe that every school has a responsibility to strive be great, I do not have any objection to the expectation that every school and district be held accountable for meeting a standard of excellence. An expectation that schools engage in a continuous cycle of improvement is a good thing. Honestly, I am not opposed to Cognia.

That being said, I stand in support of the wisdom of SB2362 which would allow local districts to move beyond Cognia and have opportunities to pursue "Accreditation through a nationally recognized accrediting organization, a formal school improvement organization, or a continuous improvement organization approved by the superintendent of public instruction" in order to demonstrate that they are indeed meeting the expected standards of a quality education, and that they are actively engaged in a cycle of continuous improvement.

Some of the reasons that I support SB2362 are:

1. I believe that the process of continual improvement should be demonstrated every day, not every 5 to 6 years. By allowing a LEA the autonomy to demonstrate that they are meeting, or exceeding, the state's expectations, that LEA will have more buy-in and commitment to the continuous improvement process. For example, our district is striving to incorporate Marzano's HRS framework. Our commitment to this framework has resulted in every one of our 8 schools achieving level 3 HRS and half of our schools achieving the distinction of being a Level 4 HRS school. In addition, our commitment to becoming HRS drove our current strategic plan including providing a basis for our vision, mission, value statements, and stated goals. Every teacher in our district can tell you that we are striving to be HRS, and what efforts we are making to achieve that goal. That is buy-in, that is commitment, that provides the "why" behind the hard work that we ask our staff to do every single day. Whereas, on the other hand, Cognia feels more like an event that we must endure every 5 years.
2. By providing a LEA the autonomy to select their own model of continuous improvement, the work within that model is authentic. In our district, we not only did the work to meet the requirements to become HRS, but we also collect "quick data" on a regular basis to ensure that we continue to meet the requirements of HRS. In contrast, going through the Cognia accreditation process feels more like a Dog and Pony Show. It is an event every 5 years where the district finds the evidence to show that they have jumped through the hoops set before them. If you ask any of the teachers in our district about the indicators of HRS, I think you would like the answer that you get. Ask that same teacher about how the Cognia process affects their work every day, few would be able to make a connection.
3. The cost in time and manpower to prepare for a Cognia visit is extreme. We just completed our Cognia review. I am happy to report that our district did very well, and we are proud of our results. But the literally hundreds of hours of work that we put into preparing for the review was on top of the work that we were already doing. Our district's administration and

school improvement team dedicated literally hundreds of hours preparing for our Cognia visit. It would have been so much more cost effective if we could have committed those hours to furthering our efforts to achieve HRS.

4. Finally, allowing a LEA to have autonomy to choose their own model will allow the district to enjoy some consistency in the process. Over the past 20 plus years, I have gone through 4 accreditation visits. The one thing each of these events had in common was we were told every time that the process was not going to change for the next accreditation cycle. The second thing that each of these visits had in common was the process always did change. Over the course of time we went from Northwest accreditation to Advanc-ed to now, Cognia. Even the Cognia standards were changed from 2017 to 2022.

In contrast, as we work toward achieving HRS, we rely on the expert research of Marzano, Hattie, Dufour, and others. We utilize a consistent model and resource. For example, Level 1 HRS is the creation of a Safe, Supportive and Collaborative culture. The 6 indicators do not change. The tenants of the PLC do not change. And while we are continually striving to improve in each of those 6 indicators, the consistency of the indicators provides an ongoing focus for our continuous improvement efforts.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat that I am not opposed to the Cognia accreditation process. For those districts who have not adopted a research-based model to drive their continuous improvement efforts, Cognia may be a great option for them. But allowing a district to choose an alternative model that provides an ongoing focus on the day-to-day improvement efforts, system wide buy in, a savings of time and resources, and allows consistency in a district's efforts, just makes good sense.

As a final note, I spent some time doing a crosswalk between the current Cognia standards and the leading indicators contained in the HRS model. For all but 1 of the stated Cognia standards, I identified 1 to 3 HRS indicators that demonstrated the same skill or competency. If we would have been allowed the autonomy to simply present the data on our HRS efforts, we could have exceeded North Dakota's requirements and saved the hundreds of hours of effort that we committed to the Cognia process. I hope that you strongly consider allowing Districts the autonomy to demonstrate their compliance to the expected continuous improvement process by passing SB2362.

Sincerely,

Keith Harris

Assistant Superintendent

Dickinson Public Schools

Testimony of Jon Dryburgh

Hillsboro Public School Superintendent

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 2362

Monday, March 17th, 2025

Chairman Heinert, Vice-Chair Schreiber-Beck and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jon Dryburgh, and I am the superintendent at Hillsboro Public School District #9. I am speaking in support of **Senate Bill 2362**, which seeks to open additional means for North Dakota schools to be accredited. Please return this bill to the House Floor with a “Do Pass” recommendation.

As I consider the group that I’m talking to, I noticed that as a committee, you are very diversified. You come from different vocations and have varying numbers of children, from zero to five. My wife and I have been blessed to have six children. What I know about those six children is that they all learned differently. My oldest was talking early, my third child needed help with speech because his older brother did all the talking for him. Some of my children loved reading, some resisted a little. I have worked in eight different schools in my career and I always tell people that there are good things about every school I have been at and there are things that can be improved at every school I have been at. Children and schools all have different needs.

High Reliability Schools take a look at data each year and determine how the school is doing on various key indicators. We are constantly monitoring our culture, our instructional practices, and our curriculum. We conduct surveys, have people come in and provide feedback, and set aggressive goals for ourselves. We analyze data on a monthly basis and track student progress over time. When students are struggling, we ask ourselves what that student needs in order to be successful.

The help that our school receives to be a High Reliability School costs the district money and requires some difficult conversations when things are getting off track. The company that reviews our information is independent of the people we work with. This last summer Hillsboro Public School achieved Level 3 Certification, which means we have a Safe and Collaborative Culture, we have Effective Teaching in every classroom, and we now have a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum. This is constant and consistent improvement.

Senate Bill 2362 would allow us to use this process for our accreditation process instead of using Cognia. I’m sure Cognia helps schools, but my experience has been that schools jump through hoops which allow them to be accredited and then do very little until it is time to be accredited again. Cognia also costs our district money because of trainings we must attend and the number of hours it takes to jump through all of the hoops. The money we spend would be better spent by continuing down the HRS path.

A farmer monitors fields, a rancher knows the health of a herd, a parent notices how their child is progressing and then each makes decisions to hopefully help. We as school administrators desire the same flexibility in evaluating our schools and helping them improve.

Please send Senate Bill 2362 back to the House Floor with a "Do Pass" recommendation from your committee.

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



North Dakota Senate

STATE CAPITOL
600 EAST BOULEVARD
BISMARCK, ND 58505-0360



Senator Donald Schaible

District 31
9115 Highway 21
Mott, ND 58646-9200
dgschaible@ndlegis.gov

COMMITTEES:

Appropriations

March 17, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairman Heinert and the House Education Committee, for the record, I am Senator Don Schaible, here to introduce SB 2362

This bill amends 15.1-02-11 of the North Dakota Century Code, which pertains to the accreditation of schools in North Dakota. This legislation is crucial to ensuring our schools have the flexibility to pursue accreditation models that align with their unique instructional goals, operational needs, and community needs and desires, ultimately enhancing student achievement and school performance while also limiting or eliminating unnecessary duplication.

North Dakota's schools are committed to continuous improvement and innovation. Many districts, such as Dickinson, Bismarck, Hope-Page, and Hillsboro, among others, have already adopted or are in the process of achieving certification as High-Reliability Schools (HRS) as an excellent example of another continuous improvement model. The HRS model, based on four decades of educational research, provides a structured framework for school improvement through five progressive levels of reliability. This evidence-based approach ensures that students are equipped with the necessary content and skills to graduate ready for their future endeavors.

The proposed bill before you seeks to expand accreditation options by allowing schools to choose from a state-defined accreditation process or nationally recognized school improvement models, such as HRS. By doing so, schools will no longer be confined to a one-size-fits-all model that often reduces accreditation to a mere compliance exercise. Instead, they will have the opportunity to engage in meaningful, research-backed frameworks that drive real, measurable progress.

Districts like Northern Cass have demonstrated the power of HRS in transforming their educational approach. Their experience has shown that HRS provides actionable indicators, meaningful resources, and a strategic alignment that fosters continuous improvement at every level. During their last Cognia accreditation visit, they used all their HRS documentation as their evidence for Cognia accreditation. Northern Cass was recognized with distinction by leveraging their HRS work, proving the framework's effectiveness and alignment with their strategic goals.

This bill will ensure that each accreditation option meets or exceeds state standards, aligns with North Dakota's educational goals, and provides measurable outcomes for student achievement.

Furthermore, it will grant schools autonomy to select an accreditation pathway that best aligns with their vision for student success, subject to approval by the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Schools such as Northern Cass, Hillsboro, Bismarck, and others have been asking for an option for quite some time and this bill provides them with this option, which for their districts, might be a vastly better option and method of continuous school improvement.

North Dakota has a strong track record of fostering educational innovation through past legislation and to continue that approach with SB 2362. By passing this bill, we continue that tradition, empowering our schools to move beyond compliance and truly engage in practices that improve learning outcomes for all students.

I urge your support in passing this legislation to provide our schools with the flexibility and tools they need to thrive in an ever-evolving educational landscape. Chairman Heinert, that concludes my testimony, and I would try to answer your questions.

TESTIMONY ON SB 2362
HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Monday, March 17, 2025
By: Kirsten Baesler, State Superintendent
701-328-4570

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

For the record, my name is Kirsten Baesler, and I serve as the Superintendent of the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in **full support** of SB 2362, as amended, regarding the accreditation of schools.

I appreciate the thoughtful collaboration that has gone into refining this legislation. With the amendments now incorporated, this bill strikes the right balance between maintaining a **state-provided accreditation option at no cost to school districts** and ensuring schools have the flexibility to choose from an approved list of accreditation agencies that best meet their needs.

As amended, the bill:

- **Ensures that school districts have access to a state-funded accreditation option** through a contract secured by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, ensuring no financial barriers for districts.
- **Allows school districts to select an alternative accreditation agency from a state-approved list**, while requiring districts that opt for an alternative to cover

the associated costs. This approach mirrors the successful interim assessment model passed by the Legislature last session.

- **Maintains the authority of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to oversee the accreditation process** while incorporating meaningful input from educational stakeholders.

I greatly appreciate the committee's work in shaping this bill into a **strong, student-centered policy that supports our schools while preserving local flexibility.**

With that in mind, I respectfully request that the committee **consider moving this bill forward as is with no changes as quickly as possible** so it can get to the Governor's desk for signing. This will allow us to immediately begin working with our educational stakeholder partners to establish the approved accreditation list, ensuring that:

1. I can see this initiative through to completion, rather than leaving it as unfinished business for my successor.
2. School districts have the time they need to make accreditation decisions for the 2025-2026 school year.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your support for this important work, and I urge a **“do-pass”** recommendation.

Kirsten Baesler

State Superintendent

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Education Committee Coteau AB Room, State Capitol

SB 2362
3/17/2025

Relating to the accreditation of schools.

3:42 p.m. Chairman Heinert called the hearing to order.

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

Discussion Topics:

- Committee action

3:42 p.m. Representative Morton moved a Do Pass.

3:43 p.m. Representative Conmy seconded the motion.

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

Motion carried: 14-0-0

Bill carrier: Representative Morton

3:44 p.m. Chairman Heinert closed the hearing.

Leah Kuball, Committee Clerk

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
ENGROSSED SB 2362 ([25.1049.02000](#))**

Education Committee (Rep. Heinert, Chairman) recommends **DO PASS** (14 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). Engrossed SB 2362 was placed on the Fourteenth order on the calendar.