

Tribal and State Relations Committee

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Chairman Nelson, members of the Committee - I'm Valerie Fischer, Director of Adult Education for the Department of Public Instruction. I am here to provide follow up information regarding adult education and the GED program which was briefly discussed at the last meeting.

The GED - General Educational Development - was originally developed in 1942 to help WWII veterans who were often pulled from high school to serve their country. After serving four, sometimes six years, it was not practical to return to a traditional high school environment. The GED gave returning soldiers and sailors the academic credentials they needed to get civilian jobs and gain access to post-secondary education or training. Additionally, there were many immigrants that came to the United States at that time. The process then consolidated to the Department of Labor and finally evolved into the adult learning centers in the mid-1960s. Each stage included additional audiences - including those who left high school, the inability to pass required courses, the need to work (farming families), personal problems, etc.

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction receives federal funds under the Workforce Investment Act Title II and state funds (NDCC 15.1-26) to support the operations and free programs of seventeen (16) Adult Learning Centers located across the state (three of four reservations receive funds). Adult Education helps adults over the age of 16 obtain basic academic and educational skills to be productive workers, family members, and citizens. Adult education classes provide a second opportunity for adult learners committed to improving their academic and career skills. The four core programs are adult education,

GED services, Displaced Homemakers, and English as a Second Language (ESL) services for New Americans.

NDDPI requested and received an increase of \$1M in state funds during the 2015 legislative session, and all adult learning centers received more funding. Funds are disseminated to each site based on success, service area, volume of students served and other factors.

The GED is a series of four exams – reading/language arts, math, science and social studies. Once all four exams are successfully passed, NDDPI issues a GED diploma. In a typical year, we serve approximately 3500 students; about 70% acquire a GED, 75% obtain employment and 35% pursue post-secondary education (duplicated counts). Adult educations return on investment to the ND economy averages \$17-19 million dollars annually.

Every 10-12 years the GED is ‘ramped up’ to stay current with high school standards. In January 2014, we began a new series. The four exams are computer based which allows us to integrate keyboarding and computer literacy into instruction. Each exam costs \$30; an innovative partnership allows two test fees, or \$60, to be paid by the Bank of North Dakota as a token of its respect of the GED and also to support students to consider post-secondary education.

The new GED series is difficult; as a high school equivalency exam, it is based on four content area competencies and critical thinking skills rather than the previous rote memorization. The 2002 series had a national validation rate of 44% (40% in ND) when compared to high school seniors who were not able to pass the GED. To date the 2014 series is also demonstrating similar results.

During the last meeting, there was concern expressed about the rigor of the GED and whether an alternate exam would be more beneficial for reservation sites and Native American students. Our statistics tell us ...

- Statewide, our GED pass rate is 83% compared to the national rate of 67%;

- Reservation GED programs have a pass rate just 2% less than the state rate, and still more than 13% higher than the national rate;
- When comparing Native American students to non-Native American students in ND, data tells us that Native American students take approximately 28% more time to achieve the same educational gains;
- The same data source confirms that Native American students also have a younger drop out age and pre-assessment testing shows them to be almost 2.5 grade levels less their same age peers;
- Issues which affect Native American more than non-Native American students is attendance and retention which factor into success;
- What we can reasonable conclude from the data is that it may likely take most, not all, Native American students longer to acquire the GED, but we have excellent and caring staff, strong professional development and motivated students. We're early into the new GED cycle, our data is stronger than national data and we're pleased with our progress but will continue to work with all adult learning centers and improve the quality of instruction.

I hope I have provided an overview of the adult education program and the opportunities the GED program offers. This concludes my testimony and I'm available to answer any questions you have for me. If not, thank you for your time.