

Testimony for House Education

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

Nicole Poolman

Good morning, Chairman Owens and members of the Education Committee, my name is Nicole Poolman, state senator from District 7 here in Bismarck and Lincoln. I am here to introduce and offer an amendment to SB 2269.

SB 2269 applies to students between the ages of 18-22 with intellectual or developmental disabilities who are on an IEP (Individualized Education Plan). These students are educated in our districts until the age of 22 in accordance with federal law and are included in district ADM (Average Daily Membership) numbers. The programming from the ages of 18-22 focuses on transitioning students to adulthood by teaching them independent living and job skills.

This bill creates open enrollment opportunities for students in this age group to include not only transitional programming in their home district, but also transitional programming associated with a postsecondary program. There is currently only one of these programs in North Dakota: ASTEP on the campus of Minot State University, which currently has 7 students enrolled.

Students enrolled in ASTEP pay full tuition and room and board to Minot State, and families pay an additional \$8,000 fee to support the ASTEP programming and resources. In the past, the rest of ASTEP's transitional and life skills programming was paid for with federal grant dollars. Recently, the federal grant requirements changed, and now those dollars can only be used to create new programs at other postsecondary schools. This bill is an attempt to create a reliable funding stream going forward, but more importantly, it is an attempt to ensure students have access to the transitional programming that best suits their needs and goals.

You will hear from students and parents who have been part of the ASTEP program today, and they will fill you in on the many benefits of the program, so I will stick to the content of the bill and why it needs to be amended.

If you look at the next page, I have included the amendment in context. The amendment adds language to clarify that these are integrated formula payments – exactly what these students would have been eligible for had they stayed in their home districts. It also clarifies that the payment cannot exceed the per pupil payment and will be paid out at the same time school districts are currently paid.

This bill simply shifts the per pupil payments that would have gone to the home districts of these students and gives them an option that offers more independence and challenge. These are not new dollars, but merely a shift of dollars currently spent on these students.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 2269, and I will stand for any questions you may have.