



# North Dakota Small Organized Schools

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SB 2229

Testimony in support with amendment

Michael Heilman – Executive Director North Dakota Small Organized School

February 2, 2021

Chairman Schaible and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Michael Heilman. I am the Executive Director of the North Dakota Small Organized Schools (NDSOS). I represent 154-member school districts of the North Dakota Small Organized Schools. NDSOS stands in support of SB 2229 with the amendments suggested by Dr. Katherine Terras.

NDSOS member schools have been dealing with shortages of teachers in most areas for the better part of two decades. I was curious what NDSOS member schools might say to a quick two question survey conducted yesterday. You saw this information earlier today during testimony on SB 2332. I believe it is applicable to SB 2229 also.

Informal Survey conducted February 1, 2021 by North Dakota Small Organized School.

- Have you had difficulty filling teaching positions?  
Yes 50 +                      No 3
- What are the teaching areas of greatest need?
  - a. Special Ed                      17
  - b. Math                              15
  - c. Science                         15
  - d. Music                            13
  - e. CTE(Ag, FACS, Tech)       11
  - f. Elementary                    9

Other areas of need with 1-5 responses: Art, ELA, Counselor, Business, Early Childhood, Para’s, Bus Drivers, Nurse, Administrators, Custodians.

Comments from emails:

- 3 years no applicant
- Had one applicant, not qualified
- Left Ag Science position open last year

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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.**

- It takes up most of my time (recruiting and hiring qualified staff)
- Special Ed is by far # 1, without a doubt.
- Used to get 10 applicants, now we're lucky to get three.
- Had a math and elementary position unfilled. Retirements will make 21/22 difficult.
- Any position needing a pulse.

SB 2229 supports rural schools and encourages "student teachers" to consider one of the many rural schools in our state as a first option. NDSOS applauds the efforts of this bill to address teacher shortages in rural areas. The bill not only provides for a scholarship for the student, but recognizes the impact that mentorship has on retaining teachers. Many of our rural superintendents believe that if a teacher candidate experiences their school through student teaching, they have a real chance to retain these individuals and sign them to a teaching contract. I can speak from experience to this. I have a niece that student taught in a rural school and was thrilled when she had a chance sign a contract for the following year. She and her fiancé are both teach in a shortage area, she in special education and he in agriculture education.

NDSOS also supports the removal of exclusionary language from the bill as proposed by Dr. Terras of Certification Central. The current teacher preparation programs in the state do an excellent job preparing teachers, despite their efforts critical shortages still exist. Ask any school administrator and they can tell you how the number of applications they receive for most positions has declined drastically and in some cases there are no applicants. NDSOS believes we need all approved programs and the students enrolled in these programs included in this bill to address the ongoing teacher shortage. That completes my oral testimony. I will stand for questions.

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