



1 **SB2304 – Curriculum on Native American history**

2 **2/1/2021 – NDCEL Testimony in opposition**

3 Chairman Schaible and members of the committee – for the record my name is Aimee Copas –
4 serving as the Executive Director for the North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders. I come
5 to you today to offer testimony in opposition to SB 2304. Our opposition is grounded in approach
6 and not content. Please do not misconstrue our testimony as any sort of opposition about learning
7 about Native American Culture – it is beautiful and an environment that I grew up in and have
8 appreciated since my birth growing up on the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe in South Dakota with
9 the neighboring border of the Standing Rock Reservation right across the highway from our family
10 farm.

11 This testimony has to do more with allowing education to operate appropriately with everyone
12 supporting it in their appropriate roles and abiding by successful processes to determine
13 appropriate curriculum. I'll provide an analogy shared with me by a fellow superintendent. As a
14 school administrator, we wish for our school boards to wrap their arms around a district with
15 appropriate policy so their administrators and teachers can do a great job. However as soon as
16 they open their arms and dip their hands and fingers into the internal operations, the security of
17 good policy becomes compromised and entities become dysfunctional. Similarly, we view the
18 legislatures role with the state. We want them to wrap their arms around all of us with good sound
19 policy (law) and then allow the businesses, entities, and schools to do their jobs and all should be
20 better by that well-defined policy set by the state. This bill has the state opening its arms a little
21 too much and dipping hands and fingers into what should be the job of NDDPI through content
22 standards (which I'll show you they've done) and by our local boards that set curriculum for a
23 district, teachers that execute the approved curriculum by executing the content standards set forth
24 by NDDPI and by administrators who assure that has been completed.

25 Pages 36-38 (also please note Pg 7 of the guide which indicates the resources used) of the North
26 Dakota Social Studies Standards (which were just updated recently by a cohort of North Dakota
27 Educators in partnership with NDDPI, allowing time for feedback, public comment, multiple
28 meets and much effort according to the appropriate policy set forth by this legislative body), clearly
29 indicate a requirement for solid curriculum around Native American Essential understandings be
30 taught¹. It is thorough and developed and appropriate. You'll also notice that in the course of a
31 school year that a social studies teacher has a LOT to cover. Every teacher I know in every area
32 indicates it is a huge struggle to get all standards covered. Yet constantly educators are asked to
33 include more. Each session; and this session might be one of the more challenging with inclusion
34 of curriculum related bills, our teachers are asked to be mandated to include more. Often times
35 putting mandated emphasis on particular items of interest which are worthy – but are likely already

*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-----Assistant Director: Russ Ziegler



1 included in content standards. So, to carve out 4 weeks of instruction in 4th, 8th, and in HS US
2 History Class, I ask you what 4 weeks of standards and instruction are they supposed to no longer
3 teach? If this section is included for Civics, what 20 valuable lessons are you asking kids not to
4 learn? What 60 topics throughout their years in K12 are no longer important? A solid
5 understanding of Native American Culture and essential understandings is in our standards. Again
6 pages 7, 36-38 is dedicated to that requirement.

7 The state's role is to define broadly what needs to be covered (course areas) (this is wrapping your
8 arms around education with good policy). NDDPI is charged with setting standards. School
9 Boards are set with determining curriculum. Teachers are charged with executing those standards
10 and curriculum, and administrators are charged with assuring it and providing the needed
11 professional development to assist. This is a beautiful arrangement. We ask that we keep our roles
12 defined appropriately. We don't believe this bill provides the appropriate guidance and policy for
13 education. If there are specific pieces of Native American instruction that are missing from the
14 standards, there is a process and procedure in place to adjust that through the standards-based
15 process that allows for experts to develop with ample opportunity for public comment and
16 adjustment based on that opportunity. Inserting this into Century Code we do not believe is
17 appropriate and removes the layers of processes currently in place and the ability of local boards
18 and teachers to determine curriculum. Again, based on the reasons outlined we respectfully ask
19 for a do not pass on SB2304.

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21 References

- 22 1) [https://www.nd.gov/dpi/sites/www/files/documents/Academic%20Support/Final%20Social
23 Studies_Content%20Standards_Rev5_6.3.2020.pdf](https://www.nd.gov/dpi/sites/www/files/documents/Academic%20Support/Final%20Social%20Studies_Content%20Standards_Rev5_6.3.2020.pdf)

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