

HB 1532

Testimony in opposition

Chairman Sorvaag and members of the Senate Appropriations – Education and Environment Division. For the record my name is Travis Jordan and I’m currently the Superintendent of Beulah Public Schools. I would also like to note that during the 2015-2016 school year I was employed as a school superintendent of a private school.

I’m testifying today urging a “do not pass” on HB 1532. I want to clarify before diving further into my testimony that my children had a top-notch education at the private school at which I was employed, and I would also clarify that they are also receiving a top-notch education in Beulah. My testimony has nothing do with the deliverance of quality education as I believe all schools are doing their best to do so.

It is true that private schools do not have to take every student. I’ve sat in the family interviews in which we denied entrance to students and families. This was usually a direct result of the family’s belief’s and/or the academic skills of the children. A family’s financial status or ability to pay tuition was never really a factor as most families attending this private school qualified for some sort of tuition assistance already and received scholarships to help cover some of the costs. Has the research been done to find out exactly how many families already receive some sort of assistance to attend the private schools of their choice?

Furthermore, school voucher programs such as in HB 1532 creates a system of the “haves” and “have nots.” Not all families have the ability to pick up and move their child to a different school. This is especially true in rural North Dakota, as typically there is no alternative opportunity for education in those areas. And one would suspect from the narrative that we all

hear that families leave the public school system to escape bullying or for better academic opportunities. Bullying behavior is not immune to private schools – it happens there too. And as far as better academic opportunities? Josh Cowen, a Professor of Education Policy at Michigan State University has studied school voucher programs for more than two decades and his research shows that school voucher programs have actually contributed to greater learning loss gaps across the country rather than shrink them. You can hear about his research in the Podcast that I have linked below.

\$24 million dollars is a lot of money. It's certainly a lot of money to throw at something that we simply have not studied enough and at something that only affects a small portion of our states' students. I'm a mental health advocate and I can't help but think what \$24 million dollars could do for ALL children and their mental health. If we want schools to improve, we cannot ignore mental health.

I urge a "do not pass" on HB 1532. At the very least, cut the \$24 Million-dollar fiscal note from the bill and send it on to a study.

Link

Have You Heard Podcast – Episode #143 entitled Moving the Goal Posts.

<https://soundcloud.com/haveyouheardpodcast/goalposts>)