

Testimony
HB 1532
Senate Education Committee
March 14, 2023

Chair Elkin, Vice Chair Beard, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

The Fargo Board of Education governs the Fargo Public School District with student achievement as our central focus. We are the 3rd largest district in the state with over 11,000 students and the 4th largest employer in the Fargo-Moorhead community with over 2,200 full and part-time employees. We are writing to you in opposition to House Bill 1532. This bill would have a detrimental impact on the quality of North Dakota's public education system and our students.

HB 1532 aims to create a program that would require our superintendent to funnel public funds to private schools. As a Board, we firmly believe that public dollars belong to our public schools. While we support parents' rights to choose where their children receive an education, public dollars must stay within our public system – a system that is accountable to our taxpayers, legally-bound to meet the needs of our students and is proven to positively impact student achievement.

By law, public schools are required to follow the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. These laws require us to meet the wide range of needs that our students bring to the district. For example, we must identify and evaluate students who may have disabilities, vary instruction based on need, install equipment such as wheelchair ramps, employ sign-language interpreters, and attend to any other accommodation needed to make our schools, facilities and activities accessible for all. Private schools are not held to these same standards, nor are they under obligation to follow Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Plus, private schools have leeway to turn away students, which we do not and would not do. HB 1532 would allow public funds to flow to private entities that are not required to follow public laws.

As a Board, student achievement is our central focus. There is no evidence that vouchers improve student performance. We strongly encourage the Committee to oppose programs and initiatives that do not have a record of success.

And finally, our public schools are the backbone of society. A strong public school system contributes to less unemployment, reduced crime, improved public health and a strong workforce. If funds are pulled from our school, something will have to give. Will we pay our teachers less or employ fewer counselors? Will we cut programs such as music or art?

We strongly encourage you to give a Do Not Pass recommendation on HB 1532.

Katie Christensen
Governmental Affairs Committee - Member
On behalf of Fargo Board of Education