

TESTIMONY ON SB 2013
SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
January 18, 2007
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee,

I am Dr. Wayne G. Sanstead, State Superintendent. It is my privilege, on behalf of the Department of Public Instruction, to provide this overview of the Department's 2007-09 biennial budget presented in SB 2013. Although Bonnie Miller, Fiscal Management Director, and other Department staff members will provide a more detailed presentation on the various aspects of our Department's operational budget and the supplemental requests contained within SB 2013, I welcome this opportunity to offer comments regarding the Department's role in advancing quality educational services and facilitating educational reforms for all students and schools within North Dakota.

Our educational system needs to be responsive to our students. They must become skilled in basic core areas, proficient in communications, teamwork, problem-solving, and they must be able to compete in a global society. We need to increase academic requirements – invest in foreign language – fund early education programs, strengthen math and science, provide career counseling, and improve reading and language skills.

Throughout this past year, education and community leaders have been engaged in an extensive study to reform the state's long-standing education finance policy to better ensure an equitable distribution of the state's resources to our schools. This study, initiated as a result of a lawsuit by school districts statewide, has produced a series of proposals that will be debated by this legislative assembly, including certain elements that emerge within SB 2013. Our Department's budget serves as the carrier for the appropriations of any resulting school finance formula and, as such, represents a collaborative effort to advance historic educational finance reform for this state. Although all elements of this finance reform will be properly deliberated, this move to reform the financing of our schools cannot be diminished in importance. These proposals and this bill, SB 2013, stand as the latest expressions of education reform and the call for greater accountability that has emerged in recent years.

This past week we observed the fifth anniversary of the enactment of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the reauthorizing legislation for the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*. For these past five years, the institutions of education have undergone a period of profound transition, and this transition has had all the feel of a revolution. The public and the public's representatives, both in Washington and with this legislative assembly, have placed upon educators new expectations for performance. And being the good stewards they are, educators have met the call to honor this mandate. These past several years have not been business as usual.

Educators have traditionally approached the work of teaching with a unique sense of mission, driven by both an embrace of tradition and a cautious openness to innovation. For generations the public has financially supported education without question and with little recourse. Resources have been allotted to education on the presumption that educators would see to it that the job of education got done. Education has run historically on a "trust me" attitude. As long as schools were open, certain classes were taught, and students moved along in a largely predictable pattern, all was right with the world.

Recent changes in federal and state legislation underscore the point that what was once acceptable in a largely agrarian or industrial society is no longer palatable today. Education has now joined most other sectors of the economy where the public's expectations have evolved in sophistication and where accountability for results is now demanded. Over the past two decades, through the balanced initiatives of educational research and federal and state law, an over-riding principle of accountability has emerged: the education system must account for measured achievement against challenging standards. The true value of education is no longer evaluated by what is professed, but rather, by what is evidenced.

The public and policymakers have demanded accountability throughout education. And many aspects of the regulation of standards and the monitoring for accountability compliance have fallen upon the Department of Public Instruction. Ensuring a fair, high-quality educational accountability system is hard, demanding work. Compared with the past, educational accountability is increasingly sophisticated, researched, and properly obsessed with issues of validity and reliability. The Department of Public Instruction, with its statutory mission to monitor for compliance with state and federal law, assumes these duties with a sense of adherence, balance, and proportionality.

It is the responsibility of the Department to draft, with consultation of educators and citizens statewide, appropriate standards for academic content, achievement, and school requirements.

It is the responsibility of the Department to provide appropriate measures of academic achievement through valid and reliable academic assessments for all students, including students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency.

It is the responsibility of the Department to provide appropriate measures of school and school district performance through annual adequate yearly progress reports and detailed school profile reports.

It is the responsibility of the Department to ensure that all schools meet approval and accreditation requirements, including standards of highly qualified teachers, health, safety, and academic capacity.

It is the responsibility of the Department to ensure that all schools meet minimal federal and state safety and nutritional standards regarding the provision of appropriate school food services to all students.

It is the responsibility of the Department to collect, compile, analyze, and issue all required public reports regarding the capacity and performance of our state's schools and school districts and to distribute accurate payments for all foundation aid and federal grant compensation.

It is the responsibility of the Department to ensure that all school finance procedures, federal grant finances and program activities, and related matters are conducted according to established financial rules and undergo periodic compliance audits.

It is the responsibility of the Department to ensure that all federal and state mandated performance reports are properly compiled, validated, and submitted to the state's legislative council, the U.S. Department of Education, other third-party organizations, and the public.

It is the responsibility of the Department to ensure that accurate, validated information and technical assistance is provided to all schools, school districts, the legislative assembly, other state and federal agencies, and the wider public regarding all aspects of our state's educational system.

It is the responsibility of the Department to study future education initiatives, with the consultation of interested parties statewide, to anticipate and meet future educational needs.

It is my job, as Superintendent, to provide educational leadership and to inform you, as policy makers, about the state of education in North Dakota, and as such, I refer you to the document "A Call for Leadership and Action." Page 2 of the document is key in that it describes North Dakota Education today. While it begins with "Where We Shine Academically" it moves on to state "What We Must Do Better" and in doing so, forewarns us about cracks appearing in our educational system; Page 4 describes our current strengths but also outlines challenges

relating to student well-being. Page 6 demonstrates, sad to say, a continuing decline in our student population. These facts are presented as a blueprint for action.

These are but a few of the many responsibilities that the Department of Public Instruction is held responsible for administering for the purposes of ensuring compliance with existing laws and regulations and for pursuing longer term, statewide school improvement measures.

Providing these services and administering these duties, rests with the qualified and dedicated staff members who make up the Department of Public Instruction. I am honored to supervise the performance of their duties.

Mr. Chairman, public service is a difficult and humbling calling; it is demanding work. For the state to advance the public's good, the educational efforts of department staff must be recognized, supported, and funded. It is these fellow North Dakota citizens who administer the will of policymakers and conduct the peoples' business.

The budget contained in SB 2013 provides for the conduct of the peoples' business. I ask that you consider its provisions with care and act favorably on its adoption. My staff and I are available to you to answer all questions you might have throughout your deliberations. As always, Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I look forward to a constructive relationship with you as we, together, proceed to do the peoples' business.

Mr. Chairman, this completes my testimony. I am available to answer any questions. Following any questions, I wish to introduce Bonnie Miller, Financial Management Director within the Department of Public Instruction, who will continue with a detailed overview of the provisions contained within SB 2013. Thank you.