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For Immediate Release

Aug. 3, 2015

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Baesler Teacher Shortage Task Force Proposal Adopted

BISMARCK, N.D., Aug. 3, 2015 – North Dakota Superintendent Kirsten Baesler’s teacher shortage task force on Monday proposed giving school districts that are having difficulty hiring teachers the authority to request a hardship waiver.

The waiver would allow a community expert to become a classroom teacher in the subject of his or her expertise. For example, a school district could hire an experienced farmer who lacks a college degree in education to be licensed to teach vocational agriculture.

North Dakota’s Education Standards and Practices Board, which is the state’s teacher licensing agency, voted unanimously on Monday to endorse the proposal. Under its terms, waiver applications would go to the ESPB, which would decide whether to approve them.

The board will now draft emergency administrative rules that will go into detail about how the hardship waivers will work, and under what conditions they may be used. Waivers would be good for one year.

Baesler said the step is necessary because many of North Dakota’s 179 public school districts are still scrambling to find teachers for the 2015-16 school year. Some districts are starting classes in less than three weeks.

Baesler said that 129 of North Dakota’s 179 public school districts responded to a recent survey about their success in hiring teachers. As of noon Monday, Baesler said, there were 72 elementary teaching positions that had not been filled, and 102 open high school and middle school positions.

Responding to concerns from North Dakota school administrators, Baesler assembled a task force in June to explore ways to alleviate the state’s teacher shortage. At its second meeting Monday, the group recommended asking the ESPB to give school districts the option of requesting hardship waivers if they were having difficulties recruiting a licensed teacher.

At its own meeting later Monday, the ESPB approved the proposal and authorized the drafting of emergency administrative rules to implement it.

North Dakota’s administrative rules process allows agencies, with the governor’s approval, to implement emergency rules by filing them with the Legislative Council, which is the research arm of the North Dakota Legislature.

Baesler said her task force would continue working on longer-term solutions to North Dakota’s teacher shortage. “Our work is not over,” she said. “It is just beginning.”

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