



# Gateway to Science

February 1, 2021

North Dakota House Education Committee  
North Dakota House of Representatives

Re: HB1478

Dear House Education Committee Members,

I am writing to state my support of Learn Everywhere HB1478, a bill that would allow students to earn credit for quality out-of-school time (OST) learning experiences. Students across the state are active in afterschool clubs, summer camps, internships, and other activities where they are finding inspiration and hands-on experience applicable to their future careers. These career explorations that occur in informal settings can be critical to developing a student's preliminary skills and ultimately lead to a greater motivation to learn in a formal setting.

At Gateway to Science, North Dakota's hands-on science center located in Bismarck, we offer a variety of interactive STEM opportunities in an informal setting for students of all ages. Career exploration is an integral part of all of our OST programs, especially for our middle school camps. STEM professionals from local businesses partner with Gateway to Science educators to lead hands-on activities, share their experiences and passion with students, and provide an insight into their jobs in camps focused on topics ranging from engineering to environmental sciences. The impact on our STEM campers made by these professionals, educators, and businesses is immeasurable. Our connection with the Bismarck Public Schools Career Academy introduces students to a variety of study areas and careers.

A week-long STEM camp typically provides middle school students with approximately 35 contact hours of interactive, hands-on learning. What do students do during our STEM camps? They may collect soil samples and run basic soil analysis, or review blueprints and visit a construction site, or intubate a medical training dummy, or practice gas metal arc welding, or fly a drone, and so much more. This is the type of highly interactive learning experience that Gateway to Science would submit for consideration to earn credits for our students.

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The inspiration to learn about science, and other subjects too, often comes from an informal experience. A *Nature* magazine article, “Learning in the Wild: Much of what people know about science is learned informally. Education policy-makers should take note,” published online in April 2010 supports this observation: <https://www.nature.com/articles/464813b>. “The personal nature of informal science education is what makes it powerful. The question 'why is this relevant?' never even arises.”

Learn Everywhere HB1478 supports North Dakota’s “choice ready” approach to education, allowing students to seek out opportunities that fit their individual learning goals. Student-centered education that incorporates OST opportunities can build on students’ unique and innate gifts, helping them to maximize their ability to contribute to society.

I strongly encourage that HB1478 receive a positive vote from the House Education Committee.

Sincerely,

Beth Demke  
Executive Director