

Our daughter, Elowen Butz, was enrolled in Tech Trep Academy (TTA) through Yellowstone Virtual Academy of North Dakota for the 2022-2023 school year but was forcibly unenrolled because the school board has refused to sign the required cost share form. We, and many other North Dakotan families, are being forced into homeschooling due to this situation. Yellowstone Virtual Academy and Tech Trep provided us access to community, in person and virtual field trips, and the support of the virtual school system. Due to this innovative opportunity in North Dakota, we can better meet the needs of our children. We like to say that the kids are our future, but what kind of future are we building for them? Who knows our kids better than us, the parents?

In this tuition-free public school we were assigned a North Dakota licensed teacher and my child is required to meet North Dakota State Standards. The teacher answers questions, encourages student learning, and approves documentation of proof of student learning. With this schooling at home model. I, as the parent, am held accountable for my child's learning and was turning in physical proof every other week for every subject. This model helped me to feel confident that my daughter was learning, not only things she needs to be successful, but also real-life applications. If she one day chooses to join Bismarck Public Schools for high school, she will be prepared.

Because Elowen is not in a classic brick and mortar school, she is able to participate in more field trips, experience hands-on learning, and live on a schedule that is conducive to her needs and learning style. As a five-year-old, she attends 5-6 hours of therapies every single week. She struggles with debilitating anxiety and issues with executive functioning, such as planning and decision making. She was also a witness to domestic violence outside of our home. Accessing the number of resources she needs, while remaining in a North Dakota public school, was only possible because of this advancement in technology. I appreciate that we can school at home and meet North Dakota's state academic standards without compromising my child's mental health or quality of education. We have made trips to the zoo, Gateway to Science, the library, the History Museum, and Medora.

One big question is probably, "what are our kids missing by not being in a brick-and-mortar school?" You know what my kid is missing out on by not being in the Bismarck Public School system? She is missing out on possible bullying that could incite her anxiety. She is missing out on classrooms with too many kids and exhausted teachers, who cannot possibly address all of her needs. She is missing out on sitting at a desk for a large part of the day, which is frustrating and can be difficult for any child. She is missing out on not having full access to the mental health services she needs because the resources our schools are able to provide are limited. Schooling at home allows us to meet Elowen's mental health needs without her having to be pulled from school multiple times a week or being a distraction to her classmates by coming and going for appointments.

Elowen is always asking questions, and because she is not in a traditional classroom, every question can be answered. Whether it's something I already know, a quick google search, or a trip to the library, we don't have to worry about interrupting an entire class's learning and her questions don't have to go unanswered. We are growing confident problem solvers who can be independent but aren't afraid to ask for help.

Put students first, not school districts. Please allow students to participate in Yellowstone Virtual Academy regardless of what school district they live in. We are building a stronger generation, a stronger future, a stronger North Dakota.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration,

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