

Regarding HB1376

My name is Heidi Pope, I am a resident of Bismarck, and I am a constituent in District 47. I am honored to be here to share my experiences and thoughts.

My husband and I are parents of 5 children. Our children have had a variety of educational opportunities and experiences over the past 25 years, including community schools, commonwealth schools run by families, public schools, concurrent enrollment programs offered by community colleges and universities and online schools similar to YVA. We have loved being involved in the education of our children. We are currently homeschooling our youngest child, a 13 yr old son in 8th grade.

Last summer we decided that he needed an educational experience that would help him prepare to attend our local high school. We wanted him to have more accountability to and feedback from teachers and mentors other than his parents. Yellowstone Virtual Academy (YVA) was a great fit for us, it was portable, he wouldn't miss school when we traveled, it gave us standards aligned curriculum, gave him accountability and the chance to excel in high quality STEM courses, activities and clubs—which he loves.

Like nine other Bismarck students, our son was denied the opportunity to participate in Yellowstone Virtual Academy (YVA) by our local school superintendent and school board. They were asked to sign a ZERO Tuition Cost share agreement (a document required in the state of ND). This document stated that BPS would NOT be financially responsible for any portion of our students' education while they were enrolled at YVA.

Currently the Century code defers the authority to the local school boards and superintendents—NOT PARENTS—for making critical decisions about a student's educational environment. I don't see how this could be fairly done with students who have never been in the school system, that administrators don't know. This is a tragic misplacement of authority.

It's important to understand that NONE of these students would have pulled ANY funding out of the Bismarck School district because each of these 9 students had been previously homeschooled or not been enrolled in school yet.

I have seen that when parents have educational options for their students it fuels innovation and creativity. Educational options generate transformational learning experiences for students.

If school district administrators are permitted to deny a student the right to participate in a ND state sanctioned, standards based Virtual Academy– that is overseen by a North Dakota school board and Superintendent– and is supervised by North Dakota teachers– then educational equality for North Dakota students stops right here. ND education would take a backward step– away from “empowering every student to learn and be choice ready”at graduation– in favor of allowing the continuance of an outdated tradition of school districts operating like monopolies exercising authority, without accountability.

My son is currently an 8th grader. YVA powered by Tech Trep is available only for students in grades K-8th.

There are online schools offered in ND, such as the Center for Distance Learning. These virtual schools cost families between \$1200-1600 per year per student. Mandan offers another online option for students, but there is no virtual academy– provided in the state of ND– that is able to offer students the support and connection that YVA by way of TTA is able to. They offer families and students;

- Weekly teacher and administrative support, grading, communication and accountability for students and parents.
- Local Field trips
- Organized Community of friends and opportunities to participate in exceptional community events
- Online and in person clubs and classes
- STEAM lessons
- Special education options for students with learning disabilities
- Online educational tools that fit individual student’s needs and interests and programs that inspire every type of learner;

In addition, students have tuition free, unlimited access to many of the most innovative learning tools available online. Such as:

Epic, Brain Pop, Generation Genius, LEARN 360, MiWrite, Time/Edge, Code Monkey, IXL MOBY Max, Prodigy, Reflex Math, Study Island, Math Seeds, Edu-Typing, Accelerated Reader, Kids Discover, Adventure Academy, Center-vention, Beast Academy, CTC Math, DreamBox, Mr. Math, Dreamscape, Quill, Kiwi Co., ULAT (spanish/ French language program), Education.com, Flocabulary, Microsoft 360, ALEKS, Mystery Science, Music Lessons, LEXIA, Mathletics, Tinker Coding, Power up, ASL, Evan-Moore teacher files, Exact Path, Thinkwell, and more.

Yellowstone Virtual Academy, powered by TechTrep Academy, is not a homeschool program. In fact the local homeschool community strongly affirms that this is not homeschooling at all, its schooling at home—in an environment parents can choose, using state standards based curriculum and additional resources to meet the individual needs of their students.

YVA offers a program that fills a current gap between traditional homeschooling and public school attendance. This virtual program is not for everyone, but it is a great option for parents who share 50/50 custody of their children who spent time with both parents throughout the school year-but do not need to miss school to do so. It ideally fits families who travel and families with students who need special education support for students with learning disabilities or anxiety. It is outstanding for students who need to work at a slower pace, and for students who like to work ahead of schedule, and it is a great fit for families like mine who want to prepare a student to excel in high school, by increasing accountability to a teacher other than mom and dad.

YVA offers families an option— so that if needed, ND students can be educated in a non-traditional setting and still receive a North Dakota standards-aligned education. It is not intended to replace homeschool or public school. But It is an excellent way to support families like mine who have previously homeschooled, but are now seeking more accountability, more accessibility and more innovation to meet the needs of their students.

North Dakota Families need educational options. It is just not feasible to expect that every student is going to fit into a local public school program and be able to excel there or that every parent who's student doesn't fit the public school mold will be able to homeschool them.

School choice is gaining momentum across the country. Please give North Dakota families the right to choose to enroll in online schools such as Yellowstone Virtual Academy. Please put the students first in this decision.

Thank you for your time,
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