

HB 1376 Parent Student School Choice

Representative Michelle Strinden

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For the record, my name is Michelle Strinden and I represent the people of South Fargo's District 41.

Every child is unique, and all children learn differently. Parents need to be empowered to pursue the educational environment that best fits their children and align's with their personal values. According to EdChoice.org, a non-profit foundation founded by economist Milton Friedman, today there are 76 educational choice programs on the books in 32 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The Center for Education Reform lists Florida leading the country as the number one state that expands parental opportunities for their children's education. Other states that rank at the top of the list include Arizona, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and Minnesota to name a few. Sadly, North Dakota is at the very bottom of the annual assessment called the Parent Power Index which ranks states on the degree to which they allow school choice options and parental involvement.

North Dakota K-12 students and their families have very little choice. Parents education options for their children are expensive private schools, homeschooling, and very limited open enrollment. Many North Dakota children succeed at their assigned public school, but some students need a different learning environment that better fits their unique needs. For instance, bullying may make a school environment dangerous to a child's social and emotional well-being. Perhaps a struggling reader in 1st or 2nd grade could learn to read in

another school better trained to teach the science of reading. The Covid 19 pandemic has also led to parents greater understanding about how their children are being educated. The pandemic increased school disruptions in many ND districts with school closings and mask mandates. This caused many parents across our state and country to look to other options for schooling and increased the school choice movement nationwide.

HB 1376 allows parents more involvement in deciding what is best for their children's education and gives parents increased flexibility to solve problems that are hindering or even harming their children. The bill still provides reasonable provisions for public schools that are at capacity, while encouraging healthy competition and incentivizing schools to improve instruction for all students. This is a very good thing and much needed given North Dakota's low reading and math proficiency rates. According to our ND DPI's dashboard, our students are only 44% proficient in ELA and 39% proficient in math.

HB 1376 states that a school of residence may not deny enrollment of a student at the Career for Distance Education to ensure that every student has the opportunity to pursue online courses that meet their unique needs. Students also must be able to open enroll virtually at another ND approved school district if they choose to do so. Currently, school district administrators have the power to deny students from enrolling in other North Dakota virtual schools.

The Yellowstone School District (K-8) in McKenzie County is one such public school providing a virtual school learning opportunity for students. Tech Trep is the vendor providing a personalized flexible curriculum and methods for a 21st Century global economy. Yellowstone is also excelling in math and reading proficiency. [Insights.nd.gov](https://insights.nd.gov)

shows that Yellowstone School District is outperforming state reading and math scores by 20 to 25 points respectively.

This fall, resident schools refused to sign the cost sharing agreement for approximately 30 North Dakota students who wanted to enroll in the Yellowstone School District's virtual school. Many of these students were homeschooled children, which means they would not lose one dollar of the per pupil payment. These families wrote letters to their superintendent's and school boards explaining their situations and asking them to reconsider, but unfortunately they were still denied enrollment.

What is best for the children? It's time for North Dakota to take a step in the right direction. School choice options can help certain students find a safer and more appropriate learning environment tailored to meet their needs. It provides options for low income families and holds public schools accountable. ND parents deserve the right to choose quality education that improves academic achievement for their kids. School choice means freedom to choose, and our ND education system needs more of it.

Thank you for your consideration, Chair Elkin and Senate Education committee. I stand for any questions you may have.