

1/17/24

Dear Legislators,

My name is Jodi Webb, and I am a mother of two. This year will be my daughter's last year, as she began her second semester as a senior. She follows her brother who graduated two years ago. My daughter was diagnosed at an early age with severe anxiety, depression, and Ulcerative Colitis (just last year). My daughter has been on a 504 plan (which creates a plan of accommodations to help her to be successful in school) since the third grade. During that time, my children attended their local K-12 school. My husband and I felt that moving out to a smaller town just outside of Minot would allow for a closer team and a continuum of supports as she aged. Covid hit during middle school for my daughter, both of my children struggled with their online classes and the organizational structure and implementation of distance learning with our public school. The school did not follow through with the necessary accommodations and my daughter struggled and became very removed as many students did.

When school reopened my children went back with everyone else, however my daughter was acting differently. Again, we went to try and get the 504 plan implemented but it was always a struggle and beyond frustrating. Absenteeism began to be an issue. My daughter became unable to attend both physically and emotionally. With the lack of needed services and supports my daughter spiraled into a hole so much so that she began to plan how she would commit suicide.

As a parent that is watching their child wilt away, your heart screams for a resolution. We decided to remove my daughter from public school. We could not put her in a neighboring school due to her anxiety and with her mental and physical health so fragile we needed to find a flexible and accommodating school. That school was NDCDE. My daughter began her first classes at the beginning of October in 2020. When we enrolled, we had 1 to 1 support from a counselor who walked us through different high school learning tracks. On the first day of classes her teachers emailed her and /or sent her a welcome email. Classes are challenging, interactive and the best part; NDCDE teachers implemented her accommodations on her 504 plan! My daughter and I joke that we hear and talk more to her distance education teachers than the ones she saw in person every day.

When my daughter experienced her first flare up from her Ulcerative Colitis, we were able to pause her learning to then come back and to start where she had left off.

I am a strong believer in putting the decisions into the hands of the people. People should be able to freely choose what type of education they want their children to receive. There are not a lot of options for alternative schooling. We do not have charter schools, we have

minimal private schools with majority of them being church based. The cost for private school puts a financial burden on a family who is seeking better education for their children. I have invested \$5,500 in my daughter's education and before that \$3,300 on her brother. I did this because there were not any other options in our rural town. We chose financial burden and have invested in my daughter by bringing her to NDCDE. With the classes being available for free ND would be breaking down barriers for rural, low income and underserved families, giving them the tools to have choice in the education of their children.

NDCDE developed my daughter's independence, gave her a reliable school team that makes her feel great and that holds her accountable. The 504 plan was finally being implemented allowing her academic success. Most importantly my daughter's mental health was so much better. We were not struggling to get out of bed before 8, begging her to get in the car, getting out of the car. There was not any more faking being sick or physically making herself throw up to avoid going to school. To bring the positives out even further, with my daughter attending NDCDE I was able to arrange multiple work experiences to allow my daughter to try the types of careers available to her. If she stayed in her old school she would not have had that opportunity.

I highly oppose this bill, as I believe in the choice of free public virtual learning. NDCDE is a full support system and a lifeline for students with disabilities, chronic health issues, advanced students and students who have highly active schedules. If it were not for NDCDE I am positive that my daughter would not be here, graduating in almost 4 months.

Please reach out to me if you have any questions

Sincerely,

Jodi Webb

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