

Verbal Testimony for the North Dakota Senate Education Committee
Monday, Feb 3, 2025

Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Bobbi Smith. I am currently a teacher in a 4th/5th grade classroom at a Montessori Charter School in rural Utah. I was born and raised in North Dakota in a small town called Carson; it's about 60 miles SW of Bismarck. The town I grew up in had a population of about 150 people. My roots and heart are deeply embedded in this state. My father and brother still reside here in North Dakota. I will always hold a love for this state and I am honored to be able to speak to you today.

I have been an educator for 24 years. I began my career in Arizona where I had the opportunity to work in a few different traditional school districts in the Phoenix metro area. I have taught grades first through fifth. I have taught in a rapidly growing district (we were enrolling approximately 200 students a week), an inner city school district (this was in the heart of Phoenix in a predominantly hispanic area), and a smaller suburban district (this was very much a "normal" student population). All had a great influence on myself as a teacher. I had opportunities to try new things, but it never felt truly satisfying to me. I then moved to southern Utah, where after 12 years of teaching, I was unsure if I even wanted to continue my career in education, I thought this might be a good time for me to try something new. Little did I know that my something new would be a rural charter school.

That is when I had been presented with the opportunity to try something different, something I was very indifferent about. I had always heard rumors about how charter schools don't have the same expectations, that it may be "less" of an education, it's expensive, it's going to harm the school districts and we will lose our staff, these are just a few that I personally believed. I was hesitant to even apply, but I did and it was so invigorating and refreshing. In many ways it reminded me of how I went to school. The school gave me a sense of community and belonging. I felt recognized and was awarded so many more opportunities to grow as a teacher. In the charter setting, there are so many chances to be a part of many things you may not get from the larger district approach. Your voice is heard and matters in affairs that affect the school and your classroom. I soon found that many of the "rumors" I had heard were vastly untrue. It is another choice for parents, teachers, and students to find the place that best fits their learning and educational philosophies. I fell in love with this rural charter school. I soon came to realize that charter schools are an amazing choice for everyone, especially the rural community.

To close, I believe that charter schools give many opportunities for flexibility in teaching and learning. I was able to gain my Montersossri training through our charter school and found that this really appealed to me and my future as a teacher. I once again found my love for teaching which has been quite dull prior. I have been able to have several leading roles at my school too. I was able to be a grade level lead, worked on curriculum choices and mapping, aligning our beliefs to meet the state guidelines. I have been able to work closely with our teaching staff and the SPED program to lead the Response to Intervention team, which has been highly rewarding for me as a teacher. These are all very valuable to make me feel like an important member of our school's community. I truly believe that this was all because I found an amazing charter school. Never would I have thought this would be my place, but it really is. I would like to thank you for your time today for me to share my experiences as a charter school teacher. I'd be more than happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you!

Warm Regards;

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