

Verbal Testimony for the North Dakota Senate Education Committee

Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. My name is Amy Gibson, and I am the Assistant Director at Gateway Preparatory Academy, a public charter school in Enoch, Utah. We serve students in grades K-8 through on-site, hybrid, and distance learning. As a rural school, we are dedicated to providing an individualized education that emphasizes both academic excellence and practical life skills.

Because we are not a boundary school, families make a deliberate choice to attend Gateway. This means we must work intentionally to create a sense of community—and we have. Our families love the relationships we have built, the welcoming environment we foster, and the strong connections between students, teachers, and staff. We are more than just a school; we are a place where every child belongs.

Accountability and Oversight

There is often a misconception that charter schools operate without accountability, but in reality, we answer to multiple layers of oversight. In addition to state and federal Title I requirements, Gateway is held to a comprehensive performance framework by the Utah State Charter School Board (SCSB). This framework evaluates whether we are:

1. Academically successful
2. Financially healthy
3. Operationally sound

As part of this oversight, Gateway recently underwent its 15-year comprehensive review, which assessed our academic outcomes, financial stability, governance, and operational effectiveness. The results highlight our strong financial position, exemplary student growth, and compliance with state requirements. Notably, the review found no material audit findings, no unresolved compliance issues, and a financial health rating well above the charter school portfolio average.

Academic Performance & Student Success

I want to be clear—I'm not sharing this data to brag, but to show that it is possible. It is possible to run a highly accountable charter school that prioritizes students, fosters community, and achieves real academic success.

Over the past year:

- English Language Arts proficiency increased by 8%
- Math scores improved by 12%
- Science scores grew by 10%
- Third-grade reading proficiency exceeded the state's goal of 70%, reaching 71%

Additionally, our RISE assessment growth has been recognized as exemplary by the Utah State Board of Education, and we are outperforming many of our peer schools in English, math, and science growth metrics.

Financial Stability & Efficient Resource Use

Without a district structure, we can allocate resources directly to classrooms—resulting in two adults in every K-5 classroom and extensive special education support. Our recent financial review shows Gateway maintains over 200 days of cash on hand, demonstrating strong fiscal health, and we continue to prioritize teacher compensation and student-focused investments.

A Community-Driven Charter School

What makes working at a charter school so special is the ability to prioritize students first. At Gateway, we see challenges firsthand and can address them immediately without bureaucratic red tape. Our small administrative team wears many hats, allowing us to secure grants quickly, pivot when student needs evolve, and continuously improve our programs.

Most importantly, we have built a true community—a place where every student, teacher, and family feels welcome. Our mission is not just a statement; it's something we live every day: *"To provide children an individualized education emphasizing practical life skills and demonstrations of student learning in a safe, respectful, and supportive environment."*

In an unsure world, we give students the tools, confidence, and resilience to succeed. When students leave Gateway, they are confident, capable, and prepared for the opportunities ahead.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to share our story. I welcome any questions you may have.