

Testimony for SB2295

Chairman Heinert, and members of the committee:

My name is Katie Vidmar, I am a native of Mott, ND and my life trajectory was shaped by my parents' exercising school choice. I graduated the 8th grade from St. Vincent's Catholic school, a small rural parochial school that closed in 1998. I received an incredible education from this tiny place, and I wonder if it may have lasted longer if school choice policies had been adopted earlier.

As for my husband Jeremy and I, being able to exercise school choice has made all the difference for our family. This is especially true for our oldest daughter Mary Claire who has a non-specified neurodevelopmental disorder, as well as a cognitive disability.

Our family had been living in Mott, North Dakota, and while the local school district was doing the best they could, it was clear their capacity to serve our daughter was limited. As an early elementary student, spending 80% of her time in a resource room was very isolating for Mary Claire and we began to be concerned for her social and emotional well-being. It was then that we began to seriously consider moving from our beloved rural community to be closer to better support for Mary Claire, as well as an educational system equipped to be more inclusive of our daughter. It was then that we discovered Christ the King Catholic Montessori School in Mandan.

We were drawn to Montessori education and Christ the King specifically because by nature of the educational philosophy embraced at the school, having children of varying ages and abilities present in the same environment is the norm. Administration was clear they didn't have the same LD supports as a Public School, but they were willing to work with us to find creative solutions to integrate Mary Claire into the CTK community. We moved in October of 2021, and our oldest three children are now enrolled at the school.

Mary Claire is thriving. She's fully integrated in a lower elementary environment, where her presence as a member of her community is valued and even treasured. We've partnered with a local outpatient pediatric therapy group that sends PT, OT, and Speech Therapists to treat Mary Claire in the context of her school day, allowing for collaboration between her teachers and therapists. We feel we've found the setting that is truly the best fit for our daughter.

Christ the King has been wonderful for our other children as well. Our 8 year old son has dyslexia, and an embodied approach to reading meets him at the point of his need. Our 6 year old daughter is an extremely precocious Kindergartner. She's doing academic work well above her same-age peers, while also enjoying the leadership she has as one of the oldest children in her 3 to 6 year old environment.

Jeremy and I have 3 more children at home, which means at some point we'll be paying private school tuition times 6. This is a significant financial commitment on our behalf, and the burden is real.

Some may hold the opinion that perhaps if rural school districts received more funding for special education, perhaps our family could have been better supported in Mott. While more

support is always helpful, what we have found at Christ the King is a unique philosophy of education that allows Mary Claire to be integrated with her peers, leading to her growth socially, emotionally and spiritually in a way that even a very well-funded public school cannot accommodate. Simply appropriating more dollars to our rural public school would not have been enough to keep us there, as it would have been simply “more of the same,” not the kind of holistic educational support we are receiving now at CTK.

As taxpayers and parents, we are grateful to the Senate for considering this assistance to families. For us, it would make all the difference.