

Hello, thank you for having us here today. My name is Paxtyn Steckler, I'm a stay at home mom and full time Realtor here in Bismarck/Mandan. My husband and I reside in Lincoln and we have three little boys. Two of our children attend Saint Joseph's Catholic Montessori School in Mandan. You're probably sitting in your seats right now thinking "why on earth are they driving from Lincoln to the middle of Mandan every single day, that's a trek." Well, you'd be right, it is a trek. I spend about one and half to two hours in my vehicle dropping off and picking up our children each day, depending on weather. We don't do that for fun or because we really enjoy racking up the mileage on my vehicle.

We do it because Saint Joes is the absolute best place our children could possibly be right now for their needs. School to us is not just about sitting in a classroom learning from a textbook. Our children are in that building, surrounded by their peers, and being cared for by their teachers from 8:30 in the morning until 3:20 in the afternoon. That's 7 hours. They spend more time at school than they do awake with us at home Monday through Friday. We are extremely aware that the school we choose to send our kids to plays a massive role in raising our boys. It's not JUST education they are receiving. They are being formed mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Being able to send our children to an institution that aligns with our values and our morals is essential to us. But it is not easy and it has brought up difficult conversation in our household every year when we get that re-enrollment email. Tuition is not cheap. School lunch is not cheap. Uniforms are not cheap. Gas is not cheap. Frequent oil changes and new tires are not cheap. We are prioritizing the development and care of our boys whole person above many many other things, and it's not cheap. Having the financial support for educational choice would benefit our family substantially. We simply do not have proportionate support for our children and their educational needs compared to those who attend public schools. If we did, I believe our community would be better balanced. It would ease the stress of being able to make those payments so that we can always prioritize our children needs and well-being over our financial situation. We'd have the ability to help above what is asked in the classroom and we would have more to contribute to support our local businesses.

Being able to send our children to a school that supports them in every aspect of their life is a gift that I don't take for granted. But receiving proportionate support to do so is a right I believe we should have as parents. It's incredibly unfortunate that families who attend non public schools contribute just as much to society and our local community yet are inadequately supported. This isn't "just school". This is our next generation, and having educational choice to allow us to choose how the most important and valuable little people in our lives are formed each day, is crucial. Thank you.