



FULL CIRCLE ACADEMY
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Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Britney Bachmeier, and I live in West Fargo where my sisters and I are the co-founders of a pediatric therapy clinic and Full Circle Academy, a private nonprofit elementary school for students with special needs, approved by the Department of Public Instruction. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and highlight how a robust school choice program can offer something unique to students and taxpayers. I am a School Psychologist and Board-Certified Behavior Analyst, previously worked as a Behavior Specialist in the public school, and continue to serve some of the most intense and complex students in the state. As a supporter of the public school system, I have nothing but respect for all public-school administrators, teachers, counselors, and related service providers, especially those who work in special education. I am writing to advocate for continued partnership between the public and private sectors; Senate Bill 2400 can be a step to make this more realistic for students with special needs.

It is well known that behavioral health needs are at an all-time high and administrators and teachers often cite student behavior as consuming substantial portions of their day and the primary factor for staff burn out. Since opening our clinic in 2019, we have been overwhelmed with the number of requests for contacted behavior support services. We push into public schools and support students in their general and/or special education classrooms. However, there are times when students engage in extremely unsafe behaviors towards themselves or others, and another option is necessary. Thus, we created Full Circle Academy and now offer a therapeutic educational setting with integrated special education, behavior support, and related therapies from highly trained professionals.

We have strong partnerships with the surrounding school districts, including those in rural areas. Districts can place students in our Academy whose needs exceed what can be met in the typical self-contained classroom, often with the intention of transitioning them back to their home school after teaching new skills and decreasing maladaptive behavior. Cost is the number one barrier to students accessing our Academy. As school choice options continue to be discussed, I encourage you to consider additional caveats for students with special needs. The cost of educating one of our students is substantially higher than that of a typical student and that should be reflected in the amount allocated to this population. If we can work together, school choice does not need to be private versus public and instead about each student having what they need to be successful.

If trained professionals in a private, therapeutic setting can serve students with the most significant needs, administrators and teachers will feel relief in the public schools, other students' learning won't be disrupted, parents won't have to quit their jobs due to their child being frequently suspended or expelled, and most importantly the child will make progress toward their goals. If additional funding is available, it would be more feasible for parents to choose to enroll their child privately in a therapeutic school, just like others may choose a faith-based school.

I encourage you to vote in favor of Senate Bill 2400, take a step toward making therapeutic options more accessible to those with unique learning needs, and continue to work together to improve educational support for our most vulnerable population.

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