

Regarding HB1376

My name is Heidi Pope, I am a resident of Bismarck, and I live in District 47. I am honored to be here to share my experiences and thoughts.

My husband and I are parents of 5 children, 4 of whom are adults. We are currently homeschooling our last child, a 13 yr old son. We have participated in leadership education and commonwealth or community schools run by families, since he was very young. We enjoy frequent travel, so having the ability to take school with us has been important in recent years.

Last summer we chose to seek out an educational experience that would help our son prepare to attend our local high school. We wanted our son to have more accountability to and feedback from teachers and mentors other than his parents. **Yellowstone Virtual Academy** was a great fit for us, it was portable, he wouldn't miss school when we traveled, it gave us standards aligned curriculum, gave him accountability and the chance to excel in high quality STEM courses, activities and opportunities—which he loves.

Like nine other Bismarck students, our son was denied the opportunity to participate in **Yellowstone Virtual Academy (YVA)** by our local school district. They refused to sign a ZERO Tuition Cost share agreement which simply stated that BPS would NOT be financially responsible for any portion of our students' education while they were enrolled at **Yellowstone Virtual Academy (YVA)**.

Current Century code is written to defer authority to the local school districts to make decisions FOR students and families concerning their education. Therein lies the problem. BPS, and other school districts who have denied homeschooled students this innovative educational opportunity are not seeing the bigger picture.

Students attending YVA are accountable to ND certified teachers, students get to be educated with a curriculum that meets state standards. This is not a traditional homeschool program. In fact the local homeschool community strongly affirms that this is not homeschooling at all, its schooling at home—in an environment parents can choose based on the individual needs of their students.

YVA offers a program that fills a current gap between traditional homeschooling and public school attendance. This virtual program is not for everyone, but it is a great option

for those parents who share 50/50 custody of their children with an ex-spouse and don't want their student missing school. It ideally fits families who travel and families who need special education support, for students with learning disabilities or anxiety. It is outstanding for students who need to work at a slower pace, and for students who want to work ahead of schedule. And it is a great fit for families like mine who want to prepare their student to excel in high school, by increasing accountability to a teacher other than mom and dad.

Here is some information you may not be aware of;

1. Currently YVA is only available for K-8th grade.
2. Some school districts have tried to meet the growing needs of nontraditional students by offering libraries of school materials that are no longer used in the public school system –a benevolent gesture, but it doesn't sound like innovation to me.

Some school districts have created online or virtual academies in the year following the pandemic. But there has been no virtual academy provided in the state of ND that has been able to meet the needs of individual students and families like YVA powered by Tech Trep is able to offer.

YVA offers:

- Weekly teacher and administrative support, grading, communication and accountability for students and parents.
- Local Field trips
- Organized Community of friends and opportunities to participate in exceptional community events
- Online and in person clubs and classes
- STEAM lessons
- Online educational tools that fit individual student's needs and interests, such as;

Epic, Brain Pop, Generation Genius, LEARN 360, MiWrite, Time/Edge, Code Monkey, IXL MOBY Max, Prodigy, Reflex Math, Study Island, Math Seeds, Edu-Typing, Accelerated Reader, Kid's Discover, Adventure Academy, Center-vention, Beast Academy, CTC Math, Dream Box, Mr. Math, Dreamscape, Quill, Kiwi Co., ULAT (spanish/ French language program), Education.com, Flocabulary, Microsoft 360,

ALEKS, Mystery Science, Music Lessons, LEXIA, Mathletics, Tinker Coding, Power up, ASL, Evan-Moore teacher files, Exact Path, Thinkwell, etc.

The point of YVA is to offer families an option-- so that if needed, students can be educated in a non-traditional setting and still receive a standards-aligned education. It is not intended to replace homeschool or public school. But It is an excellent way to support families like mine who have previously homeschooled, but are now seeking more accountability, more accessibility and more innovation to meet the needs of their students.

School choice is gaining momentum across the country. Families need educational options, we live in an era where it is becoming unfeasible to expect that every student is going to fit into a local public school program and be able to excel there or that every parent who's student doesn't fit the mold will be able to homeschool them.

Please give **families** the right to choose to enroll in Virtual Academies such as Yellowstone Virtual Academy. Every student deserves a great education and support in that endeavor.

Thank you for your time,
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