

Dear Ms. Samuelson,

I appreciate your willingness to hear my plea for continued, and increased, support for the Expeditionary School at Black River (ESBR), and to put ESBR's latest application for school choice consideration on the June docket.

As a clinical social worker who has provided mental health services to children in this community for many years, and in a variety of settings, I am very familiar with the challenges our local schools face in meeting student's mental health needs. I've been on the provider side, of working in public and independent school settings, and I know first hand just how inadequate those services can be. And in my role of area manager of the children's outpatient unit for the local community mental health center, I bore witness, many times, to children's educational needs not being met because there wasn't enough resource or flexibility in meeting the children's mental health needs.

This awareness, coupled with the significant anxiety that my 14 year old daughter has experienced her whole life, led our family to homeschool. I knew that she would need a flexible environment that would allow her to move through her anxiety to access learning. Homeschooling gave us that flexibility and she was successful in that environment. But she is a very social person and was missing a sense of community and was expressing interest in going to school. With my knowledge and experiences with the local school districts, I knew that her unique needs would be hard for schools to meet. And then I found ESBR. It's flexible educational approach was the ideal match for her and would give her the freedom to acknowledge her challenges, and thrive despite them.

Since starting at ESBR this school year, ESBR has been able to provide my daughter with the support she has needed to push past her anxieties, to be more present and engaged with her learning and to grow in her sense of community. She enjoys going to school, is able to contribute in new and exciting ways and is gaining more confidence and acceptance of herself. She has been able to channel this confidence outside of school as well, improving her dedication to competitive dance and taking on the role of helping to teach young dancers her love of dance and learning. She will also be a camp counselor this summer at her dance studio, continuing to share her knowledge and experiences with others.

Her growth has been a beautiful thing to witness and would not have been possible without ESBR. Her goal is to graduate from ESBR, and she now believes that college could be a part of her future as well. This did not feel possible to her before ESBR. School choice approval, and the funds that brings with it, would allow her to succeed in ways that she wouldn't be able to in other traditional school settings, and offer this opportunity to other learners who face similar challenges.

I appreciate your time in reviewing this request and I hope that you will consider her experience as you review whether to support ESBR's application for school choice funding. Please reach out if you have any questions or would like more information about our experiences.

Sincerely,

Christine Reid