

March 4, 2017

Dear House Committee on Education:

Rep Margaret Doherty, Chair
Rep. Diego Hernandez, Vice-Chair
Rep. Carl Wilson, Vice Chair
Rep. Paul Evans
Rep. Susan McLain
Rep. Julie Parrish
Rep. Janeen Sollman
Rep. Sherrie Sprenger
Rep. A. Richard Vial

I am writing this letter to voice opposition to HB 2720. My name is Dr. Johnnie Driessner and I am in my 8th year as a board member, and currently serving as president of the board, of the Metro East Web Academy, a public charter school in Gresham-Barlow School District in its 8th year of operation.

Our public charter school has grown from an initial enrollment of 70 students in 2009 to almost 500 students in 2015-2016 school year. The school expects to hit 500 enrollments again.

I have served various professional roles in public and private higher education, and in various volunteer leadership and governance roles in public, private, and non-profit organizations directly supporting K-12 education for over 40 years. Like you, I am passionate about the role of education as a lever to advance our citizens and our communities to a safer, healthier and more productive future.

We all recognize that our traditional models of education have limited effectiveness across the immense diversity of students and families that we seek to serve. This is the primary motivation for the development of a charter school system to explore and infuse new educational thinking and models to enhance our overall attainment of the potential for education's impact.

Our traditional systems serve some students well, but do not meet the needs of many others. Metro East Web Academy and many other charter schools exist to provide more effective options to those students.

HB 2720, postured as yet another study of school effectiveness, actually replicates a myriad of existing studies of virtual schools already completed throughout the United States, as well as data already collected by the schools and the districts. This study, which purports to use the same data points that are readily available on the ODE website, will likely include metrics such as graduation rates, state assessment results, and attendance data. In a year when resources are scarce and legislators are scrambling to create an adequate educational budget, this seems

like an questionable use of public dollars. If data is needed to assess effectiveness, why not ask the schools for the appropriate data points?

Rep. McLain did establish an inclusive process that allowed the virtual school leaders to meet and discuss this legislation. The end result, however, is that the language added to the legislation after that collaborative process, reverts the bill back to a process of studying data that already exists in abundance. It appears to be wasteful to complete such a project, when we have that data readily available.

Please be assured that the faculty, staff, administration and board of our virtual schools are committed to regular and meaningful assessment of our effectiveness. In addition to all of the assessment requirements associated with the State of Oregon, the sponsoring district, and regional accreditors, our school annually commissions Portland State University to evaluate our school and provide much of the data that this proposed legislation purports to study. This report is provided in an annual review to our sponsoring school district, and can be provided to the committee upon request.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Johnnie Driessner, Ed.D.
Board President
Metro East Web Academy