

My name is Sarah Coyle and I have been teaching Social Studies and Visual Arts for 16 years. For the past 5 years, I have taught at Hillsboro Online Academy, which is a fully online non-charter public school in Hillsboro School District. I also teach as an independent contractor for ORVED, a non-profit, virtual online charter school for the past 5 years.

I am submitting my testimony in favor of HB2720.

I consider myself a teacher that specializes in high needs students. Students now choose online school because the traditional in-your-seat, everyday brick and mortar service model is not a fit for their particular needs. They choose our public online option in Hillsboro because they are still able to receive all the supports the district offers locally, including sports, arts, and career & tech electives in their home buildings, and they have direct access to counselors, resource specialists, and core teachers at our school site. Often, we are a great option until a temporary issue has been resolved and the student can return to being successful in the building.

On one end of the spectrum, I have a few gifted students who are able to tap into upper level courses and work at a faster pace than is offered at their neighborhood school. I also work with homeschool families who have very involved parents. I work with typical, average students who are busy pursuing sports, musical careers, or professional dance, or traveling with parents for work. I have one student working to be on the Jr. Olympic Hockey Team, another working to be on the Jr. Olympic Ski Team- a student who crosses the country to record music, and a student doing missionary work with his family in Africa. These are my 'easiest' students- they are at grade level academically, are motivated, and have very involved parents. They are also my smallest group of students.

My greatest numbers of students are those who are extremely challenged in some aspect of their life- medically fragile students dealing with cancer, cystic fibrosis, lung transplants, high-anxiety students who can't function in a packed classroom of 35-45 students, students being bullied, students being moved around in the foster care system, students whose families are uprooted often for economic reasons, students who must work to support their families or themselves, students who must stay home to care for younger siblings or perhaps an elderly family member, and students who are already parents themselves. In addition to these personal challenges to their education, about 20% of our students are on IEPs or 504s.

Unfortunately, too many of my students do not have the family support they need on their end to make the most of education in general, much less the complicated world of

the online service module. Their parents may be working multiple jobs, dealing with substance abuse, or simply absent. Too many parents think once their kids are teens, they can fend for themselves. Often, parents don't feel equipped to help with academics or they don't feel competent with the technology. I have found that online students need personal connections and support from educators perhaps even more so than students in traditional settings. At HOA, our strategies for supporting our students always start with what I call creating 'deliberate connections'. For example, in addition to academic communications in the courses, teachers support students through email, text messaging, phone calls and in person. At Hillsboro School District, we expect students to come in for face to face assistance once a week.

Our greatest challenge as online educators is to ensure these at-risk students are able to be succeed despite the challenges they face. In our public, non-charter model, all of testing and graduation statistics are transparent to the state, our school board, and the community-all who have a stake in our outcomes and who have input in our funding. Our staff work as a team and are accountable for every single student in our school- from attendance, to grades, to credits earned and graduation rates. We have a personal stake in the success of each student we serve because we answer directly to our community, whether or not parents are engaged. We continually collaborate to improve our practice- principals, teachers, and office staff working together to address and improve the numbers of students completing courses and graduating on time.

We are also continually working within our district to ensure that if and when they are ready, students are able to return to the traditional building and be on target for graduation. Ours is a very fluid system- there is no disruption of services as students enter or exit our online program.

At Hillsboro Online Academy, as we look towards our graduation ceremony this June, every member of our staff will be working in collaboration to support every senior, so despite all of their varied individual needs and challenges, they will walk across that stage and shake hands with our superintendent before receiving their diploma. In 2015, we had a 64% graduation rate- approximately 27 out of 42 students who were full-time with us graduated on time. Considering the credit deficiencies and challenges they came with, and the fact that these 27 would not have graduated at all otherwise, we are extremely proud of these numbers. When our graduation rates dropped last year, we were responsible to address this immediately- not only in our school, but in all the systems involved throughout the students academic career, and what brought those students to us in the first place. After all, the entire career of a student must be considered when looking at graduation rates- not just the last few years in isolation.

I support HB 2720. With transparency of online school statistics, including testing and graduation rates, we can best address student needs and ensure improved student success through all levels of schooling, and not simply analyze one aspect in isolation.

Thank you.

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