



*Every Child, Every Day*

Good afternoon Chair Dougherty and members of the Committee,

For the record I am Allison Galvin, Executive Director of Oregon Connections Academy.

I would like to thank Representative McLain for bringing stakeholders together to discuss the role virtual schools play in our state's diverse education system. I do support the idea of equity amongst our public school students and support looking at what resources virtual schools currently do not have access to. I believe it is also important to look at the students we serve and to redefine "at-risk" in education to incorporate mobility and credit deficiency. The sponsor of HB 2720 has stated a number of times the importance of ensuring ALL public school students have access to all the same opportunities and funding and I support this effort.

However, there are some recent language changes that cause me serious concern with HB 2720 and at this point I am not confident this bill can accomplish its original goal.

As virtual schools, it is important to note that even without receiving title funds and many other resources available to traditional schools, our K-8 students at Oregon Connections Academy either meet or exceed the state in most areas of state testing, specifically language arts and science. We recognize math is a continual challenge for all of us in the state and as a former math teacher and instructional coach, this continues to be a priority for myself and Oregon Connections Academy. We are also graded based on our high school achievements on the Smarter Balanced assessments, but mostly our K-12 school is measured on graduation rate, which is a true challenge given our high mobility rates and students that come to us credit deficient.

On line 8 of the bill, the proposed amendment aims to include Smarter Balanced Assessment scores and graduation rates as an included, or potentially included, metric changing the tenor of the bill originally focusing on growth, to being a bill that includes widely available public data points already in existence. My understanding of this bill was to look at how virtual schools work, the students we serve and the resources we are able to serve these students with which is less than our traditional bricks and mortar schools. This changed wording on line 8 significantly changes the bill from the original intent to including end point data which is already publically available, thus making it unnecessary for a study and not a fiscally responsible way to spend resources during this budget shortfall.

Our high school graduation rate is our most publicized single data point, I would like to take this opportunity to share how focusing on growth is powerful. At Oregon Connections Academy, we serve nearly 4100 public school students in Oregon, of which about 2100 of these students attend our high school. Our 2016 4-year state-reported graduation rate is 62% and our 5-year rate is 66%. In addition, those that were with us by October 1--or the full academic year, which is more comparable with a traditional bricks and mortar school--our graduation rate for 2016 was 91%. Our state-reported 4-year graduation rate has increased over 28% in the last five years as we continue to fine tune how we support the credit deficient students we serve. We are proud of this growth; yet, this increase is not recognized and celebrated and with the proposed amendment to line 8 of HB 2720, this growth will continue to go unnoticed.

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Being an alternative setting, many of our high school students come to us already behind academically. Currently, 44% of our high school students are new to Oregon Connections Academy this year. Of those new students, 58% came to us credit deficient, with 23% of those students being 6 or more credits deficient, a full year behind academically. Also of note is that 88% of these students started with us after the first day of school. Of those that did not graduate on-time in 2016, 95% of students came to us credit deficient, and many are working on graduating this year.

Thank you for getting to know our school more and how the measure of graduation rates and testing data for the purpose of a study, given this is information we are already accountable for and is readily accessible in public records, is not a fiscally responsible use of finances in this budget shortfall. Focusing on end measures rather than looking at growth of our amazing students is not beneficial for anyone in a study. Thank you Chair Dougherty, Vice Chair Hernandez, Vice Chair Wilson and members of the committee for the time to share today.

Allison Galvin  
Executive Director  
Oregon Connections Academy

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