



Oregon Connections Academy Parent Association (ORCAPA) represents a group comprised of Connections Academy's online schooling families and friends.

13 March 2013

Members of the House Education Committee,

As the Oregon Connections Academy Parents Association (ORCAPA), we represent the roughly 3400 students and their families enrolled in Oregon Connections Academy (ORCA). We support the intent of HB 3012, which would increase family choice in finding the "best fit" for their student. There may be reasonable limitations worth consideration.

A recent Oregonian editorial¹ does a very good job of explaining some of the issues faced by families who do not have inter-district transfer options. We agree with the authors, that districts which offer very limited or no open-enrollment seats violate the spirit of HB 3681 passed in 2011. Many opposed to the very idea of "open enrollment" cited fears of wild enrollment fluctuations from year to year, something that has not been an issue for districts which have embraced the concept. The vast majority of families in Oregon are satisfied with their local school and district, and would not consider committing the extra time, expense, or schedule coordination to enroll in a non-local school. However, there are undoubtedly some families who are currently denied that choice but could benefit immensely from having it.

We do not agree with the tactic employed by some districts which have chosen to allow enrollment by students only from a particular geographic area, such as from a specific city, county, arbitrary distance limit from the district boundary, or from a specific neighboring school district. Much like enrollment in public charter schools, open enrollment should be available equally to any who apply.

The proposed bill would make expulsion from a previous district the only exception to receiving consent from the receiving district. Other reasonable limitations would be available space in current classrooms and transportation costs. Forcing districts to make capital expenditures or add non-local bus routes to accommodate non-local students do seem unnecessary burdens. Consent for non-local students could be limited to space not filled by local students (remaining seats should be filled by lottery, similar to charter school enrollment). Transportation costs for the receiving district could only be required for transportation within the district boundaries, with additional costs shared by non-local families or covered by the receiving district if they consent.

While we agree with the concept of opening up school choice for Oregon families, reasonable limitations should also be considered to reduce the fiscal impact to districts with already-tight budgets.

Sincerely,

ORCAPA Board Members:

*Anne Marie Gurney, Jessica Cousineau, Preston Baxter, Mark Scarborough,
Paula Foster, Lori Conklin*

¹ http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2013/03/oregon_school_districts_should.html