

To whom it may concern,

I am the parent of a child who is in her 2nd year of online schooling with Oregon Connections Academy. We believe this is our best and only choice for her education. A "brick and mortar" public school is not an option for her. She suffers from extreme anxiety and panic attacks, has issues socializing and understanding body cues, cannot sit still, stay on task or focus for periods longer than 10-15 minutes, is highly sensitive to noises and smells, the list goes on and on. The schools here will not help and the bullying is rampant. She also attended a private Christian school and the treatment she received there will leave emotional scars forever. No, the only choice we have is online schooling and it is working beautifully ! I do not understand why the State of Oregon will not recognize the benefits of this method of learning for our children. The whole point is to "give them an education" isn't it? Does it matter how? Should all children be forced to sit in a classroom with 30-35 other kids with various degrees of abilities and disabilities, and expect them to learn? Should children be faced with name calling, shoving, pushing, hitting, humiliation, embarrassment, hatred, on a daily basis? Our public school system is not set up to deal with children who "learn in a different way". They may not be able to follow the rigid and strict routine that brick and mortar schools maintain. Connections Academy gives us the flexibility to do "schoolwork when she is mentally and physically" prepared. If she wants to sit on the floor and cuddle with her pet rats while I read, she can do that. If she doesn't feel like finishing all her subjects in one sitting, she can stop and come back to them when she chooses. Taking breaks, mentally and physically, is so important and we can do that with online schooling. It also gives us the freedom to go on field trips, visit places she may be studying, explore on our time. She has friends who attend schools in the area and out of the area. She takes gymnastics and swims twice a week. We are an active family and participate in local events, fundraisers and volunteer in the community. We are the face of online schooling ! Just regular people who want the best for our child.

Do not take this away or restrict other parents from enrolling their children. Do not punish them because you do not understand the program. I pay taxes and support the public schools. I want, and deserve, to have a choice of what kind of education my child receives. Do not force me to send my child to a school of YOUR choosing. YOU do not know my child, you do not know anyone's children, so you have no right to dictate what kind of school is best. Your job, in the State of Oregon, is to see that every child is educated and that our tax dollars are going for just that, EDUCATION. Connections Academy, K-12, and the other online schools are providing a top-notch, well-rounded education for our children and I suggest you talk to the kids and the parents of those students to find out why they chose that method of learning before you start threatening to cut funds and cap enrollments. We are not the problems with the public school system in this state. The whole thing is broken and punishing online schools is not going to fix the problems. I suggest you start at the top and work down, you will probably find that the whole structure of teaching in brick and mortar schools is failing. I would think your time would be better spent focusing on that. If you do not fix the present public school system, more and more families are going to turn to alternative methods of teaching, online schools for example, so what are you going to do then? Place further restrictions on them? Cut enrollment again? Reduce funding? Is that fair? Is that how you should deal with the problem? No, you should be thanking online schools for doing the job that brick and mortar schools have failed at. You should be praising them for creating a system of learning that works for those kids who may have fallen through the cracks. Do you think online school is easy? No way !! I work full-time, I am heavily involved in my community and I am my child's "Learning Coach". She and I "learn" on

an average of 5-6 hours a day and sometimes on weekends. The subjects are challenging and difficult at times, but she is learning and she loves it. Do you ever remember finishing an entire text book in a school year? I never, ever did, but with Connections Academy, the kids finish every text book in Math, Science, Social Studies and Language. I bet our "brick and mortar" schools don't even get 1/2 way through any of these subjects in a years time. I am pleading with the State of Oregon to quit looking at online Public Schools as the enemy. We are not ! The enemy is within, the entire Public School system is broken and our legislature needs to focus their attention and energy into finding ways to fix it. Please do not cap enrollment and let Connections Academy ( and other public online schools) continue to educate our children. They are doing a fantastic job !

Thank you,

Terri Strom  
Toledo, Oregon

Child: Mikayla  
Grade: 5th grade