



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

19 February 2014

Members of the House Committee on Education:

As the Oregon Connections Academy Parents Association (ORCAPA), we represent the roughly 3400 students, and families, enrolled in Oregon Connections Academy (ORCA), Oregon's largest online charter school. We urge you to oppose SB 1538 in its current form. This bill attempts to combine three very different and consequential ideas that should each be addressed, debated, and considered separately.

**Concept #1** is to allow local school boards to accept, deny or even terminate school charters based on alignment with and progress towards "educational goals." School boards already have the ability to approve or deny charters, so the most consequential effect would be the ability to terminate an active charter based on insufficient progress towards one or more of a district board's goals. "Progress" is left to the determination of the school board, and no appeals process is established. Termination for insufficient progress towards board goals is not a threat shared by traditional schools. School boards can choose not to renew a charter once the original contract has expired, so it is unclear why this provision is necessary.

**Concept #2** is a revision of the calculation method for the 3% "cap" when determining whether charter school applications must meet these additional criteria. Whereas all students residing within the district are typically counted when testing the threshold (ie ORS 338.125.4.B.A), this bill specifically excludes students who attend private schools, parochial schools, are homeschooled, or any others who are not required to attend full-time public school per ORS 339.030 from that count. The effect of this concept is to lower the "cap" and make it easier for school districts to deny charter applications.

**Concept #3** would allow public charter schools to give priority admission consideration to students based on their race, ethnicity, income level or first language. Currently admission to public charter schools must be equitable to all students. This concept was introduced as a last-minute amendment at the public hearing on 6 February in the Senate Committee on Education and Workforce Development, where it was passed before it was even written! The concept of giving priority admission status based on race, income, or any other social factor represents a major shift in policy that deserves thorough discussion, debate, and careful consideration.

We urge the members of this committee to split this bill into separate, standalone proposals that can be carefully vetted, discussed and considered. Pushing through such substantive changes without the proper scrutiny will likely end in undesirable results for those who can least afford them, our state's young students.

Sincerely,

ORCAPA Board Members:

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