

Subject: SB 819 and SB 820 - your attention please

Chair Roblan & Committee,

Today SB 819 and SB 820 will be before the Senate Committee on Education and I emphatically urge you to pass these two critical measures. Public charter schools are a vital source of energy and experimentation in public education. While traditional public school environments may adequately educate most students in a cost effective manner, there are children, like mine, for whom this system does not work. My daughter transferred to Southwest Charter School in Portland's South Waterfront neighborhood this year after completing K- 5 at our neighborhood PPS school. She spent 6 years in a traditional public school environment, being overlooked by her teachers because she was "easy", bored by the curriculum, and dismissed by her peers. My daughter's confidence plummeted, her attitude toward school & learning became indifferent at best. Knowing that her learning and emotional needs were being met in a traditional school environment, we transferred her to Southwest Charter School (SWCS). The small class sizes, access to teachers and administrators and place based learning focus turned what we knew of public education on its ear. My daughter is finally allowed to learn in a way that engages her and she has begun to THRIVE. She is allowed to learn in a hands-on way, spending time beyond classroom walls, in the community in which she lives. She is asked to EXPERIENCE what she is learning and is encouraged to contribute. My daughter is asked to share her knowledge and expertise with her peers. She is validated - and she has become a successful student who loves to go to school.

My daughter's story is not a unique one at SWCS. She learns in the company of many students who were failed by a traditional public school system. Almost all of her peers begin to thrive in our uniquely crafted and encouraging community and go on to do very well in both a traditional and non-traditional public high school setting. While our teachers and place based educational focus surely has much to do with this, there is certainly a component of their success that is due to a smaller and different environment; one in which many various types of charter schools can provide. Unfortunately our school, like many other charter schools, must make all this happen with 42% less funding than district schools get. The Chalkboard Project just did a thorough study of this and the results are discouraging. As a tireless SWCS volunteer, I know firsthand how difficult it is to achieve the results we have, and are being held to, with such a drastic reduction in funding compared to our district counterparts. Our teachers and children deserve the same funding and opportunities that are provided to all district teachers and children, even if that means migrating to an alternative charter environment which allows them to thrive. I ask that you please pass SB 819 and SB 820 tomorrow. I very much appreciate your careful consideration of these issues.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Downer