

Written testimony
In support of SB 819

Chair Roblan, members of the community, my name is Christine Landers Boatman, and I am the parent of a ninth grader at Alliance Charter Academy in Oregon City, Oregon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I am here to talk about my son Nick, who turned 15 on Sunday. Nick was diagnosed with autism when he was 3, and attended his neighborhood elementary school until the end of the fourth grade. We removed him from Redland Elementary because Redland was increasingly unable to meet his educational needs and because he was being targeted by bullies that the school either couldn't or wouldn't properly handle. He hated school and sending him to a place where he felt like a failure and where he was being bullied, was a terrible experience for me as a parent.

I have had a child who succeeded in the traditional public school. My daughter, Caitlyn, was a 2014 honor cord graduate from OCHS and is currently a freshman majoring in biology at U of O on an academic scholarship. I watched my daughter succeed in the education environment that later failed my son. I am not an enemy of traditional public schools.

But not all children are the same, and not all educational programs will work for every child. The things about ACA that benefit my son are very small class sizes, more individualized attention, mixed-aged classrooms, the ability to progress at his own speed, a genuine anti-bullying environment with buy-in from peers and staff, incredible teachers and educational support, and an amazing music program.

I want to talk just for a few moments about music. Nick began taking guitar in the fifth grade, when we enrolled him at ACA. I wish that I could show you the video that I took of him playing his guitar on Sunday, because even though I am his mom, I'm pretty sure that his skills would amaze you. Music gives him confidence and an identity in which he can take pride, and he has friends who share this passion for music. ACA gave him this, and continues to provide musical and social opportunities that simply do not exist in traditional public education.

With respect to academics, when Nick left Redland, he had fallen behind in every major area because the large class-sizes just could not give him the individualized support he needed to learn. He did not meet the grade standards on any of OAKS tests, and he was more than one grade level behind in math. It took three years of hard work with the teachers at ACA to bring him up to grade level. When he took his OAKS tests last year, he met grade standards in math, reading and science for the first time since kindergarten.

This was an incredible moment for his teachers, and for his family, but it was even more incredible for Nick, and the amount of pride he took in those test results was amazing. I absolutely believe that ACA has changed my son's future. He is on track to graduate on time with a standard diploma, and has confidence that he is competent, capable, bright and likeable. I do not believe that he would be in this position if he had attended Ogden Middle School and

was a student at OCHS. Those schools are poorly equipped to handle my son for a variety of reasons.

I strongly support charter school education in Oregon as an alternative for students who are unsuccessful in traditional public schools. There are a lot of young people like my son, who are not behavioral problems and who are motivated students, but who simply do not fit and cannot succeed in a traditional public school environment. Those kids, and the schools that serve them, need and deserve financial support just as much as the schools for young people who can succeed in public schools. I would ask the committee to support the legislation to ensure that schools for students like him are equitably funded.

Thank you for the opportunity to be heard.

Christine Landers Boatman