

Subject: SB 819 and SB 820

Chair Roblan & Committee,

This morning SB 819 and SB 820 will be before the Senate Committee on Education. I am writing in hopes of convincing 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 attended Meriwether Lewis Elementary School (PPS) for her primary education. We realized that she excelled in her education when the lesson plans and educational opportunities were set in non-traditional surroundings. We were fortunate to have been a part of a cutting edge PPS school whose teachers worked tirelessly to mix a little place based learning in with classroom time.

We noticed that our daughter struggled when she was in the classroom all day long. We were concerned about the effects traditional middle school would have on her ability to excel, how it would negatively affect her during a time when the foundation she builds now will affect the rest of her academic career.

Our daughter is gifted. She consistently earned the highest scores in her classes in reading, writing, and science throughout her 4th and 5th grade school years. She struggles with Mathematics, but with extra help and patience, her grasp of the concepts and ability to show comprehension grows dramatically.

We met with her 5th grade teacher & the school administrator toward the end of her school year to help formulate an educational plan that would foster a love of learning and help her to excel.

It was a unanimous decision that we seek a 'place based learning' experience for her Middle School tenure. My daughter transferred to Southwest Charter School (SWCS) in Portland's South Waterfront neighborhood this year.

The small class sizes, access to teachers and administrators and place based learning focus redefined our perception of education. I am happy to report that my daughter is learning in a way that has allowed her to THRIVE.

This hands-on approach provides students with the ability to spend time beyond the classroom walls and in the community in which she lives. She, along with her peers, is to EXPERIENCE what she is learning, is encouraged to contribute, and actively participates in open discussions with her peers and her teacher.

My daughter is happy and is eager to go to school. I attribute this success to our teachers, the administrator, and the environment they have created over the years. The place based educational focus is grooming our daughter to become a thoughtful, active, and vital member of the community.

Smaller class size is a huge factor; 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. It's 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 am asking that you please pass SB 819 and SB 820 today. I very much appreciate your careful consideration of these issues.

Sincerely,
Rob Downer
Southwest Charter School Parent
Portland, OR