

Chair Roblan and Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I wanted to thank you for the opportunity to speak on Tuesday April 7, 2015 regarding the importance of SB 819. However, due to the limited time I was not able to share many important items which are important for the committee to understand before going into your work session on April 21, 2015 and voting on SB 819.

I have only been in “public charter” world since June of 2011; however I have learned a great amount over the past 4 years. I have mostly learned that there are many assumptions, myths or misconceptions about how the ORS and “public charter schools” are verses what people think they are.

For example, ORS 338.155 states, “ The payment shall equal an amount per weighted average daily membership (ADMw) of the public charter school that is at least equal to: (a) Eighty percent of the amount for the school district’s General Purpose Grant per ADMw as calculated under ORS 327.013 for students who are enrolled in kindergarten through grade eight...” It goes on to state 95% for grades 9 through 12 and for charter schools sponsored by Oregon Dept. of Education 90% for kindergarten through grade 8 and 95% for grades 9 through 12. However, nowhere in the ORS does it require the sponsoring school district or the ODE to provide any services or support for these dollars. Therefore, the sponsoring districts DO NOT provide these to their public charter school for which they sponsor.

I have tried for the last four years to find out where these figures came from. The amazing gentlemen like Michael Elliot and Michael Wiltfong from ODE who work with and distribute the State School Funds, simple stated, said it was just their opinion, but that many thought when public charter schools were passed into law that the districts would provide some kind of support or service, but since the ORS does not require it, then the districts don’t.

I then did some research around the time the ORS was passed and the individuals involved in helping Public Charter Schools get their start in Oregon. I came across Jim Green (currently the Deputy Executive Director of OSBA) at a Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA) who was giving a presentation in Eugene regarding Public Charter Schools. Many individuals asked about the 80% vs. 95% and where it came from, why those numbers, etc. Jim Green was very honest, and stated “We floated many numbers trying to get enough support for the passage of Public Charter Schools in Oregon and those were the numbers that worked. There was no rhyme or reason, other than with those numbers we knew we had enough votes to get it to pass.” Hearing him speak, suddenly explained a lot. Those numbers were not researched or proven they were just arbitrary figures at the time. However, now with more than a decade of experience it is time to actually use a figure that is accurate and equitable for all kids.

Ironically, all most 100% of the time when I explain to someone that as a Public Charter School we are required to give up 20% of the students funding to our sponsoring school district – the very next question is, “Well, what do we get in return for the 20%?” I have to answer that question with “Nothing, the district is not required to provide anything to us and they don’t.” After having answered this question to parents, board members, senators and representative from our community it has become quite clear to me that the general public assumes that sponsoring school districts are somehow

supporting their charter schools in exchange for the moneys they retain, but this is purely an assumption and until the ORS is changed it will continue to be.

You heard public testimony from Kristen Miles (from Portland Public School District), which alluded to the amounts spent on services and/or support for their public charter schools. I would strongly encourage you to reach out to their public charter schools to verify the information presented and not assume it to be accurate. In fact, did you know that not one of PPS sponsored public charter schools are housed in a vacant PPS building and they have many vacant buildings? When I speak to PPS public charter school directors the answer is always the same. PPS wants to charge amounts that are 10 times the going rate for example, \$40,000 a month for a lease of one of their buildings. It is actually, cheaper for the 9 PPS sponsored charter schools to lease commercial buildings from private industry than it is to lease publicly owned buildings through PPS. This speaks volumes as to how PPS interacts (or supports their public charters). Therefore, I don't believe Kristen Miles or the figures she presented; in fact she did not even submit them for you or anyone else to review.

Therefore, as the Executive Director for Sauvie Island Academy a public charter school sponsored by the Scappoose School District, I would like to again share with you the types of services and supports that we purchase from vendors outside of our sponsoring school district, because they are not provided by the sponsoring district as most would assume.

Accounts Payable \$1200
Infinite Vision (account license/software) \$5000
Payroll Services \$2500
Fiscal Auditors (required by ORS 338) \$600
Human Resources \$5000
Substitute Finder System \$2200
Technology Services \$5000
Internet \$25,000 (this is after the E-rate discount)
Background checks for all personnel and volunteers \$1500
Truancy Services and Officer \$1000
PACE Insurance \$11,000
Fire Monitoring System \$380
Building Security System \$300
Busing \$54,000 (this is after the reimbursement)
Mealtime (NSLP computer software) \$2000
School Alert System (parent notification) \$1000
Building Lease \$43,200
Utilities \$21,360
Maintenance of the building \$15,000
Facility Use Fees of district auditorium (2 music concerts/year) \$500
Although this is not an exhaustive list-these items alone come to a total of : \$197,240

The Scappoose School District currently receives (20%) approximately: \$345,000 and provides none of the above services, which the general public assumes are being provided for by the 20% - this is simply not the case because of the current ORS language. So as a public charter school we are losing \$345K to the sponsoring school district and spending an additional \$200K for services often covered at a district

level. This is \$545K out and our budget is only \$1.5 million. This is a huge amount lost from public charter school students.

I found the list that PPS provided as public testimony to include many of these types of items and when they got to the end of their presentation, claimed to be in the red by approximately \$70,000. Ironically, I was at a public comment session for HB 3151, where I heard David Williams (PPS Govt. Relations) testify publicly to the House of Representative Education Committee that the “5% they receive is not even worth the time and manpower to process it.” He stated that “they could keep the 5% as far as PPS was concerned.” It is important to know that HB 3151 who was sponsored in conjunction with PPS, would require Virtual Public Charter Schools who grew bigger than their sponsoring district to immediately be transferred to the ODE to sponsor. The elephant in the room at that hearing was the fact the Oregon Connections Academy (OCA) left the Scio School District (when the charter contract was up) and moved to the Santiam School District (because Santiam would not take as much of a percentage as Scio). This was a big loss to Scio (OCA has approximately 4000 ADMw X approximately \$6500 ea = \$26,000,000 X 5% = \$1,300, 000 not including Spec Ed \$’s so if Santiam only kept 4% it would go down to \$1,040,000 a savings for OCA of \$260,000 and Santiam has just increased their budget by \$1 million dollars).

As you can see Public Charter Schools have become a Revenue Line Item for Sponsoring School Districts. For the Scappoose School District the 20% that comes to them from the students attending Sauvie Island Academy then gets redistributed over the remaining district students. How it looks is: SIA students receive 80% and the district students receive 102.4%. The ORS 338.095 only requires sponsoring school districts to and I quote, “The sponsor or sponsor’s designee at least annually shall visit the public charter school site and review the public charter school’s compliance with the terms and provisions of the charter.” Everything else in ORS language speaks to what the public charter school must to according to the law.

Therefore, much of public charter school administrator (and it is singular, because you can only afford one) time is spend meeting the requirements of the ORS or the ODE. For example, we are required to complete the following ODE reports: IUID, Staff Assignment, Class Roster, Staff Position, PE Facilities & Minutes, as well as reviewing and verifying quarterly ADM reporting. These are all reports required by the ODE and done at the district level, however as public charter school we are required to complete and submit them ourselves. Although, they do not have a dollar figure equated with them the amount of time each takes is at least 4-6 hours each, therefore I did not list them earlier – but again the assumption is that the sponsoring district is doing the ODE reporting which is simply not the case.

At the hearing you also heard from Kevin Strong, the business manager for the Sweet Home School District. He first shared figures from Private Schools (not public schools) and how it cost more for High Schools than K-8. This is a second area where many are confused regarding Public Charter Schools in Oregon. It is around the hiring of Highly Qualified Teachers. The ORS does allow public charter schools in Oregon to have 50% of their teaching staff highly qualified and the other 50% can simply be registered with TSPC. However, the reality is this – If a public charter school in Oregon were to hire a teacher that was not highly qualified, it then puts their sponsoring school district into a Title IIA Plan for 4 YEARS,

regardless if the problem is rectified before the 4 years is up. The sponsoring district is required to dedicate a portion of their Title IIA funds to “fix” the highly qualified problem. Therefore, the reality is that I CAN NOT hire someone who is not highly qualified, unless I want to put my sponsoring district into a plan. This is the same sponsoring district, which I have to then come to and try to renew my charter contract. As you can imagine, it would be a difficult task considering you put them in a plan for 4 years and then limited their Title IIA dollars. Ironically, even though the public charter school students count in the calculation for the Title IIA dollars, the public charter school does not receive any of the Title IIA dollars. So when districts try to justify the difference in K-8 and 9-12 based on highly qualified arguments, be aware that what is possible on paper is not possible in reality.

Mr. Strong also referenced the added expense of Special Education Services assumed by the sponsoring school district. I can tell you from experience when we first began in 2011 the only special education students that were able to attend SIA were those needing speech/articulation services. Our speech students received speech services once a week for 20 minute via Skype (with the special education teacher located in the district) therefore, it did not even require the speech teacher to drive to our school. Since 2011 and a lot of pressure from parents and ourselves, we are now able to serve students on IEP’s if they only require “pull out services” and we are limited to 2 ½ days for a Special Ed teacher and 2 days of a Special Ed assistant. However, if a student needs “push in services” or they are in need of “emotional services” the sponsoring district special education team will declare that Sauvie Island Academy is NOT an appropriate placement for the student and they are sent back to their home district or required to come to a school in the sponsoring district. Therefore, I am certain that sponsoring school districts are using ways to limit their costs for providing Special Education Services at their public charter schools.

At the public comment session, you heard many public charter schools testify to the valuable teachers being lost because of a lack of funding to pay competitive salaries and benefits. I can tell you that SIA has experienced this same issue – it is not because of a lack of unions. In fact, some public charter schools have formed what is called a “wall to wall” union that encompasses every employee. I would strongly argue against what Mr. Strong was leading you to believe. If public charter schools had more funding the first thing we would do would be pay a competitive salary, in order to retain our specially trained teachers. In fact, I would argue with OEA (state union association) that public charters ability to pay competitive wages would increase the district union’s ability to leverage more dollars for their members. Basically, if we could pay more than districts would also need to be competitive, currently they don’t compete with public charters because our teacher make significantly less – lowering the floor on wages. Public Charter Schools are not undercutting the union – sponsoring school districts are using the 20% they retain from their charter schools and choosing to spend it on things other than wages and benefits.

Mr. Strong assumes that public charter schools are not paying for busing, however SIA spends over \$54K a year to ensure that students from outside the school district can access the SIA. For example, we have students who come from Columbia City (N. of St. Helens), St. Helens, Warren, etc. We help parents arrange carpools from those areas to a transportation hub in Scappoose. We pay for 2 shuttle buses in the morning and 2 shuttle buses in the afternoon, which we are required to have staff supervision at (2

paid employees in the AM and in the PM), as well as an AM and PM bus route around Sauvie Island. Student access to public charter schools are contingent on transportation, so we try to eliminate this barrier for students and their families so they can actually access SIA regardless of where they live. In addition, we try our best to use buses for field studies and field trips, rather than relying on parent drivers each time. This is a huge financial and time burden that parent in the district schools do not face, as well as the liability it puts on parent drivers and the school. However, if we had more of our State School Funds, we could also run a shuttle bus to North Portland, for the families that come from that area. Currently, we can afford to do this so these families have to car-pool everyday – and they do because it is what they have to do! This is an access and equity issue that sponsoring school district do not have to face, but is a huge reality for our families.

Let's talk about the Economically Disadvantaged students at my public charter school, as Mr. Strong brought up topic in his testimony. Since 2011 it has doubled here at SIA, we are now at 25% and growing with economically disadvantaged student (those who qualify for free or reduced lunch). This is less than the district, so Mr. Strong's argument could work against him. In fact, according to Michael Elliott with ODE the Poverty calculation has changed and is not how Mr. Strong presented.

(Feb 25, 2015 at 8:09 AM, ELLIOTT Michael S <michael.s.elliott@state.or.us> wrote:) "The poverty data set was changed from 2012 to 2013. The data set is based on the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Income Poverty Estimate. That is updated every year. We moved from the old method of calculating poverty to this new SAIPE data starting with 2014-15. Since the data is updated every year, poverty will change year to year. I am not surprised that poverty was reduced as the 2013 data is looking at 2012 number. Since we are coming out of the recession, 2012 should have less poverty than 2011 which is what the 2014-15 estimates were based on. Going forward both 2014-15 and 2015-16 will be based on 2013 SAIPE data. Additionally, once 2014 SAIPE data is released, then that will be the year used for 2014-15."

A second point I would debate with Mr. Strong in his information that public charter schools are benefiting from their sponsoring school districts demographics is in regards to a situation we faced regarding Remote School Dollars. In fact, in 2011-12 SIA qualified for the Remote School Dollars, because we are located more than 7 miles from another elementary school in our district. In 2011-12, it added an additional 50.29 in weights to SIA's ADMw ($50.26 \times \$6085 = \$305,832$). The district refused to pass those additional weights/dollars through to SIA. It was only with the help of ODE and OAR language additions that in the Spring of 2012 the district was required to pass forward 80%, however they were still able to retain 20% (\$61,166) even though they were not the remote school nor did they have the needs of a remote school like SIA.

Another example, of SIA would be in our ELL population. At SIA we have several ELL students for which additional weights are added into the ADMw and the sponsoring school district gets their 20% cut of those dollars, even though they are not required by ORS to provide any resources or support. In fact, our sponsoring school district would not even include us (their public charter school) in their State ELL plan. Therefore, we worked with ODE and spent many hours developing and writing our own plan to submit. The ODE staff was shocked and surprised that the sponsoring school district would not simply add the

few addition paragraphs into their current plan, but rather kept the 20% of additional ELL funds and cited ORS that did not require them to provide any services or support for the funds, including their ELL plan! So I would counter Mr. Strong's argument the public charter schools are benefiting from the demographic of the sponsoring districts, because clearly our sponsoring school district is benefiting from the Remote School dollars, the ELL dollars, etc. which we bring to the district.

Although, what I have shared with you is much longer than I had hoped, it is extremely important as you go into your work session and begin making decisions that impact the 126 public charter schools across Oregon and the public school students who attend them.

Please do not be confused by the myths, misconceptions, or misinformation regarding public charter schools. Please realize that we have to take the State Wide Assessment like every public school. We are required to submit our reports to ODE, just like sponsoring school district. We have to accept all students who apply into our open spots; we cannot pick and choose who comes to our public charter schools. We have and serve special education students (well at least the ones the sponsoring districts allow to stay). We are evaluated on the State Report Card like all other public schools in Oregon. Public Charter Schools are just that Public – we cannot charge tuition!

Most importantly, please spend the time necessary to investigate the true impacts of 20% currently versus 5% potentially. SB 819 gets us closer to providing an equitable system for all students attending a public school - be it through a district or through a public charter.

I am asking for your support of SB 819 on behalf of my students, my parents, my staff and my community.

Thank you for taking the time to read my comments,

Darla Meeuwsen
Sauvie Island Academy
Executive Director
dmeeuwsen@sauvieislandacademy.org
503-621-3426