

HB 4091 Testimony, 2/8/16

Chair Doherty and members of the committee, thank you for giving me this opportunity to tell you about Oregon Connections Academy. My name is Allison Galvin and I am the Executive Director of Oregon Connections Academy, or ORCA. Our school opened its doors in 2005 and we have grown to be Oregon's largest online public charter school, serving over 3900 students around the state. In the past 11 years our students have had many successes and we have been able to implement support programs to help our students. Our students come to us for many different reasons; Some are medically fragile and require a healthy environment, some have been bullied and are seeking a safe environment where they can focus on their academics, not what might happen in the hall after class; some come to us because they need a change in their schooling environment; and some students come to us credit deficient and in jeopardy of not graduating. In the words of one parent, "My daughter loves it!! She was bullied in public/regular school and didn't want to go to it. She loves ORCA!!! She doesn't stress, and has no problems getting online and attending school everyday with ORCA!"

It is important to note, that we serve a diverse, and mobile, population of students.

- 46% of our students qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch;
- 16% of students are special populations and on an IEP or a 504 plan which is higher than the state average.
- 48% of our students are classified as "mobile" by ODE in the Annual State Report Card.

Yet despite these challenges, ORCA students outperformed the state in many areas.

- ORCA performed higher than the state average in 3rd, 5th, 8th, and 11th grades in English Language Arts and equivalent to the state in every other grade.
- ORCA students outperformed the state in 3rd Grade Math and approached statewide levels of proficiency in the other grades.
- Since 2010, we have seen a 35% increase in our grad rate including another 5% gain this past year for a 59.63% graduation rate. In fact, our full academic year graduate rate is 90% for the class of 2015.
- Over 300 ORCA high school students have earned college credit through our Dual Credit program.

The question today, though, is about accountability for virtual schools. I can tell you that we are accountable just like any other public schools. In addition, we are accountable to the charter law and the virtual school provisions.

Here are a few of the additional provisions of accountability that ORCA undergoes:

- We are audited annually and we forward a copy of the annual audit to the Oregon Department of Education.
- We report to the Oregon Department of Education at least annually on the performance of the school and its students.
- We have a weekly meeting with our sponsoring district which includes financial accountability.
- Our sponsoring district visits our school regularly and reviews the school's compliance with the terms and provisions of the charter.
- We report on the provider of our educational services including an itemized budget.
- We go through accreditation and in fact are going through that process right now through AdvanceED.
- Our contract with Santiam-Canyon includes Academic Performance goals. If we don't meet these goals then we develop a School Improvement Plan and if we don't meet the terms, then the contract can be terminated and the charter revoked.
- We are accountable to our parents. A 3rd party evaluator conducts an annual evaluation of our teachers, our curriculum, our technology, and all aspects of the services that we provide. I am proud to tell you that 94% of the parents are impressed with the curriculum and 95% are satisfied with the helpfulness of their teachers.
- Finally, we are held accountable by you, the legislature. Each year we are here to help educate and inform on a piece of legislation that affects our school and our services to kids.

Commented [DLH1]: Is it weekly? If so, you may want to highlight the frequency.

We spend a lot of time on our data and these are just a few of the accountability provisions that we perform consistently. Virtual schools are a great service to thousands of students throughout Oregon. We provide a quality education and I am proud of our students...I am proud of our teachers who work hard every day.... I am proud of our academic success....and I am proud to work for a school whose mission is to help the underserved and/or students who need an alternative way to learn. We truly understand that we are not right for every student, but we do work hard to be right for the students we serve. Just as there is not one type of college right for every student—this is why we have community colleges, private colleges, state universities—we are here to serve as an alternative option for students who have struggled to find success in a traditional educational model. Please allow us to continue to focus on students and student learning.

Chair Doherty and members of the committee, thank you again for your time and giving me the opportunity to tell you about our great school, Oregon Connections Academy.