

My name is Sarah Coyle and I have been teaching Social Studies and Visual Arts for 15 years. I currently teach at Hillsboro Online Academy, which is a fully online non-charter public school in Hillsboro School District. I also teach as an independent contractor for ORVED, a non-profit, virtual online charter school.

I am submitting my testimony in favor of HB4091.

In my capacity as a public service online teacher, I am able to offer not only core academic classes but elective options which align to Oregon content standards and the common core standards. I consider myself a teacher that specializes in high needs students. Students now choose online school because the traditional in-your-seat, everyday brick and mortar service model is not a fit for their particular needs.

On one end of the spectrum, I have a few gifted students who are able to tap into upper level courses and work at a faster pace than is offered at their neighborhood school. I also work with homeschool families who have very involved parents. I work with typical, average students who are busy pursuing sports, musical careers, or professional dance, or traveling with parents for work. I have one student working to be on the Jr. Olympic Hockey Team, another working to be on the Jr. Olympic Ski Team- a student who crosses the country to record music, and a student doing missionary work with his family in Africa. These are my 'easiest' students- they are at grade level academically, are motivated, and have very involved parents. They are also my smallest group of students.

My greatest numbers of students are those who are extremely challenged in some aspect of their life- medically fragile students dealing with cancer, cystic fibrosis, lung transplants, high-anxiety students who can't function in a packed classroom of 35-45 students, students being bullied, students being moved around in the foster care system, students whose families are uprooted often for economic reasons, students who must work to support their families or themselves, students who must stay home to care for younger siblings or perhaps an elderly family member, and students who are already parents themselves. In addition to these personal challenges to their education, about 20% of my students are on IEPs or 504s, or a combination of both.

Unfortunately, too many of my students do not have the family support they need on their end to make the most of education in general, much less the complicated world of the online service module. Their parents may be working multiple jobs, dealing with substance abuse, or simply absent. Too many parents think once their kids are teens, they can fend for themselves. Often, parents don't feel equipped to help with academics or they don't feel competent with the technology. I have found that online students need personal connections and support from educators perhaps even more so than students in traditional settings. At HOA, our strategies for supporting our students always start with what I call creating 'deliberate connections'. For

example, in addition to academic communications in the courses, teachers support students in email, text messaging, phone calls and in person. At Hillsboro School District, we expect students to come in for face to face assistance once a week. With ORVED, I also do regular calls with students to support their needs, whether academic or non-academic.

Our greatest challenge as public online educators is to ensure these at-risk students are able to be succeed despite the challenges they face. In our public, non-charter model, our student numbers and statistics are transparent to our community, the state, and especially our school board, who decide our funding. We are accountable for every single student in our school- from attendance, to grades, to credits earned and graduation rates. Our staff have a personal stake in the success of each student we serve because we answer directly to our community, whether or not parents are engaged. We continually collaborate to improve our practice- principals, teachers, and office staff working together to address and improve the numbers of students completing courses and graduation on time, and also ensuring that when they are ready, students are able to return to the traditional building and be on target for graduation.

When online works, it works really well. I have students emailing me and texting me at all hours of the day, even weekends, to ask about social studies work. They share hard times they are going through- they share what happened in their day. They share their successes. That is pretty powerful!

At Hillsboro Online Academy, as we look towards our graduation ceremony this June 7, every member of our staff will be working in collaboration to support every senior, so despite all of their varied individual needs and challenges, they will walk across that stage and shake hands with our superintendent before receiving their diploma. Last year, we had a 64% graduation rate- approximately 27 out of 42 students who were full-time with us graduated on time. Considering the deficiencies and challenges they came with, and the fact that these 27 would not have graduated at all otherwise, we are extremely proud of these numbers. But we will improve our numbers this year!

I support HB 4091. With transparency of online school statistics, we can best address student needs and ensure student success. Often, only involved parents are responsible for holding for-profit virtual charters accountable for student success. However, too many our students do not have the parental involvement needed to ensure they are receiving the services required for success at online school. When companies are allowed to profit whether students are successful or not- and especially when this profit comes from public school funding- it is time to step in and look more closely at the systems in place.

Sarah Coyle
955 NE Sunrise Ln.

Hillsboro, OR 97124