

Madam Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Jennifer Kambas, I am the president of the Oregon Virtual Public Schools Alliance, a coalition of parents who have joined together to advocate for our children and virtual public school students in Oregon.

I am here to speak in opposition to HB 4091 legislation to create a virtual school study.

I am the parent of a virtual school student. My daughter, Elizabeth, has been enrolled in a virtual public school for six years. Like our family, thousands of Oregon families have found success for their children in virtual public schools. It's a vital part of our public school system that gives kids who need an alternative to the traditional classroom a place to get a quality education. Unfortunately, because most people aren't familiar with this new form of education, legislators can be easily misled. It's happened before, and it's happening again.

In 2009 our opponents mounted an aggressive campaign to deny Oregon families access to virtual public schools. Their bill, SB 767, would have shut down virtual public schools and kicked our children back to the traditional classrooms where they struggled to succeed. An uprising of virtual public school families helped keep the schools open, but no additional kids were allowed to enroll at the time.

Now our opponents are back with more slanted information about the virtual public schools on which our families have come to rely. They're claiming our schools don't have good test scores, which we find highly ironic since they spent the last several years rightly arguing that high-stakes testing is a terrible way to measure student achievement. The truth is most of our students struggled in the traditional classroom and enter virtual public school behind grade level. It should come as no surprise that it takes awhile for them to catch up. Would our opponents prefer that they simply fall through the cracks in the traditional classroom?

Our 2016 family survey shows that only 2 percent of our families report slippage in their child's performance since joining. The rest report that their child is either catching up, at or above grade level. When it's a choice between a parent's assessment and that of a standardized test, we'll take the parent's word every time. Unfortunately, the authors of the study that is being circulated to legislators and referenced in the ODE presentation failed to speak with one parent of a virtual public school student. Not one.

HB 4091 is being couched as a bill to "study" virtual public schools. It's clever because who can be against a study? As parents who've fought to keep alive this public school option for our kids, forgive our well-placed doubt about the true intentions behind this legislation. We can't understand why giving a small number of kids access to a public education in an environment better suited to their individual needs is so threatening to our opponent. And, how small are we? According to the ODE, we make up only 1.5% of all school kids. Don't you think your time and effort could be better spent on the real problems in our educational system?

I hope you will oppose HB 4091. Thank you for your time and for giving me the opportunity to testify today.