



Testimony to the House Education Committee  
In support of HB 2898  
March 13, 2017

Good afternoon chair Doherty and members of the Committee. I am Marshall Coba representing the Oregon Virtual Academy in support of HB 2898. ORVA is a virtual public charter school with an independent board of directors with about 2,450 students in K-12. Our charter is with the North Bend School District.

Improving Oregon's graduation rate is a clear and urgent priority for our state. We know that there are many efforts underway, including those led by the Chief Innovation Officer, Colt Gill, and Dr. Noor and his team at ODE. We believe HB 2898 is complimentary and aligned with these efforts. HB 2898 is a rather benign bill that will assist the state in assessing student progress towards graduation and an important effort in collecting more and better data.

Graduation rates have become a major point of discussion and contention over the past several years. Education professionals, legislators, taxpayers, the public and even students look at the numbers with awe and/or with concern. HB 2898 doesn't cure all these ills. It doesn't bring uniformity nor does it adjust in any manner how graduation rates are calculated. What it does do is add more data to the database that can be used to help make rational educational adjustments as needed over time.

HB 2898 amends ORS 329.105 which currently states " **329.105 School district and school performance reports.** (1) *The Superintendent of Public Instruction shall collect data and produce annual school district and school performance reports to provide information to parents and to improve schools*". HB 2898 adds to this data collection by allowing the Department of Education, by rule, to develop a method for analyzing the progress towards high school graduation for any student population for which the department calculates a graduation rate to determine:

- the percentage of students who are credit-deficient and the degree of credit deficiency after each academic year;
- the change, year over year, in degree of credit deficiency among credit-deficient students;
- the dropout rate among credit-deficient students and;
- the change, year over year, in the dropout rate among credit-deficient students.

Currently Oregon tracks whether or not 9<sup>th</sup> grade students finish their first year of high school on track to graduate (6 credits/25%) as this has been determined to be a promising indicator of the future likelihood of success or dropping out. However,

this data collection is limited to just the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and we are aware of no other annual identification of students who are off-track to graduate in other grade levels.

HB 2898 is about developing a method to analyze progress toward graduation that includes credit deficiency – with ODE in the lead as far as how to do it. For the Oregon Virtual Academy, the ability to analyze progress toward graduation that includes credit deficiency is critical information as many of our students enroll behind in their credits and are unlikely to graduate on time. This data would be helpful to us but it would also be helpful to every other school in Oregon.

To be clear, the bill does not make any changes to the grad rate calculation. But we do believe that understanding the rate in the context of student progress toward graduation is critical to improving how we support our students on their path toward graduation and beyond.

In fact, all Oregon parents, students, teachers, counselors, administrators, and legislators deserve to see how students are progressing toward graduation on an annual basis. This data would support educators as they determine the needed supports for students and help schools determine if they are closing the gap for credit-deficient students and to make sure they are not allowing individual students to fall behind.

The report required in Section 2 (e) could be added to any of the several annual reports already produced by ODE regarding graduation and/or drop- out rates. This report, using the new credit deficient and drop out rate data, will help all schools support their students and help the public better understand the how and why of high school graduation rates.

We understand that ODE does not currently collect this data, but we believe it is feasible, desirable, and a positive step for all students and schools in Oregon.

We thank you for this hearing and encourage your support of HB 2898.