

April 10, 2017

Dear Oregon Representatives,

Our experience with Southwest Charter School started when our daughter, Madison, started 7th grade. Madison experienced bullying at her former school as a result of having a speech delay. The social torment she endured compromised her academic success. We powerlessly watched her grades plummet and her desire to go to school disappear. At the end of her sixth-grade year, we promised her that we would advocate for her and work to find a better school environment. We had heard about Southwest Charter, but really did not know much about the school. In desperation for an alternative education, we applied and she was chosen from the lottery for a space.

While it is truly difficult to sum up the impact Southwest Charter had on Madison, we will highlight a few of the school's unique features. First, the school does amazing work creating and supporting a safe community of learning. In our current climate of education, with oversized classrooms, limited or cut budgets, and many schools simply failing to properly educate our youth, emphasizing the value of creating a safe space is instrumental to the progress of students. In our opinion, this characteristic of the school set the tone for Madison's success. We watched her transition from a shy, intimidated, and doubting young girl to a confident young woman eager to take risks and push her boundaries. Her teachers encouraged her, highlighted some of her unique strengths she was unaware of and held the community accountable within their safe space of learning. This community-emphasized education produced a cohort of very eclectic, but tight-knit individuals whom became lifelong advocates for one another. They have all pursued different paths in their post-secondary education, but the power of community that Southwest Charter provided created a confident group of young individuals.

Equally important are the methods of instruction that Southwest Charter employs. There is an emphasis on experiential learning which was instrumental to Madison's success. She was a timid writer as a result of her speech delay. She was encouraged to challenge that weakness and through the use of creative projects, she excelled in her confidence and served as a leader in coordinating a student led state bill contest. This also carried over to her high school career. When she encountered difficulties in subject areas, she was taught to look through different lenses and views. She became her most influential advocate.

Overall, Southwest Charter School provided Madison with resources to be successful which had not been introduced to her in other schools. Their holistic approach to education helped her pursue her specific academic interests, but also taught her essential strategies in navigating subjects which she found challenging. She graduated from high school with a high GPA, having pushed her limits by going on several service trips to Montana and California, and received a Provost scholarship at Southern Oregon University. She is now pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and hopes to one day pay in forward and be the kind of teacher she had at Southwest Charter; empowering diverse students to passionately learn among a supported community of learners.

Sincerely,

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