

Good afternoon, Chair Roblan and distinguished members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Sandy Cloud. I am a parent of two successful charter school graduates and coordinator of community partnerships for RPA (or Redmond Proficiency Academy), a public charter school located in Redmond, in Central Oregon.

When my daughters enrolled in RPA in 2009, our family had very little idea how to navigate preparations for college. I had only recently graduated from college myself. I knew that the public school system didn't seem like a good fit for what I believed about education and I didn't know how to proceed. RPA - at the time a little charter school over half an hour away from our home - empowered us to create our own path to our goals.

Since being hired by RPA in 2011, I've learned that charter schools have a really unique place in the education system. Every charter school has to continue to earn student and family trust, or they will fail and disappear. It doesn't matter if they have great ideas about education if they don't deliver great results. RPA did that, for my family and many, many more families like mine. Our lives will never be the same because of this charter school.

At RPA, my daughters were encouraged to think for themselves and to filter the many demands on their life by what mattered deeply to them. This is a skill that can only be developed when students are given the opportunity to make mistakes in their thinking process and their time management - our public charter school has the flexibility to allow for the creation of scaffolding to support the freedom of this type of student exploration.

Students in charter schools have opportunities to connect with their teaching staff in ways that build a sense of community and camaraderie. These relationships encourage student attendance and engagement, which increase learning and test scores. My daughters - and their friends - enjoyed their teachers and loved learning even challenging subjects because they enjoyed earning and keeping the respect of their instructors.

Our public charter school offered my girls the ability to take college entrance exams two times per year from their freshman year forward. They were accelerated through classes that were below their skill level and took college courses and AP courses from their freshman year forward. My daughters had to develop a plan for managing their time in order to take part in all the opportunities they were given to develop their skills, both academic and social. They and their peers were offered an enormous choice of elective classes including performing and visual arts. They were offered chances to serve their peers through RPA's unique Ambassador Cadre program (please ask me more questions on this later!), and to serve community members as well.

My oldest daughter, Kaitlyn, graduated from RPA and was accepted to Southern Oregon University's new Honors College, receiving free tuition for the two years she attended. (She was also accepted into NYU's summer program but was unable to attend because of the high costs.) After a while, though, she needed some time away from academic life and went to work bussing dishes in a high end restaurant that she now - one and a half years later - has a hand in managing. The owner of the company continues to add to her responsibilities and trusts her to move the company forward using the skills she developed by being given responsibility in our charter school. Interestingly, she recently had a conversation at work with some deaf customers that reminded her of how much she enjoyed her RPA American Sign Language class, so she has given notice that she will be leaving at the end of June to enroll in PCC's ASL Interpretation Program this fall.

My youngest daughter, Hannah, graduated from RPA and was offered acceptance to a number of private colleges and universities, including University of Portland, the Madrid Campus of Suffolk University, and Smith College. Being overwhelmed at all her options, she chose instead to take a year off of school, save up her money, and do some traveling. This decision culminated in my 19 year old daughter taking a two-week trip to Italy by herself and deeply learning about her ability to set goals and achieve them. Again, these skills had

their beginnings in her high school experiences. Currently she is working part time while attending Central Oregon Community College and is on the Dean's List.

RPA values community partnerships deeply. We believe that students are prepared for success by learning how to engage in relationships with the larger community and we pursue these partnerships vigorously. Our students have the opportunity to be SMART Readers, support our local Brightside Animal Shelter, and work with our local library in addition to numerous volunteer credit opportunities. All of our freshmen students are Big Brothers/Big Sisters to a local elementary student and our Freshman Seminar classes meet at these elementary schools one day/week. Every opportunity for our students to experience life with people older or younger than they is an opportunity to grow their capacity for understanding, social interactions, and compassion. The flexibility of our charter school gives us the chance to introduce new partnerships between the school and the community on a regular basis, which adds value to our academy and to our community. When adults trust students and that trust is returned, whole new worlds of interaction can occur that add even more life to our communities.

The truth is that RPA and other charter schools are here to fill specific student needs. Students who are self-motivated and desire to know themselves and be supported in finding purpose succeed - indeed, THRIVE at our charter school. These are the students who will "check out" of education if not given more freedom and responsibility. This RPA charter school has found one niche to fill that is needed for student success in Oregon. How many other holes might there be that other charter schools can fill if funded properly?

I urge you to support SB 915 so that all Oregon students can find their educational path forward. Thank you so much for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you might have about RPA or our family's experience.

Sincerely,

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In 2009, RPA began with 150 students.  
Now we have more than 840.  
People seem to agree: We're doing something right.

Apply Now at  RP academy .org

Limited Openings  
Apply Now!

The graphic features a blue silhouette of a graduate on the left. The text is centered and uses a mix of blue and green colors. The RP Academy logo consists of a stylized 'R' and 'P' in blue and green, followed by the text 'RP academy .org'.

