



Highest performing online school in Oregon

O: 503.258.4790 F: 503.258.4791

1394 NW Civic Dr • Gresham, OR 97030

March 21, 2019

RE: HB2516

Dear House Committee on Education:

Rep Margaret Doherty, Chair

Rep. Teresa Alonso Leon, Vice-Chair

Rep. Cheri Helt, Vice Chair

Rep. Diego Hernandez

Rep. Courtney Neron

Rep. Jeff Reardon

Rep. E. Werner Reschke

Rep. James Sollman

Rep. Kim Wallan

The purpose of this letter is to voice opposition to HB 2516. My name is Dr. David Gray and I am in my 6th year as Executive Director of the Metro East Web Academy, a public charter school in its 10<sup>th</sup> year of operation located in the Gresham-Barlow School District. The school has grown from an initial 70 students in 2009 to over 600 students in the 2018-2019 school year. I have served in traditional public education for over 30 years as a state department executive, superintendent, assistant superintendent, National Blue Ribbon School Principal, and a state and nationally recognized teacher. I share your passion for public education.

Unfortunately, the traditional education system is broken. I have worked to fix this system and that is the main rationale for my departure from traditional systems to the virtual charter experience. Traditional systems are effective for some students, but not all, and many of those succeed in spite of the good intentions of professional educators. This is why we must not limit options for students. Metro East Web Academy and many other charter schools exist to provide options for students to excel and obtain a high school diploma or GED. Many of our students also obtain an associate's degree from area community colleges.

Although HB 2516 targets schools that utilize public funds to pay for advertising and promotional materials, it appears that this bill is really focused on the operations and viability of the two schools operated by K-12, Inc.: Oregon Virtual Academy and K-12 Insight, and the school operated by Connections Academy: Oregon Connections Academy. I agree with the argument that for-profits should not be utilizing public funds to operate schools in Oregon; this bill unfairly includes quality non-profit virtual charter schools in this legislation, like MEWA.

**MEWEBACADEMY.ORG**

Additionally, it is important that our school utilize forms of marketing to get the word out about our blended program and inform parents and students the differences and uniqueness of what we have to offer as compared to others in Oregon. It is reported to us by both parents and students, that they were not aware of our program in Gresham – interestingly enough, many of these people reside in our sponsor district. It is our limited marketing and branding activities that inform our public and potential families as to our existence as a quality option for students in Oregon to attend.

Our non-profit virtual charter schools exist for a reason. We offer an opportunity for many students to recoup credits in a non-traditional environment as a large percentage come to us credit deficient and at-risk of dropping out of school. Many students also come to us for the purposes of earning college credit or completing their high school program in a more expedient and less socially eventful manner. These parents and students learn about our school, many times, via our online or other avenues of marketing our program.

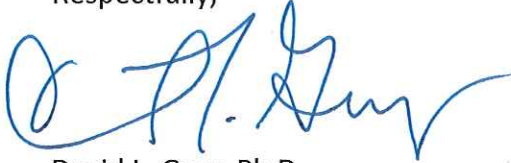
The fact is, the only school's that you will penalize with HB 2516 are those of us that do not have a connection with a for-profit organization – those for profit schools, like ORCA and ORVA, will be able to continue to market to Oregon families as they can simply state that they are not utilizing funds that come from the Oregon State School Funds. They have resources and funds available from their other operations around the country and world. Supporting this bill, will severely handicap quality schools like MEWA from competing with ORVA and ORCA. The students will still search for other options and will continue to fund these for-profit opportunities and remove the students and the funding from the community.

Many of our students report to us that the reason they choose to attend our hybrid virtual school, is that they want to “get out of overcrowded schools and classrooms”, or that they have been “bullied and are looking for a safer environment”, or that they are “bored and want to move faster” and are restrained from doing so with traditional school methods. We currently have over 600 students. Last spring, we graduated 125 students with either a diploma or GED. Some of these graduates were 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year seniors. This year, we hope to graduate as many. Many of these students would not have graduated at their neighborhood high school.

Lastly and most importantly, MEWA is the number one performing online school in the State of Oregon as measured by the state assessment and reported on the State Report Card. Additionally, we also exceeded the results of most of the brick and mortar schools in the east metro area and we exceeded the performance of all of the schools in our sponsor district. We join you in opposing the for-profit operations -- let's focus our efforts at removing **those for profit managed schools** from Oregon and supporting quality options for students like MEWA.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you are interested, here is the link to one student's story that informs the viewer relative to the power of our type of school:  
[https://youtu.be/e\\_DyePN1Z6w](https://youtu.be/e_DyePN1Z6w)

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. L. Gray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "G".

David L. Gray, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Metro East Web Academy

