

Disappointed in Legislative Concept 1099-virtual public charter schools

Rep Wilde-

I am very disappointed in your Legislative Concept 1099 regarding virtual public charter schools not being allowed if they are not in your district. I saw this information on the Teach NW Parent group Facebook page.

I am the mother of a 6th grade Black Autistic daughter who was pushed out of Eugene 4J in the 2nd grade as they violated her IEP, civil rights and left her with so much school trauma doing anything school-ish has caused severe resistance for years later.

4J left me no choice but to remove her because with a twice exceptional (gifted and “special needs”) Black child putting her in Lane School or Fox Hollow Behavior Schools was not an option as it would have permanently caused damage and further convinced her she was bad and stupid which her 1.5 years in 4J had already done. They refused to adopt any of the trauma informed, culturally responsive approaches I was suggesting to her IEP team. All while giving lip service to being trauma informed and culturally responsive at the district level.

So after leaving I began investigating how to homeschool a child. I was raised by two public school educators (My dad was a Junction City HS counselor and JV Basketball Coach for 40 years and my mom a Springfield SD Middle School teacher for 30 years. I never thought I would be homeschooling. But I had no choice but to save my child. As a Black Autistic child she is incredibly high risk for the school to prison pipeline of which I am well aware. To this day from her experience at Corridor Elementary Comprehensive Learning Center (CLC) she calls school Academic Prison. She came up with the term at 9. The explicit racism she encountered from her peers that the adults in the building were not capable of addressing in a way that didn't further shame her only compounded the issue of mistrust of schools and not feeling safe.

We left Eugene 4J in April 2017 and I said I would not return her until we had an urgent IEP meeting that took them until June to schedule when they gave me options I refused and then the Special Ed Administrator claimed FAPE when I would not send her to the MOST restrictive environment (other than her being locked up). At the mid level administrators suggestion I filled out the papers with Lane ESD for homeschooling since she was out more than 10 days at which time she would be considered truant.

I set about hiring trauma informed teachers to work in my home (I ended up with 2 different teachers who had worked in Salem Keizer school district, one in Gen Ed but had a son who was also autistic and later one who had worked 30 years in a behavioral room and both left for the same reasons I pulled out. The system does not work for families like ours and they could not be part of the system anymore that was harming children).

I started investigating homeschooling programs including Connections Academy which I learned was a for profit company owned by Pearson who is a part of the problem with our school systems as they get money for writing textbook, standardized tests and when the system fails they get some kids going into their online Connections academy program. My values would not allow me to go there, nor would her learning style which requires more flexibility, hands on experiential learning than a busy work online program would allow with curriculum that probably is not inclusive.

I enrolled her in Baker Web Academy for the Fall of 2017. Baker has an office in Eugene, provides (pre-COVID) group activities, field trips and she could still have an IEP. They helped pick a curriculum that would work with her learning style.

Baker is affiliated with Baker School District in Oregon so her public school dollars were staying in Oregon and hiring staff in Oregon. I felt good about that.

I later learned about a new program during the year that Marcola school district would be offering and signed up for Teach NW midyear when they began. It had more flexibility, allowed up to \$2000 year reimbursement to families per child for curriculum, activities, classes online or in person that are tied to an Individual Learning Plan that meets Oregon's Common Core. After I brought her to an IEP meeting at Marcola, Teach NW actually ended up hiring our second tutor to help them with the IEPs that were coming from the districts (many 4J) so they could accommodate students needs.

Again, the public school dollars were staying in Oregon and supporting small rural districts.

If you are concerned about people jumping ship from the mainstream education system (as you should be because it was failing before COVID and COVID only has highlighted this failure), then you should be specific about your legislation that students can not enroll in out of state, for profit charter programs like Connections Academy and K-12 who are part of the demise of the US school system.

If you don't allow families to pick alternatives like Baker Academy, Fossil and Teach NW (Marcola) you are both further damaging the small districts and these families who have been so hurt by the traditional system will either just homeschool with no support or go off the grid completely. Is that what you want? Now at least there is tracking and accountability to the common core. I contact our Teach NW education facilitator daily and send in weekly report of what we have worked on. There is an Individual Learning Plan that ties to common core we are held accountable to. We have to do a quarterly work portfolio or testing.

If you want to do something about the school systems here are some areas to look at:

- Investigate the Behaviorist programming at the UO School of Education that pushes Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) to the districts in this state, especially Eugene 4J and surrounding areas. This is basically Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) which is known by adult Autistics to cause PTSD. It is the school version of that. It is why my daughter crawled out windows and was put in what she calls the padded cell in 2nd grade. It puts teachers into immediate power struggles with children when the adult should be flexible and this is why we had news stories the last few years about room clears increasing. This Behaviorist practice is damaging and must go. I want to know how much money Eugene 4J makes in grants for students to be experimented on for UofO's research and I will find out and expose it. (I witnessed my daughter's CLC teacher do Planned Ignoring by physically turning her back and crossing her arms when my daughter was struggling. This is the opposite of what a child needs and especially a Black Autistic child doesn't need this from her white teacher if there is any semblance of a relationship to be had).
- Ditch the standardized testing. Trust teachers to track and know where their students are. As a parent I have only ever had to have a conversation to find out. The textbook/testing is a racket and we all know it at the expense of our kids. Stop teaching to the test. Teachers can not teach in an engaging and meaningful way when they are teaching to the test.
- Reduce class sizes. Teachers can't give the attention they need if they have 30+students in a room. Half of which are on or need IEPs.
- Hire Educators/Administrators/Staff of color and especially Black teachers. Representation matters and not just to the Black kids but all kids and to the white staff who don't even realize the damage they are doing to our kids. Our Eugene 4J school board was sickening to listen to in May's school board meeting as someone who runs EC Cares and has worked with families for 30+years acted like she just learned about racism with George Floyd's murder. This is highly representative of what is happening in our schools and why graduation rates of Black kids are so low. Lower than those of charter schools as a whole.

I understand that you have a concern that graduation rates are lower with the charter schools. I want to ask you if these kids would have graduated from the traditional setting and are they getting GEDs and going to community college and later maybe 4 year college or into a trade as many programs allow for apprenticeship and deep study of special interests. Having an Autistic child and following Autistic Adults I KNOW this is how she learns. I follow her special interests and wrap the education around that. Staying in a public school that wanted to put her in a restrictive environment had her on the school to prison pipeline in 2nd grade. Not a successful path.

You need to desegregate the data, ask why are these families pulling out (or being pushed out like we were). You need to look at the data by race/ethnicity and if they were in SPED settings. I know many families who had kids in SPED that are now homeschooling because of unmet needs.

I do not know what the answer is to save public education in the US but I know that you will do more damage if you take away an option that is a compromise for those of us who have been terribly hurt by the current school structure but still keeps public school dollars in Oregon public school districts.

P.S. Eugene 4J's online school program Fuel Ed is garbage I have heard from families that have used it and also part of the testing/for profit world which is problematic. Giving families that as their only option is not ok either.

I am happy to discuss this with you further over phone or zoom and I will find a way to give testimony should this move forward.

Thank you,

Amy Fellows, MPH (she/her/hers)

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