

My name is Summer Highfill, and I am writing in support of SB 240 and raising the 3 percent enrollment cap on virtual schools. My belief is that you should have choice in your educational options. When the pandemic started to impact Oregon in the spring of 2020, we looked at moving our daughter to ORCA. ODE shut down the ability to transfer schools, effectively limiting our educational choices. This was frustrating as we were wanting to prepare for some options pending the outcome of education during Covid. Unable to transfer in the Spring, we moved forward with enrollment transfer request in June of 2020. Our paperwork sat at our local district office past the 15-day timeline with no response which should have automatically awarded us a default transfer. I received a response from the district at about day 18 stating the 3 percent enrollment cap had been met and denying the transfer. What was interesting is I had helped several other families with the process of navigating transfers, they had applied after us and got their transfers approved. Clearly, despite the 3 percent rule, our districts were neither accountable or honest in how they dealt with these transfer requests on an "as received basis." We started the appeals process (which I was advised could take 30 days). With a small team (1 person) working on the appeals, we watched ours slowly move. As we got closer to the start of the year, my daughter didn't want to be waiting to find out where she would attend school. This was causing undue anxiety in a challenging time for students. We opted to remove our appeal and send her back to her local high school she'd attended previously. The biggest disappointment was that she is interested in the medical field and her local HS offers no courses in healthcare exploration. Due to the pandemic, as a junior, her ability to explore careers and prepare for college was limited. As a parent, educator and taxpayer, I expect that the ability to explore post-high school careers is a component of any school. Whether via CTE-approved paths of study or exploratory electives. Her high school day included a 1- to 2.5-hour instructional period (depending on course load). If she had attended ORCA her day would have been much more rigorous and provided her with the coursework to make an informed and prepared decision heading into post-high school training. ORCA has a CTE: MedSci pathway that results in a CCMA certification and she would have pursued that opportunity as a precursor to earning her RN or BSN. I feel we have lost a year of instruction and it's truly unfortunate. As her local high school doesn't provide any CTE programs for MedSci she has now been unable to confirm if this is a career path of interest and will need to spend money at college figuring out her future plans/goals. This is my biggest frustration, that students who have goals/plans and an interest in career exploration were forced to wait to make these decisions in that very pivotal Junior year.