

May 07, 2021

TO: Senate Education Committee

FR: Allison Samuel, Parent of previous Oak Grove Academy student

RE: Testimony in support of House Bill 3254

Chair Dembrow, my name is Allison Samuel, and I am here to provide testimony in support of House Bill 3254.

Our son, Tyler, was a student at Oak Grove Academy for 4 years. For the 3 years prior to this placement, he was bounced around between our home, the juvenile mental health system, and the juvenile developmental disability system. During this time he was placed in multiple different schools, educational systems, and school districts. Private and public schools could not provide the level of mental health and social-emotional support Tyler needed in their general education or special education settings. This resulted in Tyler being mentally unable to participate in learning. Not only was Tyler's ability to access his education affected, but the other students in the schools Tyler attended were also impacted. Tyler's behavior often led to room clears, code yellow lockdowns, police calls, and other disruptive incidents. He was subjected to improper care such as being locked in small offices with improper equipment and supervision multiple times. Tyler's experiences in the public school systems were the number one source of his increased dysregulation leading to the need for residential mental health treatment.

While in residential or day treatment programs, his mental health and emotional needs were met, but these placements were unable to meet his social or academic needs. Tyler has an average IQ and, when regulated, is able to handle the academic curriculum of his same-aged peers. However, the residential and day treatment programs did not offer an academic program equivalent to that in the regular school system. Tyler was usually given work that was multiple grade levels behind his ability level and was thus inappropriate for him.

When Tyler entered Oak Grove Academy in 2015, he had essentially missed all of grades 4-6 and had a very negative attitude about school. He began at the Tom McCall campus for extremely high need students. While there, he finally was in a setting that could provide for all of his needs and allow him to grow in all facets. After two years, he transitioned to the Gales Creek campus for students with less extreme needs. During his tenure at both campuses, he was able to receive the mental health support he required, the social-emotional skill building he needed, and start catching up on the academics he had missed in the previous years. An additional two years later, he transitioned to the Forest Grove School District's alternative high school and is now successfully pursuing a regular diploma in a general education setting with special education support. Without Oak Grove Academy, our son would never have had the opportunity to stabilize mentally and earn a regular high school diploma.

Our son is not alone. Tyler entered the Forest Grove School District in 2015 when he was placed in a Developmental Disabilities group home within their boundary. He was placed there, in part, because Oak Grove Academy was the best fit for his educational needs. There are multiple such homes in the Oak Grove attendance area, many with clients whose needs are as complicated as Tyler's. While many districts may only see one or two students with this level of need, this district has a large concentration of such students. Most of these students do not have anyone in their life willing or capable to advocate for them. Oak Grove Academy provides a vital program for these disabled children and gives them the best opportunity to grow and learn to the best of their ability.