

Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to oppose to SB 1552 which would lift the cap on enrollment in charter schools not sponsored by a school district.

Now, with our schools in crisis, is not the time to fund separate, and especially private, systems. There are great examples in our state of quality online education programs, developed and directly run by school districts, that have even been around prior to the pandemic. These programs are well developed, successful, and not perverted by an underlying motive of profit.

The pandemic pointed out that people, for many different reasons, may desire an online option (either temporarily or permanently) for their children. As many districts tried to provide families with options during this period of uncertainty, they discovered that although they had both demand and willing staff to provide online options, they just did not have the funding to staff both online and in person classes as schools reopened and asking teachers to teach both at the same time is not good for anyone.

I'd like to quickly relate the story of a parent I know, whose children I taught when they were in middle school. This mom wanted to keep her children in online education when schools first reopened because they live in a multigenerational household with a high risk member and a small child not old enough to be vaccinated. This mom is an essential worker who has to work every day because when she doesn't work, she doesn't get paid. She felt her kids were doing well in the program the district provided at the onset of the pandemic, where they met with a teacher from the high school for regular classes and that teacher was also available for office hours when kids needed more help. However, when the district went back to in person and the only online option provided was an option which disconnected her children from teachers the family knows and trusts at the local school (where she still hoped the kids would return to classes once her family felt safe) this mom felt she had no other choice than to send her kids back to school in person. This was principally because she never graduated from high school herself and English is not her native language. She felt she would not be able to provide the support her kids would need to be successful without the connection to those teachers, so she sent them back in spite of grave concerns she had about the risks to other family members, because she believes so strongly in the importance of her children's education.

This is only one of many similar stories I heard from parents of former students. This district also has an excellent Dual Language Immersion program and many parents were not willing to have their child lose their second language learning by being placed in the monolingual online option that was provided. Many did it anyway because they had similar stories of at risk family members. It was really a choice that was no choice for many different folks for many different reasons.

I am all for giving parents options and we have robust private school systems for parents who choose that. But if we truly want ALL students to have equal access to these options, as well as accountability for public dollars spent, our public schools should be fully funded and staffed to provide those options.

Who knows? Maybe fully funded schools with a variety of options for teaching and learning would even help attract and retain teachers.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my thoughts.

Regards,

Kathleen Jeskey, Retired Educator
Lake Oswego