

Submitter: Scott Hays
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1066

Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Education

I write in support of SB 1066. This bill proposes establishing a task force to examine chronic problems alleged to exist in the small group of for-profit online charter schools operated by private entities. As a retired public-school teacher and having spent significant time and energy in my professional career helping two community-based charter schools get organized and off-the-ground, I have a deep interest in how to best serve the needs of Oregon students. I decided to investigate some of these problems to better weigh the importance of the allegations.

Without having to look too deeply, I discovered that there are many concerns regarding the operation of these for-profit online charter schools. Among the most potentially damaging are:

- a 2017 audit report by Secretary of State Dennis Richardson found that these operations were failing our students and another study in 2022 reported on a lack of proper accountability systems among them;
- questions have been raised as to whether these enterprises adequately meet the needs of students with disabilities, English-language learners, and students who come from low-income households (or even make it harder for such students to enroll);
- questions also have been asked regarding the presence of safeguards designed to discourage or prevent fraudulent practices, such as licensure, residency, attendance data and other forms of misreporting (the implication being, of course, that such fraudulent behaviors might be taking place);
- concerns that algorithm-based programming – used in many of these classrooms -- might negatively impact learning efficacy, equity, and student data privacy;
- a concern raised by the Oregon Department of Education that for every half percentage point of increased student transfers to these for-profit charter schools, school districts lose \$55 million in shifted State School Fund resources; and
- uncertainty regarding whether these schools exercise (or have in place) appropriate quality academic standards or are held accountable to them in the same way public school districts are.

I do not know if any (or all) of these allegations are true, or the effect they are having on public education. But a task force – as established by this legislation and composed of unbiased experts, policy leaders and interested stakeholder – will be able to examine them and then make recommendations for future action, if needed.

I urge you to support the effort to better regulate and oversee private entities operating in the public school system and using public funds.

Thank you

Scott Hays