

Submitter: William Fleming
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3444

I am the proud parent of an Alliance Charter Academy (ACA) Kindergartner. My mom was 30+ years a public teacher in Arizona and I am proud to support public schools in all forms. I support HB3444. It is a step in the right direction to put public charters on a more equal footing with conventional public schools and hopefully spurs more innovation in education, which Oregon desperately needs. Below are my thoughts after experience 1 semester of public school with my oldest in 2024. [PARAGRAPH BREAK]

Something every parent learns is that every child is different. You learn this when the advice your parents and friends share with you flops because your kid is unique because every kid is unique. Public Charter Schools offer innovation and variety to the one-size-fits-all school model. In our case, ACA offers our son essentially hybrid school. He goes one day a week for art, choir, and recess. He sees his friends. Socializes. Most other days, he does his core subjects at home in a few hours where we can calibrate to his individual skills. He is a year ahead of math, but at-grade-level on penmanship. He also attends Trackers outdoor school on Friday where he's learning camping skills, an afternoon Ukulele class on Thursdays and can build robots with Lego SPIKE. This is only possible because he has time. If it was not for ACA offering their model. If they did not offer their model, we would very likely be a home-schooling family. It is because Public Charters exist that we are part of public school. [PARAGRAPH BREAK]

ACA is a community school. It has test scores that largely beat the home district of Oregon City. I assumed that, because ACA was affiliated with Oregon City School District, they would be well resourced. What I've seen in my one semester is that ACA overcomes incredible odds for their achievement. It starts with the lack of funding. They get 85% of per-student dollars. I thought that was because they get other benefits from the district... not really. ACA pays to rent a decrepit building they have no ability to refurbish as well as a mandatory cleaning contract and technology contract. ACA does not receive any dollars for transportation and does not offer transportation. There is no working kitchen, so the free lunch programs aren't at ACA. They don't receive any local bond funding. They don't have the man-power to apply for federal grants. The deck is so stacked against ACA and other public charters, it's amazing that they broadly outperform in test-scores and student outcomes. I can only imagine if public charters were earnestly supported, how much good it would do because ACA, and I imagine most other public charters, are scraping by year-to-year.[PARAGRAPH BREAK]

Oregon is in desperate need of education reform and the demand for public charters is incredible. Charter schools are way oversubscribed. We were like 75th on the wait-list at Sojourner, the best performing North Clackamas School District school. This was a school we are in district for, but was 30 minutes away. That's incredible demand. We were also like 50th on the wait-list at Springwater Academy, another charter that is much closer to our house, but a different district. ACA was the right option for our family, but the experience of getting a comically high spot on multiple wait-list made it clear just how much demand there is for school choice. Joining ACA's finance committee also let me see how all schools get whacked over the income statement with 26%+ PERS contributions (private employers are often <10% for retirement contributions). There needs to be massive systemic changes. 2/3rd of kids in the state being below proficient in math is not okay. HB3444 is a step in the right direction for public charters and puts funds where parent demands are and where there is a severe lack of funding today. I strongly support HB3444.

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Thank you for reading this message. I wish Representative Hoa Nguyen strength in her ongoing battle. [END]