

Submitter: Sam Pierce
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3444

Dear Chair Huron and Members of the Education Committee,

I am providing testimony in support of HB 3444 and asking for your support in its passage. I am a former Oregon educator holding a Masters Degree in Teaching, a parent of two public charter education students and a former board president of a charter school. I have come to understand, through educational research and my own practical classroom experience, the wide variety of learning styles and variability in social, emotional and cultural factors influencing the way an individual child learns. Public school teachers do their best, unsung heroes in this largely political narrative, to meet this variability while meeting increasingly stringent outcome targets with increasingly dwindling resources and time with individuals. The presence of alternatives in the public school arena, largely through charter schools, offers students opportunities they may not be able to access in public school classrooms.

All public school students in Oregon deserve the same investment in their education, whether attending a public charter school or public district-run school. Right now students in public charter schools receive 48% of the funding that their peers in district-run school receive, an unsettling fact from a recent report by ECONorthwest. My child's education is worth more than 48 cents on the dollar. Every child is worth our full attention and equal investment.

Young people are not "one size fits all", and education is not linear process where just the right inputs create predictable outcomes...and if education is a right and a mandate we hold dear in our country, we must provide educational options that reflect this. As it stands, it is very difficult already for Charter Schools to get off the ground. When a school meets the requirements to register as a public charter and is able to finally open it's doors, the inequity in public funding creates a situation where, from day one, they struggle to meet budget, hire qualified staff and provide needed professional development to teachers. The dollars we the public do spend on these institutions, offered in the limited fashion they currently are, can render these program less effective and essentially ensure they do not thrive and last. This renders our investment less effective. If we invest in charter schools equally, we create possibility, and on an equal playing field can then assess the effectiveness of these programs and investments fairly. These alternative programs, properly funded, then become wonderful sources of data. The majority of our Oregon schools are operating one way, and sound logic suggests that introducing variability will only serve the whole.

Our state's initial - and now outdated - charter school legislation is not in line with our state's current priorities.

It diverts funding for early education and intervention, with K - 8 students receiving only 80% of their intended per pupil funding.

It diverts funding for our historically underserved communities, with less than half of the intended state weighed funds flowing through to serve those children.

It blocks access to federal funding, which is specifically intended to serve historically underserved students. This includes no access to IDEA, Title I, and Title III.

I urge you as a constituent and as a parent to support HB 3444, have it referred to committee, and ultimately vote in support of this very necessary fix in our public education funding.

Gratefully a fellow Oregonian,

Sam Pierce