

When the Pandemic struck we watched as our 4th and 6th graders got shepherded into the emergency online public school with concern. We saw, and expected, plenty of transition problems from the school district as they struggled to create an online version. We were very forgiving and adaptable, but finally saw that public online school was a shadow of its former self and began searching for an online alternative from an established source. We settled on Connections Academy and enrolled early, knowing there was a 3% limit. Since then we could not be more pleased at the excellent quality and extremely high standards presented in this online school. Yes, there were tremendous challenges initially, but with a stay at home wife who could help administrate we eventually got used to the much more rigorous teaching and many more hours devoted to schoolwork per day. Most of the teachers are from Oregon and were former public school teachers. When the 2020-2021 school year began, I believe approximately 3000 plus new Oregon students enrolled. Several weeks into the new school year, the Connection Academy parent support facebook group lit up with exhausted parents begging for the school to ease the pace and amount of work required, as they could not keep up. Note this was the opposite experience compared to public online schools. Some moderation at Connection Academy ensued, and late assignments could be accepted in some cases. Eventually, perhaps a few hundred students left and presumably reentered the online public school. When parents asked why was this online school so much tougher than public school, a teacher with 30 years experience in Oregon public schools explained that the material used, primarily Pearson based, was approximately 2-3 years ahead of schedule compared to Oregon public school curriculum. From our experience, this completely explained the difficulty we initially had adapting to the new school. Yes, perhaps online schools require a lot of parental administration and help, particularly for elementary age children, as my wife devotes several hours each day, but less involvement is needed for middle school and high school students. In my zip code, the great school ratings are low for the public schools, 3 out of 10 for one of the middle schools and 4 out of 10 for the lone high school. Both school fall below Oregon averages for many things. We are so grateful for the opportunity to have an online school alternative and believe, in general, it provides a much superior service compared to public school, other than reduced social interaction. I see there is an opposing submission by a noted Oregon University professor. I have read his words and the reports linked, and I offer this in response. I think his reports are misleading, as if they only audited reviews from families not suited to online school, which I have already noted is not for everyone. One of the major themes of his reporting is that students at online schools learn less than their public school counterparts, which I vigorously know is a complete canard. If parents view online school favorably, and the students pass state standard testing, who is to deny their choice? Parents have been flocking to public school alternatives for decades, And it has been widely known for many years that such students have done significantly better on their college entrance exams compared to public school students. Additionally, the Oregon University professor casts shade on online schools for profiteering, but reality is just the opposite, they do a better job for the same or less money. In conclusion, we should not deny parents the choice to direct their children to better options. If the competition to public school posed by online school poses a financial challenge, so much the better, because in the absence of competition, the local public school becomes answerable only to themselves, and eventually services whither.