



Allison Galvin
Executive Director

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Chair Dembrow and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am Allison Galvin, Executive Director of Oregon Charter Academy here in support of Senate Bill 240. Oregon Charter Academy is the largest and longest-tenured virtual public charter school in the state, currently in our 16th year of operation and serving about 4,300 students this school year. We are formerly known as Oregon Connections Academy, but recently transitioned from our comprehensive management contract and have undergone the important work of becoming an independent, locally-run nonprofit public school.

In our 16 years of operation, we have the experience to share that virtual school is not right for every student. We work hard during the enrollment process to educate families about our school's vision and mission, as well as how daily learning works. It is our goal that every student is able to access the best educational option for them, even if it means attending a different school. But for the students who need something outside of their neighborhood school, I am very grateful we are able to offer a comprehensive educational option for the students who thrive in the virtual setting. Unfortunately, not every student currently has equitable access to educational options that are right for them. First semester data for the 2020-21 school year includes 521 total students that started the enrollment process at Oregon Charter Academy but were paused until the district notice of intent process could be completed, or district response to the 3% cap. Of these 521 students:

- 270 were denied by their local district
- 82 chose to not move forward with enrollment
- 70 were allowed to enroll after being initially denied by their local district due to parents submitting challenges to ODE.

At Oregon Charter Academy, we offer many programs for students to access, including our CTE program ASCEND, which currently offers five robust pathways for students. Just this spring, 11 seniors have earned their Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA) certification in our medical science pathway, while eight have earned an IT Fundamentals Pro Certification in our Computer Science pathway. We also offer dual credit opportunities for high school students. To date, 788 students have earned college credit through this program. Our school is also a model for implementing AVID in a virtual environment, a program focusing on serving traditionally underserved



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students. We also have a truly unique partnership with NASA where our students had the opportunity to speak directly with Dr. Shannon Walker on the International Space Station.

In addition to our academic programs, we focus on serving the social-emotional needs of our students. Our school social worker and family support liaisons work tirelessly to connect families with resources in their local communities as we all know that having basic needs met must come before education. In fact, this team hosted a holiday gift bag drive this year where our staff was able to support many families impacted by the wildfires.

Like our brick-and-mortar counterparts, we offer events and co-curricular activities. Our student government team is thriving where leadership skills are taught and students are empowered to implement these leadership skills throughout our school. We host over 200 field trip opportunities for students all over the state, outside of COVID of course, and even host events like prom, spirit week and college and career fairs.

I have submitted for the record a one page overview of our school. Our data highlights the role virtual schools play in serving students in mobility and why students choose to enroll in virtual schools. One data point worth mentioning is how nearly 65 percent of our high school students enroll after their freshman year. The Oregon Department of Education has shared that the graduation rate for students that transfer at any point during their high school career is 50 percent statewide. Our graduation rate for these students in mobility is 59 percent, nine percent higher.

Becoming Oregon Charter Academy has allowed us to provide a robust, dynamic learning environment with equitable access for all of our students who have been able to enroll, which includes a Chromebook and internet access for every student. Unfortunately, there is not equitable access to all forms of education for all students in our state. We will continue to do our part, by making equitable access to our resources, programs and learning for the students we serve and hope that one day we can live in a state that prioritizes this as well for all students to access the best educational option for them.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allison Galvin".

Allison Galvin
Executive Director



15+ Years of Virtual
Schooling Experience

Oregon Charter Academy (ORCA) is an online, tuition-free charter school serving grades K-12. ORCA students utilize 21st Century Skills of communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking to prepare for the rapidly changing economies of tomorrow.

Formerly, Oregon Connections Academy, Oregon Charter Academy went independent from the Pearson corporate managed school model in order to improve our learning platform, curriculum, and student technology, through the ability to make programmatic changes based on stakeholder needs.

Why Oregon Charter Academy?

- ASCEND Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program
 - Career Pathways in Computer Science, Medical Science, Veterinary Science, Early Childhood Education, and Business Management
- AVID: Advancement via Individual Determination
 - AVID is a college readiness program designed to close achievement gaps and prepare all students for success after high school.
- College Now (dual credit) opportunities with Linn Benton Community College, Chemeketa Community College, and Willamette Promise
- Student Government for students in grades 5-12
- National Honor Society and National Junior Honor Society
- Teen Parent Program
- Partnership with NASA and the ARISS Program
 - Oregon Charter Academy was one of 10 organizations (and the only virtual school) nationwide involved in the ARISS program where students were able to interview astronaut Shannon Walker aboard the International Space Station in December

What the data shows:

- Oregon Charter Academy continues to improve their graduation rate and anticipates an increase of 5% over the previous school year, despite the challenges of COVID-19
 - Since 2009, the 4-year cohort graduation rate has improved almost 40%
- Prior to COVID-19, Oregon Charter Academy increased their regular attendee rate by 22.8%
- Over 700 students have earned college credit through our College Now partnerships
- On average, 90% of students who attend ORCA for their entire senior year will graduate, regardless of credit deficiency rate.

Challenges for virtual schools:

- Students in mobility: Nearly 65% of students enroll in ORCA after their freshman year
- 82% of students in mobility started their senior year credit deficient
 - 39% were more than 4 credits deficient entering their senior year
- ODE's published graduation rate for students in mobility is 50%, whereas ORCA's graduation rate for students in mobility is nearly 59%

Oregon Charter Academy is supporting at-risk and underserved students:

External Factors:

- 15% of ORCA high school students listed having a family stress factor at enrollment
- 20.9% of students enrolling have mental health concerns needing a virtual setting.
- 11% of enrolling students have physical health concerns needing an alternative setting.
- 40.7% of students enrolled due to needing a more flexible schedule than that offered in a traditional setting.

Previous School Factors:

- 32.9% of students stated they enrolled due to struggling academically in their previous setting
- 25% of students shared they were bullied in their previous school.

ORCA has been able to support students' success in graduating who were at-risk of not graduating (students with parents incarcerated, caring for grandparents or siblings, working full time jobs, severe health issues, etc.)