

I am the parent of a first grader enrolled at Teach NW, a virtual charter school that caters to homeschooling families. When people think of online charter schools, I believe they often think of a child in front of a computer all day, clicking through reading, videos, and quizzes. Our school could not be more different. I choose the best curriculum and learning activities for my son, which are approved by teacher with whom I have contact four days per week. I submit lesson plans, and have a choice of documenting my son's learning through work samples, MAP testing, or a combination of the two. We receive a stipend to help cover the costs of curriculum, materials, piano lessons, and other enrichment classes. I can easily believe that for-profit online schools have dismal outcomes, as reported. Please don't make the devastating mistake of tarring all online charters with the same brush.

My son has been diagnosed with ADHD, and anxiety, and is also gifted and quite advanced academically (he has tested at the 99th percentile in both reading and math on the MAP assessment). His Occupational therapist and neuropsychologist have both recommended that he be homeschooled. I have no doubt that he would not be nearly as successful in a traditional school environment. At home, I am his primary teacher, and can both accommodate his needs allow him to work at his level. Were he unable to continue at Teach NW, we would simply home school. I believe many, many families utilizing this type of charter would do the same.

When schools transitioned to distance learning last year, we saw the chaos that ensued in the families we know. We know teachers and families with children in traditional school. They were all trying very hard to make it work, and it was hard. A lot of parents understandably decided it wasn't for them, and tried to enroll in charter schools like ours. Many of them were not allowed to leave their local district, because of the 3% cap. Some chose to simply pull their kids out to home school. Surely school districts could have tried to emulate the model that families were running to. They still can! If my district had an option like Teach NW that could meet my child's needs, I would gladly stay in district. Instead they choose to hold children hostage to save their funding.

Many children are returning and will return to in classroom learning at their local schools as they open, but many families will still choose to keep their children at home. As schools are beginning to open up, we are already hearing about these children being left behind their classes as an afterthought on zoom in the corner of the room. Surely these students deserve a better option.

The influx of new charter school students has also affected home school families who want to make use of these schools, so that they are being driven out of the system entirely, when the option of these charter schools would otherwise draw families in where there is the possibility of some oversight.

Raising the cap just makes sense. If local schools are having trouble keeping their students, maybe it's time for them to look at why rather than simply forcing them to stay.