

Submitter: Hazel Wheeler
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1552

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in support of SB1552, which would remove barriers to virtual learning for Oregon students. I would like to share why I believe that having a virtual option available to all families is extremely important.

Our son started kindergarten at his neighborhood school. Although he was five, it was a struggle for him to be in the classroom environment and to pay attention. When he was in second grade, he was barely keeping up; it was at this point that he was diagnosed with ADD-inattentive type. While the 504/IEP plans he had stated that teachers should provide an environment with minimal distractions, this was never honored. Concurrently, our son's diagnosis also showed us that he had processing delays; at 8 years old, he was processing his world at the pace of a pre-kindergartener. This slow reaction time left him open to being physically bullied as he didn't fight back. Between first and third grade, I had numerous meetings with the school counselor, SPED coordinator, and upper administration to construct safety plans for our son and try to bring him up to benchmark in his academics. Instead of improvement, our son's experience of himself as a competent learner collapsed. His teacher was not willing to educate herself on ADD/ADHD issues and treated them instead as discipline problems instead of redirecting the child's attention as advised.

By spring of third grade, it was clear to my husband and I that this situation was having a detrimental impact on our son's mental health; he was hopeless and his anxiety was wearing him down. We made the decision to bring him home for school. At this time, our school principal and district offered little to no guidance for us in regard to alternatives. We chose to homeschool for fourth grade, then found a new online charter (Frontier Charter Academy of Oregon) that had a curriculum I felt would be beneficial for our son and his learning styles. Immediately, the change in perspectives about learning and helping struggling learners was very clear-- online school offered myriad supports not just for the kids with 504/IEP learning challenges, but for all students. Each student's needs were incorporated into the learning experience, materials offered in a variety of ways (text-to-voice/audiobook-type options, voice-to-text options for students struggling with composition, to name a couple), and lessons were scaffolded and crafted to ensure all of the students had equal opportunity to get the most out of the subject being taught.

FCA, and other virtual schools, are not at all the same as the distance learning offered during times in the past few years. The creation of the school, its content, its

actual tech infrastructure, is very different from the cobbled-together remote learning which so frustrated students, their parents, and the teachers required to pivot to this new situation. Virtual charters are created entirely from the ground up specifically for teaching in this modality. The communication is streamlined; as a parent, I can look and see how my student is doing, where he's at with his assignments, read the feedback from teachers and more. This helps me to be the best team member I can be to support our son's learning.

That was in fifth grade; our son is now a thriving Freshman at FCA; he no longer needs the support of an IEP plan. The angry little boy from third grade who was barely hitting his benchmarks is now happy and has held straight A's for the past 4+ years, thanks in part to A. the caring and thoughtful teachers and B. his ability to choose his own environment in order to limit his distractions. We believe the less-distracting environment at home is what's made all of the difference. All students need access to learning that works for them; virtual charters can be a vital support to many of our students and should be accessible to the families who need these options for their students to succeed.

Thank you,

Hazel Wheeler