

February 24, 2022

Members of the Senate Education Committee

I write this letter out of the concern many parents and students have alike; the future of their educational career.

When my (now) 27-year old daughter was in school, she was shy and didn't have any friends. When she entered high school as a freshman, she was on the honor roll.

She was also forgotten.

Because of her naivete, she entered a school population of over 2,000 students. She would come home crying because her honors classes became too much to handle because teachers were too overwhelmed to offer help on schoolwork. As a result, her grades began to suffer, she requested that she be placed in 'regular' classes, and she began associating herself-- unbeknownst to me-- with other children who were facing far worse circumstances which led to very concerning behaviors. (Running away, drug exposure, skipping classes, etc.)

"You are more than welcome to attend class with her," the vice principal of Reynolds High School told me at the time. "We can't keep track of students and we're not babysitters."

Having a 3-year old in preschool and me working part-time, the idea came across with a sense of cold sarcasm.

"There's got to be a better alternative than this" I thought to myself. However, the only alternatives I knew about involved more than \$7,000 in tuition to attend.

Things were getting worse, and I didn't want my daughter to become one of those victims that you hear about who fell in between the cracks.

So I did the only thing I could do-- I sent her to the other side of the country to New York to finish school at her father's home. Honestly, if I had not done that, I doubt that she would not soon be finishing her master's degree in nursing.

Of course, I didn't want the same fate to happen when her younger sister entered the school system. I remember attending kindergarten round-up where all of the kids were running around and screaming while my daughter and another child were sitting attentively in their seats, listening to the staff introduction.

Right before brick-and-mortar school started I found out about Connections Academy and signed her up. Let's just say that by the end of kindergarten, she was reading at a 3/4th grade level.

At one point, I wanted to see how she would do in a physical classroom environment like I grew up in-- but I was apprehensive in doing so. I wanted the ability to go back to the online environment if my daughter did not excel as well.

Suffice it to say, she met friends and did well. However, the curriculum didn't seem nearly up to par

with her online school. As a parent volunteer, it was also unsettling when I would be subjected to teachers talking behind children's backs during recess. (That's seriously a thing? I was shocked.)

By middle school, my daughter would come home and instead of telling me about the songs she was learning in choir class, she would tell me how the choir teacher would discuss her political beliefs in front of her students and tell them what to think. It raised a big red flag in our family as members may have contradicting opinions, but never have put each other down for them. But my poor daughter would come home from school crying because she didn't know what to believe or who was a bad person for thinking what.

This is so wrong. We want our children to learn so they can form their own opinions-- not to be indoctrinated by the opinions of others.

We withdrew our daughter from brick-and-mortar school in the 2nd semester of 8th grade and enrolled her in Willamette Connections Academy where she's been ever since. This has been a positive decision as her grades have gone back up to A's and B's and she's been able to explore areas that not a lot of kids can in the traditional public school setting. For one-- she was able to do school work during this pandemic while brick-and-mortar schools were shut down for a couple of weeks at a time. She's also been able to learn at her own pace (while keeping up) and has recently obtained a job to help with her self-esteem.

She could not do this with all of the distractions that have been going on for the past two years at the in-person school in our area. And right now with all of the videos of brawls at Reynolds High School-- that's not a place where I really feel comfortable sending her.

So for now, I would like to ask anyone who has their doubts about online public school, to take a deep-down look at who it truly benefits. The students. When the students are comfortable and happy-- it shows in their grades and their accomplishments. I am so thankful for everything that Connections Academy has provided for my daughter and hope that any family going through whatever circumstances they face will have that option to explore for themselves.

Reynolds School District has reached the cap for virtual school enrollments, which is very frustrating for parents who want their children to have online school as an option. Not only because they can't transfer to a great virtual school like Willamette Connections Academy, but Reynolds is one of many districts that doesn't offer an online learning option for students.

This should not be a political issue but rather 100% interest in a child's well-being. Capping enrollment is punishing families who only want to have an equal chance of a good education like everyone else.

Thank you,

Kimberley Brown
Parent of a Willamette Connections Academy student
Troutdale