

To: The Senate Education Committee
From: Martin Mendelson, M.D., Ph.D., Portland, Oregon
Re: Testimony Opposing Senate Bill 1552

Dear Senators,

I am a scientist/physician/educator. I have held faculty positions in 5 medical schools in the U.S. I am currently a clinical professor in the School of Public Health, University of Washington (UW), and a Clinical Associate Professor at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU). I began my teaching career in 1964, and have pursued it ever since. My interest in the integrity of education at all levels leads me to this conclusion: it is profoundly damaging to permit the incursion of for-profit companies to siphon students and dollars out of the public school system into private pockets.

Among the facts regarding corporate virtual companies are these:

- The two largest corporate virtuals operating in Oregon had a 53% and 33% graduation rate – while the state average was 79% (ODE Report Card, 2018)
- K12, Inc., now rebranded as Stride, Inc., is the worst performer nationally, according to the National Education Policy Center (nepc.colorado.edu).
- Students do not get federal and state nutrition support, no band or other extra-curriculars, and are often unable to access special education or English-language-learning-services.
- Without face-to-face, “relational” learning, students are also deprived of school nurses, counselors, SLPs, and other specialists.
- 1:150 teacher-student ratios are not uncommon.

But these are only part of what concerns me. Currently I teach class at UW via the internet because of the COVID threat, and I am constantly aware of how important it has been for me to be able to perceive the unspoken responses of my students. Any classroom teacher will tell you the same thing. Equally important is for the students to see my responses – this bond is critical for learning!

These companies spend millions of dollars on marketing and lobbying to divert attention from performance issues. They frame the issue as one of “parent choice”, as if parents really choose to have their children receive substandard education. The fact is that attempts to access legally required records are frequently met with stonewalling and doctored data. No one is approving materials. Attendance and student work is often done by parents and presented as the children's.

The only thing “public” about public charter schools is that the money that pays for them comes from public funds. The truly public school boards have no control over them. For every half-percent increase on the enrollment cap, public schools lose \$55 million (ODE statistic). The reality is that although these outfits receive the same per-pupil funding as brick-and-mortar schools, their costs are very much lower, and their profit is substantial.

Despite what you may hear today from alleged parents of school-age children (obviously there is no way to confirm who is such a parent), there is no educationally-valid reason to prefer on-line learning. Rather, the body of evidence supports the critical importance of in-person, in-school learning. To further distort and degrade our public education system, the bedrock of informed citizenship, would be an egregious mistake.

Thank you for your kind attention.