

Submitter: Shelly Smith
On Behalf Of: Lewis and Clark Montessori Charter School
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB767

I have two high school-aged children who attended Lewis & Clark Montessori Charter School from kindergarten through 8th grade. I can unequivocally say that this school has played a vital role in their education, their critical thinking and perspective of the world, their empathy and kindness towards others, as well as their sense of civic duty and community responsibility. Our daughter was lucky enough to be selected into the lottery for kindergarten in 2010 and we soon realized what a special place it was. From a broad view (the use of the Montessori method in the academic structure of the lower/upper elementary levels and the Montessori Adolescent Corps) down to the small details (fresh, made-from-scratch school lunches, class camping trips and expeditions, along with extracurricular events), the Lewis & Clark Montessori Charter School community is like no other. It is irreplaceable.

Our family recently learned of Gresham-Barlow School District's intention to terminate the current building lease in June of 2023, forcing the school to find an alternative location. This issue is heartbreaking, but we were relieved to hear that Lewis & Clark Montessori Charter School found a suitable alternative in a nearby community. To find a facility that can accommodate 400+ students, teachers, and staff was a near miracle and we are thankful to hear that the school would stay afloat.

But, to compound the recent facility challenges faced by school community, Senate Bill 767 has been introduced to amend ORS 332.158 (allows for the existence of a Charter school in a different school district than its sponsoring district). So, Lewis & Clark Montessori Charter School now must find a suitable facility WITHIN the boundaries of GBSD IF this new legislation passes. The most disheartening piece of this entire situation is that the proposed new facility is located less than 1000 feet from the GBSD boundary. It is less than 0.2 of a mile!

So, the legacy and impact of this 14-year old Montessori school could vanish because of an odd combination of a potentially amended ORS and roughly 1000 feet??! Lewis & Clark Montessori Charter School is trying to find a home so that they can continue to provide students and families access to a free, high-quality, public Montessori school education that they are entitled to. Please eliminate this unnecessary barrier, vote NO on SB 767 and allow well established charter schools to be located within proximity to their existing communities. Thank you.