

Senator Dembrow  
Chairman, Senate Education Committee  
Members of the Senate Education Committee  
May 2, 2023  
RE: House Bill 3204

Thank you for your willingness to hold a public hearing on House Bill 3204. We live in rural Linn County and are small business owners. We are blessed with one child, who is our medical miracle, Gabriel. He is 8-years old and in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade at Willamette Connections Academy (WillCA), a free, virtual public charter school serving over 1,000 students across Oregon in grades K-12.

Before kindergarten, and before the COVID pandemic, we had already made the choice for Gabriel to enroll in WillCA. With my husband receiving his doctorate, myself college educated, and my mother being a retired teacher, we have experienced the spectrum of brick-and-mortar educational options. We also have many family and friends who sought out alternative learning opportunities such as home-schooling, online and private education programs for their children. After careful consideration of all those options we decided online schooling had the best chance of meeting all our needs.

My husband and I excelled in schooling and we have high expectations for a learning institution. Some may wonder why we would choose online public school over all the other options and I can say that all the benefits for joining online schooling appealed to us. The caliber of the curriculum, along with the direct contact with his teacher, has been a well-structured approach for his learning.

Not only does he have perfect grades but since Kindergarten Gabriel has been 1 to 2 grades ahead in Reading and Math. He is currently 93+% above the national average. We all are aware of Oregon's failings in educational markers compared to the rest of the nation. If there was no limit to any child having access to online schooling, such as Willamette Connections, I strongly feel that we would see a much higher educational success rate in Oregon among our future generation.

In our case, we feel it's been so successful for many reasons. We absolutely know that the flexible online school schedule has a direct correlation to the overall mental, physical and social well-being of our son. Because we can set the amount of time needed to focus on each lesson he isn't wasting time being on the computer, or alternatively in a brick-and-mortar setting where he would be 7 hours a day, 5 days a week. Rather, we can make the time more efficient for both his learning and his overall skill and talent development. For instance, he has weekly piano lessons during the day. We've had day-time swim lessons, we go to museums, learning centers, the library and travel to places of historical value to see first-hand what this state and world has to offer.

As his learning coach I don't have to create the curriculum, it's the same curriculum most of our public schools use actually. However, I have total oversight of all the lesson content so I can work with him directly to explain concepts in the manner in which he learns best. We all know none of us fit into a box and this way we can focus on the best way he learns instead of a one-size fits all mentality. With his intelligence being what it is, I honestly fear he wouldn't be challenged enough in a traditional classroom and therefore wouldn't excel as much.

We also set our routine so he can eat when he is hungry rather than at the same time each day, he can take breaks whenever he wants to play outside, do his chores, have quality time with my husband and I, his grandparents, and other family members and friends. We use the ideas we get in our lessons to learn while he is doing every-day activities too. He is safe, he eats well, he gets tons of exercise, he can also rest when needed—all of this enhances his overall well-being.

Being small business owners we need the flexibility to travel for work conferences, we can set our own vacation times and not be limited to the same school calendar as conventional school districts, and no matter where we travel, his school goes with him! All that's required is a Wi-fi connection, but also textbooks and workbooks are provided if Wi-fi isn't available. We've done school at our office, while driving, while in a hotel, and traveling to places like Washington, Montana, Texas, and Arizona.

It removes so much stress, for both me as a parent and him as a student, to not have to get up 5 days a week in the really early morning hours, be on restrictive times to eat, play and take breaks, and then get home an hour before it gets dark for the majority of the school year. Our goal is to have a small farm setting on our property in the near future. This flexibility provides the opportunity for him to learn not only about how to care for precious natural and sustainable resources the land has to offer but animal husbandry as well. If Gabriel is away from home as much as an adult is for a full-time work day he won't have the time he needs to develop these essential skills.

Every family should have the chance to choose which educational resource fits best for their child. A well-rounded child who is educated, physically healthy, and socially adept is what we as adults should hope and strive for in our children. If online school is what provides a student the ability to reach that goal, then that resource needs to be more readily accessible to any student in our state.

House Bill 3204 directly impacts families like ours because our son will be able to stay enrolled in his current virtual charter school if we move from one school district to another. Within the next year, we're building a home in a neighboring school district. Gabriel shouldn't have to lose the school he's excelled at just because that district might be over the arbitrary 3% cap on virtual school enrollment. Right now we can take his online school on the road with us when we travel for our small business or to visit family anywhere in the world. It would be devastating if we can't take his school with us when we move just miles down the road.

This bill will make sure accurate enrollment data is used to determine the 3% cap placed on online school enrollment. That way districts won't deny families access to this option based on inaccurate statistics. In addition, House Bill 3204 streamlines the notification process giving families more certainty with the hope that children won't be stuck in educational settings that may be detrimental to their well-being.

Nothing will be a total fix to this, or any other system put in place, but we have a great responsibility to the future generation of this state to make sure all educational options are available to meet the needs of every child.

I urge your support of House Bill 3204.

Lorraine Blatter  
Learning Coach and Mother  
Scio, Oregon