

Chair Neron, member of the committee:

For the record, my name is Matthew Bell, and I am an educator in the West Linn area.

This was my experience as an Online Teacher working with my district's adopted Fuel Curriculum (now Stride, but I will refer to them as Fuel in my statement because it was what they were called at the time). I taught 6th Grade Social Studies for the year.

My overall assessment was that the curriculum and assessment methods were far sub-standard. If a teacher in schools taught this way or assessed this way, they would be on a plan of assistance or removed from the classroom.

First, district leaders had a hard time evaluating the Fuel curriculum because the company insisted it was proprietary property. My guess would be that they were shown bits and pieces of the curriculum instead of being able to thumb through textbooks and glance through assessments. In my experience with Fuel, they claimed to be "proficiency-based." This was not true for their Social Studies curriculum. While they do allow for multiple opportunities to retake daily quizzes (despite having the exact same questions) and tests (they have three versions that have SLIGHT differences in the questions), the assessments aren't tied to critical thinking or reading skills. At no point were students exposed to different points of view (unless they attended optional class settings with slideshows I put together). In my trainings, Fuel representatives claimed that multiple choice tests measured Level 1 or 2 DOK (Depth of Knowledge), but it was mostly Level 1 memorization. They claimed the Part 2 portion of the test had Level 3 or 4 DOK which would require things like analyzing or evaluating evidence and forming an argument. In reality, they often had lower level questions like identifying countries on a map. When my colleagues and I were advocating to district personnel about issues with curriculum and assessments, we frequently ran into a line of argument like "But the Fuel rep told us that . . ." Three years ago, our district chose to do the same Online curriculum despite all the complaints from teachers and parents, even though one School Board member and one local state representative's students experienced the curriculum in helping their students and know that it is not good teaching and not good assessment. My reason for pointing this out is to hopefully help you see that the fear of competing with online options and losing money to them is causing local districts to make decisions they normally wouldn't make and that regulating online programs effectively is essential to supporting our brick and mortar schools.

Second, in terms of assessment, there is no way to evaluate whether or not students are completing the work, are googling answers and then changing enough words to avoid detection, or are looking up answers in the textbook as they complete the work. Fuel claimed to have a lock-down browser, but at the time it did not work for Chromebooks (which our district issued students). There is also no way to lockdown cell phones or prevent students from completing work together, giving students with wider computer access the ability to go around their system. Because the work is frequently lower-level recall knowledge, a student could easily complete a course with a B or better simply by Googling information. Students have already posted the fewer higher-level thinking questions onto forums as well.

Third, the curriculum provided by Fuel was substandard. The Modern US History textbook claimed that racism ended with the Civil Rights Movement. I had parent complaints about the 6th grade curriculum as it lacked information about early Christianity from different points of view, including the Crusades (their lesson was one day, but in-class this would be a full unit exploring the depth and complexity). The history curriculum is definitely not attached to Oregon State Standards that have been added in recent

years. My program's Language Arts teachers refused to use the Fuel curriculum because it had no novels. It mostly had short stories that were extremely old or free-use texts like a speech by Barack Obama, assumedly because they wanted to avoid paying royalties for copyrights. Fuel claimed that the curriculum was "rigorous," but my experience was that that meant they had lots of it, not that the curriculum fostered higher-level learning. Students struggled to complete the work because it had a large amount of reading a textbook and basic worksheet completion, but the work was not meaningful. There were no connections to today unless teachers provided it on our own.

In terms of supporting students, using this curriculum was extremely difficult for me. I offered other forms of assessments such as students creating slideshows to show what they learned (and I created a scaffolded version to help them avoid formatting issues), but overall students didn't take these opportunities because the online MC tests were easier to complete. Students who were experiencing depression, anxiety or other mental health issues were extremely difficult to support despite having a dedicated online school counselor for our level. The repetitive nature of the curriculum and the lack of connection to their teachers and from themselves to the curriculum was a huge barrier in keeping students motivated.

Oregon should be doing more to regulate and tamp down on Virtual Charter Schools, not allow them to proliferate. Please vote no on HB 4161. I appreciated hearing from other points of view, and I find commonality in the desire for schools to continue to improve to serve all students. I would point out that advocates for online school did not point out low graduation rates and also don't have good statistics on students advancing to post-secondary options. I would encourage representatives to have conversations with their local superintendents and ask what they would do with more money. Then keep raising the amount. I would argue that they all have key investments they could make that will drastically reduce the number of students not being successful, including offering more advanced options as some concerned citizens and representatives alluded to. We are far from the QEM that used to be a bipartisan desire, and all schools will improve with adequate funding and proper oversight.

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