

DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF OREGON EDUCATION CAUCUS
A Resolution Regarding the Practices of For-Profit Online Charter Schools

WHEREAS, the Democratic Party of Oregon’s party platform in Article 2, Preamble, calls for fully funding Oregon’s K-12 public schools at the Quality Education Model level;

WHEREAS, the Democratic Party of Oregon’s party platform, Article 2, Plank 2, calls for strengthening public education by resisting the corporatization of education that results when public resources are transferred to Education Management Organizations, including for-profit charter schools;

WHEREAS, the Oregon Department of Education¹ has calculated that for every half percentage point of increased student transfers to for-profit charter schools, school districts lose \$55 million in shifted State School Fund resources;

WHEREAS, for-profit online charter school efforts in the June 2020 special session and in eight separate efforts in the 2021 Legislative Session to increase or eliminate enrollment caps would have cost public school districts hundreds of millions of State School Fund dollars;

WHEREAS, research indicates that the educational quality of online for-profit charter schools is subpar; the two largest corporations operating in Oregon had a 53% and 33% graduation rate compared to the state average of 79% in the 2018 State Report Card²; two virtual charter schools had graduation rates in the single digits;

WHEREAS, guidance from the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) on the most successful educational practices has included a strong warning against the use of algorithm-based “machine learning”, because of its many problems³; these problems include embedded bias, lack of transparency, compromised student privacy, low teacher-student interaction;

WHEREAS, a 2017 performance audit by then-Secretary of State Dennis Richardson found that for-profit online programs are failing our students⁴;

WHEREAS, both prior to and in this current environment, school districts have developed their own district-led online programs that are not run by for-profit companies; there is a strong difference in outcomes between district-run and for-profit charter programs: district programs have as much as a 100% graduation rate and state funding stays in public schools;

WHEREAS, much has been written in the academic research community about the failure of For-Profit online charter schools, in terms of educational quality, equity, and more;^{5,6}

WHEREAS, virtual education corporations take public money for private gain; in privatizing public education services, they put profit above the well-being of Oregon’s students, families and public schools;

THEREFORE, the Democratic Party of Oregon Education Caucus resolves:

SECTION 1: To encourage Oregon legislators to oppose expansion of enrollments of public school students into for-profit online schools, paid for with public funds. Further, to strongly urge the Oregon Legislature to enact stronger performance and fiscal accountability legislation to protect public school students, and to resist the pressure of these schools’ corporate lobbyists to increase their access to public school students and to scarce public funds.

SECTION 2: To communicate this resolution to the appropriate legislative committees and to the Members of the Oregon Senate and Oregon House of Representatives.

1 Calculations in 2021 by Michael Wiltfong, ODE Director, School Finance & Facilities

2 <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/schools-and-districts/reportcards/reportcards/Pages/Science-1819-English.aspx>

3 <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/documents/Comprehensive%20Distance%20Learning%20Guidance.pdf>

4 <https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/lfo/Audit%20Reviews%20Documents/SOS%20Audit%20Report%20No.%202017-30.pdf>

5 <https://nepc.colorado.edu/newsletter/2012/07/understandingimprovingvirtual%20>

6 <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publicationschoolhousecommericalism-2017>