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OREGON SENATE REPUBLICANS

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Senate Republicans Vote to Expand Opportunity in Education

SALEM, Ore. – Today Senate Republicans proposed an addition to HB 2954 to allow more students options in their education.

The minority report, carried by Senator Chuck Thomsen (R-Hood River), mirrors the bill passed out of committee, but would also raise the decade-old arbitrary cap on virtual public charter school enrollment from three percent to four percent of the school district’s student population.

“The reality is, many students don’t thrive under traditional learning models,” said Senator Thomsen, the vice-chair of the Senate Education Committee. “Virtual public charter schools are a great option for many kids for many different reasons, whether it be bullying, the flexibility to learn at their own pace, or to accommodate mental and physical health conditions. The current cap is a cap on student potential. It doesn’t serve what should be the main goal of our education system: to serve Oregon students’ needs and set them up for future success.”

Despite overwhelming support from families and students to raise the cap, Democrats voted in lockstep to defeat the motion to include this provision.

“This is the time for real education reform,” said Senate Republican Leader Fred Girod (R-Lyons). “This session, the Democrats have lowered education standards and avoided meaningful reform by throwing more money at a failing system. School choice is fundamentally about giving students, regardless of wealth, the best education possible for them. Republicans will continue to be the party of educational opportunity and school choice.”

Increasing the cap on virtual charter schools would have been a small victory for those trapped in a system that doesn’t meet their needs. For communities of color and low-income households, too few education options exist. Without options, families will be stuck in a failing system that hinders upward mobility. Giving these families the

freedom to choose an education that works for their students [correlates](#) with increased academic achievement.

Despite [promising](#) to promote “Access and Equity in Public Education,” Senate Democrats have blocked all school choice measures from advancing this session, including a measure that would have completely lifted the cap on virtual public charter school attendance. Senate Democrats held a public hearing for SB 240, but only after it was ‘dead’ due to legislative deadlines.

Public support for school choice has skyrocketed since the onset of the pandemic. Traditional, government-run public school models were no longer a viable option for many, including our most vulnerable populations. When Governor Brown shut down schools in the spring of 2020, students and parents flocked to virtual public charter schools. The current three percent cap on enrollment led to record transfer rejection numbers. Since July of 2020, the Oregon Department of Education has received at least 839 rejection appeals, the vast majority of which have been upheld without reasonable explanation as to why.

Yet, at least 41 school districts in Oregon have exceeded the three percent cap on virtual public charter school attendance, further demonstrating the demand for education alternatives. New data from [Real Clear Opinion Research](#) finds overall support for school choice is increasing as parents need more options than ever before:

- 69 percent of Democrats and 75 percent of Republicans back school choice, the highest level of support ever recorded from major American Federation for Children polling.
 - The support is also consistent among various ethnic groups: 73 percent White; 68 percent Hispanic; 66 percent Black; and 66 percent Asian.
- 66 percent of Democrats and 67 percent of Republicans support parents having access to a portion of per-pupil funding to use for home, virtual, or private education if public schools don’t reopen full-time for in-person classes.

The minority report for [HB 2954](#) was voted down by Democrats. The Senate voted in favor of the original bill that carries the same language but fails to provide necessary education options.

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