

State Representative
Kim Thatcher
House District 25



NEWS RELEASE: February 16, 2009

CONTACT: Dawn Phillips
503.750.1764

**Legislators to State Board of Education:
“Don’t Close On-Line Charter School!”**

(Salem) A group of 20 legislators including [Kim Thatcher](#) (R-Keizer, St. Paul, Newberg) sent a sternly worded letter today to the [State Board of Education](#) demanding that it honor commitments the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) made to the Legislature in 2005.

[Oregon Connections Academy](#) (ORCA), the state’s largest on-line charter school serving more than 2600 students, has applied for a waiver from the [so-called “50% provision”](#). That law requires any charter school offering on-line courses to enroll at least 50% of its students from inside the boundaries of the sponsoring school district. That law was enacted after ORCA signed a charter with the Scio School District. If ORCA were required to comply with this provision now, it would have to close.

In the 2005 session, when the [“50% provision” was passed into law](#), the Oregon Department of Education official in charge of virtual education assured legislators and the State Board of Education the provision would not apply to ORCA. After the law passed, ODE’s position abruptly changed. It now says that ORCA must comply with the “50% provision” in 2010, when its charter contract is renewed.

“If the State Board refuses to grant this waiver and stand by the commitments, clearly documented in the record, made by the ODE in 2005,” the letter reads, “then it will be clear to us that we can no longer trust anything told to us by the state’s education agency.”

“The credibility of the Oregon Department of Education is on the line here,” said Thatcher, who has a child that attended ORCA. “We can’t allow a state agency to tell the legislature one thing, then abruptly change their tune after a bill becomes law. If ORCA has to follow the 50% rule they will cease to exist and thousands of families will have to scramble to find a new school for their children.” Representative Thatcher serves on the House Education Committee.

The State Board of Education will consider the waiver request on [Thursday, February 19 at 1:00 PM on the 2nd floor of the Public Services Building](#), 255 Capitol Street NE, in Salem.

#####

State Representative Kim Thatcher
900 Court Street NE H-472 Salem, OR 97301 ~503-986-1425
www.leg.state.or.us/thatcher ~ Rep.kimthatcher@state.or.us