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Oregon's Coronavirus Education Lockdown

Teachers unions block kids from transferring to virtual charter schools.

By The Editorial Board [Follow](#)

March 31, 2020 7:24 pm ET



A woman and child walk past North Salem High School on March 31. PHOTO: ANDREW SELSKY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Oregon has cancelled public-school classes amid the pandemic, but political self-interest never sleeps. The Oregon Education Association and its labor allies are now blocking hundreds of children from continuing their education at virtual public charter schools.

As of Oct. 1, more than 14,000 children already attended Oregon's 19 virtual public charters and received the bulk of their education remotely. But when brick-and-mortar schools closed on March 16 to limit the spread of the coronavirus, Oregon parents clamored to transfer their children to the online schools.

Monday was the first day at Oregon Connections Academy, the state's largest virtual public charter, for seventh grader Natalie Ritter and her fifth-grade brother, Lincoln. Their mom, Stephanie Ritter, says the ability to transfer them was a godsend, though it was heart-wrenching to leave behind beloved teachers and classmates.

Ms. Ritter and her husband work full time and don't have hours a day to teach their children at home. Attending school online "will help them not just learn but feel connected," Ms. Ritter says. "Not having that as an option just means that we would have to put more faith in the Oregon schools figuring that out. And I think they're working on it, but we just don't have the luxury to wait."

Like Natalie and Lincoln, some 300 students successfully transferred in mid-March to Oregon Connections Academy alone, and the teacher's unions were alarmed by this mass exodus from the public schools.

Under pressure from the unions, the Oregon Department of Education stopped allowing transfers on March 27. At Oregon Connections Academy, this means some 1,600 students who had sought to transfer won't be able to, says Jeff Kropf, the school's founder and president of the board of directors.

It could be worse. The state Department of Education originally contemplated closing down virtual public charters along with the brick-and-mortar schools, according to a March 24 PowerPoint presentation reviewed by the newspaper Willamette Week. Even during a national crisis, unions would rather deprive students of an education than see their charter-school competitors succeed.

Appeared in the April 1, 2020, print edition.