

My name is Kerri-Lynn Morris. I am one of the Founders of Sauvie Island Academy. I am here to request that you renew Sauvie Island Academy's waiver which includes criteria for Sauvie Island resident students. My oldest son entered the Sauvie Island School in kindergarten in the Fall of 2008, three years before we became a charter school. Back then it was a much smaller school – about 75 kids total in grades K-6, of whom around 40 were from Sauvie Island. It was a great little school, but clearly not financially viable because of our small enrollment. The Scappoose District, under significant financial pressure, was sympathetic to the parent's plight, but could not continue to fund such a small footprint. With the overwhelming support of both on island and off island parents who could not imagine not having a school on the island, we banded together and began the journey to become a charter school.

Most of us from the island are somehow connected to farming – we understand the difficult economics of the small family farm, and understand that regardless of our differences in race, religion or politics, the only way for a diverse community like ours to survive is to band together and help each other. Today your cows might have escaped your fence, but tomorrow it may be mine, and I need to help you today because I may need you tomorrow. This is part of the island culture and was a driving force that refused to see the school disappear.

As parents, we loved our school. Even before becoming a charter we were already practicing the concepts of "Place-based" education, using the resources from the island to teach the students. As founders and parents we understood two key things – that we had something significant to offer a broader community and that we had to attract more students to the school in order to be viable. Our island community center where our school was housed had the capacity to hold 200+ kids, but we were only schooling 75. So we created presentations and held meetings throughout the district and beyond – from St. Helens to Scappoose to St. Johns. We explained the benefits of Place-based education to anyone who would listen and were thrilled that we were going to be able to share the incredible resource of the island with others. As founders, we were proud to immediately have a waitlist.

What we never imagined was that one day the island students may not have the choice of attending the school everyone built and nurtured...the school that the island community supports with enthusiasm. If the Sauvie Island Academy waiver were not to be renewed, the students of Sauvie Island families would possibly lose the ability to attend the school in their community. Assuming that ½ of the 24 positions available in kindergarten are filled by siblings, and 70 children apply for the other spots, the 6 island kids that would be included in that 70 have only a 9% chance overall for 1 of them to get in. Looking at it from the individual child perspective, the island child would have only a 1.6% chance of getting in to the only neighborhood school in their area. We never imagined that one day the school would not have students from the island in it – but would instead serve the needs of choice for only the surrounding suburbs, while the island farm kids are frozen out, victims of the school's popularity.

If the school does not have island students, what do we lose in our education? As a school, we lose what the island students bring – a culture that understands that the world is a village and we have lots to learn from each other. As a school, we lose the horses, goats and pigs who have found their way into the classroom for show-and-tell. Those animals are unlikely to be permitted on the 1.5 hour bus ride into Scappoose. As a school, we lose the science fair demonstrations on milking techniques from the

students who are part of the last family dairy in Multnomah County. As a school, we lose the intense discussions on animal husbandry from students who have actually helped birth horses, cows, goats and pigs. As a school, we lose the economics lesson from the 12-year-old dog breeder from whom I bought my dog. As a school, we lose the chickens who were hatched at the school and then were brought back to visit 3 years in a row, and then made a final appearance in chicken soup. As a school, we lose the tractors that have been driven to school through the back fields and the discussions about how technology has changed even the small scale farm. As a school, we may lose the students themselves entirely, as some are unlikely to be bussed far from home because of cultural or language barriers. For example, Adriana Martinez-Sanchez is now in the honors program at the University of Oregon. After attending Sauvie Island School, she went on to be the class valedictorian at Scappoose High School. Her parents valued education, but if a local option had not been available, her life may be different now. She says “For me personally it would have been a hardship to go to Scappoose for elementary school because of the distance. My dad was always working and my mom had only recently learned to drive when I entered 1st grade. I remember even one time when my mom still didn’t drive, she walked to the school because I needed some medicine. It made my parents’ lives a lot easier to know I wasn’t so far away in case of an emergency.” She was in a place nearby that they trusted. Her parents were part of the school community on the island – that would have been unlikely if she had gone to school miles from home.

And if we lose those students, what else will we, as a school lose? We lose the strong support for the school by the island parents, grandparents, neighbors and friends. These individuals, past and present are the lifeblood of our Place-based educational model. They provide volunteer hours tutoring in math and reading. They teach our students how to band birds, graft trees and how to tell the age of a bald eagle by its feathers. This will be lost. These are the individuals who provide students access to private property – ponds, trails, kennels, farms, eagles’ nests, even a blue heron rookery. As a school, we lose the support that our island parents share with our off-island partners – the island culture is one of helping and proximity is sometimes key if a student is sick and needs to be picked up quickly. In addition, once we remove the island parents, we lose the island community. It is this community in conjunction with our school community who attends our auctions and donates the extra funds that make up the 20% difference so we can offer music and art. In short, we lose the people behind our Place-based identity.

In any given year, there are on average 50 students from Sauvie Island who will be in the K-8 age range. With a school population of 216, island students will never be much more than a quarter of the school population even with criteria that assists admission. Without the waiver criteria, island students in the school are likely to be a novelty, and island parents will have no choice in education. Without the students and without the support of island parents and the island community, the school will be hollow of Place-based education. Please do not allow this to happen. We founded Sauvie Island Academy to provide choice for the students, including those from the community of the island. Please let us continue to do that. Please approve the Sauvie Island Academy waiver.