

September 18, 2023

Awesome ORCA teachers and administrators,

I have had many fantastic experiences during my five years of online study at ORCA. This includes a live talk session with astronauts aboard the International Space Station, hosted by the ORCA NASA club. In World Studies with Mr Gallagher, we traveled virtually around the world, seeing the views from the planet's tallest mountains, and most spectacular European palaces and Asian temples. In Marine Science with Mr Rodriguez, we got to connect with scientists from their base near the South Pole. They dive under the ocean ice of Antarctica to explore exotic forms of life. In another online field trip, we got to tour Paris with a teacher who had just traveled there. I went on in-person field trips to the Lewis and Clark Museum, and the Portland Art Museum. At Linfield College, I saw Nobel laureate physicist Dr. William D. Phillips. He demonstrated magnetic levitation as a gyroscope floated inside a wine glass, and blasted a waste basket off the stage with a billowing plume of liquid nitrogen to demonstrate the power of the super-cold. I am one of the wide-eyed tribe that have experienced "Mrs Johnson's Algebra," a force of nature. This class has its own "Rickrolling" language, memes, intensive workbooks, nick-names and holidays like "Slopmas," inspired by the calculation of slope. I feel a lot of accomplishment in my personal progress in math, art, language arts, fitness, science, and computing. Health and P.E. gives a lot of great ideas about how to have a positive attitude and a fulfilling life. Because our school is online, I think students have an advantage in becoming skilled with digital presentation and productivity tools.

The flexibility of being able to connect to school anywhere, whether on a trip to California, Texas, or Japan, or from the beach is really great. We can tune into lectures whether we're at a desk with our dog, or on a couch with our cat and a cup of coffee. You can pause and rewind lesson recordings so you never have to miss important information. Our mode of school is sheltered against concerns like viruses and episodes of violence. I like the diversity of having fellow students all over the state. I think big group chats where the comments just whiz by because everyone has something to say are fun.

The curriculum at ORCA is ambitious, and the work can seem more advanced than some in-person schools of friends that I have visited. The most helpful thing teachers and administrators can do to help learning besides keeping on doing a great job, is to make assignments super-targeted to class time so that we have productive time to absorb and be creative with what we have learned. Reading materials and text-books which are compatible with text to speech accessibility aides are really helpful. If I had my preference, I would do multiple days of one subject at a time in an intensive block for mental continuity, but I am getting better at trying every class every day. Teachers, with their knowledge and unique personality are sculpting and sparking young minds that will be the leaders of tomorrow. Challenges of environment, culture, and technology face us. Together, we can rise to the challenge!

Thanks for everything,

Austin Horner