Senate Education Committee Testimony

Cyber/Charter School Funding

Arnold J. Nadonley, Superintendent

Richland School District

August 14, 2019 – Everett Area High School

Good afternoon SENATOR LANGERHOLIC, SENATOR DINNIMAN, AND MEMBERS OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTTEE.

My name is Arnold J. Nadonley and I serve as the Superintendent of Schools for the Richland School District in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. For disclosure and pride in its truest sense, Richland is the alma mater and home of our Senate Education Chairman. Senator Langerholc, we are proud to have you as a Richland alumni and proud of the fact that you have entrusted your children to be RAMS. With that in mind and all the students we serve, it is a very sincere privilege to be invited here today to testify.

The 2019-2020 school year will mark my 31st year in PUBLIC education. I have been truly blessed to serve students in four Pennsylvania public school districts where I began my career as a special education teacher with the last 21 ½ years being in administration of which 13 years have been in the Superintendent's position.

I was here when the cyber and charter school laws were passed and I want to go on record as a supporter of competition when all things are equal in terms of regulations, standards,

and costs. While my testimony may be pointed, I welcome competition that is fair and equal in all aspects.

It is important for me to clarify, that while the Richland School District is considered a "wealthier" school district in the eyes of the commonwealth's *Market Value and Aid Ratio* of .3942, our name "Richland" is somewhat misleading.

First, Richland has only raised millage by 1 mill since 2006 and according to the *PA Schools Work website* only 11 out of 500 Pennsylvania public school districts spend less per pupil than Richland ***(Exhibit A)*** while our *Economically Disadvantaged* population has increased from 12% in 2006 to over 34% in the last 13 years ***(Exhibit B).*** Yet, Richland School District has exceeded federal and state *Adequate Yearly Progress* benchmarks for 19 consecutive years and recently ranked in the *Top 20 Traditional Public High Schools* and *Overall High Schools* in Pennsylvania in English Language Arts/Literature, Mathematics/Algebra, and Science/Biology and our elementary recently ranked in the top 100 out of over 2,000 Pennsylvania public elementary schools in the Commonwealth, including receiving designation of being a *Title I Distinguished School* out of 1700 Pennsylvania *Title I* schools ***(Exhibit C).*** We are proud of our 1,500 plus students, we sincerely appreciate the efforts of our dedicated staff, and I am thankful for a supportive Board, and the supportive parents, and communities of Richland Township and Geistown Borough for their support.

With our success, comes the challenges of managing a budget that has become a "deficit budget" due to declining local revenue due to multi-county commercial tax appeals taking place and minimal increases from state and federal sources, coupled with unfunded mandates, and basic cost of living increases.

In the 2015-2016 school year, the Richland School District taxpayers shelled out $259,229.20 in tuition costs for 32 students to attend 6 underperforming cyber charter schools where the highest then *School Performance Profile* score was 57.4 or a solid "F" ***(Exhibit D)*** and during the with 2016-2017 school year, our district taxpayers paid out an additional $264,416 for approximately 30 students to attend the same underperforming cyber charter schools ***(Exhibit E).*** ***https://triblive.com/news/pennsylvania/cyber-charter-school-costs-under-the-microscope/).***

During my administrative career as a superintendent, we tracked the reasons as why these parents selected cyber charter schools and the reasons ranged from the district enforcing truancy and attendance mandates, to contacting parents about lice, to students not liking their teacher, to students not being able to come to school on time, and so forth. Not once did we ever hear the parents say they were seeking a school that would challenge their child's academics or that they were seeking a school that performed better, nor were the parents ever aware of the cyber charter school's former *School Performance Profile* or *Future Ready Index* ranking because they were not available or mandated to be listed in the deceptive "tuition free" advertising where over $21,000,000 of Pennsylvania taxpayer dollars were spent on advertising from 2015 to 2017 ***(Exhibit F)***.

https://projects.publicsource.org/chartereffect/stories/pennsylvania-charter-schools-spend-millions-of-public-dollars-in-advertising-to-attract-students.html and when all Pennsylvania cyber charter schools had graduation rates below the state average of 86.6% and have been underperforming since their inception ***(Exhibits G through H)*** https://www.mcall.com/news/education/mc-nws-pennsylvania-cyber-charter-schools-tuition-20190228-story.html and https://thenotebook.org/articles/2018/06/14/pennsylvanias-cyber-charters-consistently-recieve-poor-academic-scores/,

It is also alarming to our district's Board and leadership that cyber charter tuition is based on each district's tuition, but if a child physically moves from one district to another, the underperforming cyber charter can receive additional revenue from the new residency district that has higher tuition without ever changing the instruction. A 2018 survey by the *Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA)* found districts pay, on average, $11,306, for each general education student attending a cyber-charter, and $24,192 for special education students.

An example of cyber charter profiteering in 2015-2016:

2015-2016 Cost per Student if student moves from Richland to another district at halfway through the year and remains in Cyber or Charter School and Difference in charges for same education.

	Richland:	Fox Chapel:	Additional Cyber/Charter Profits:
Reg. Ed	**$9,034.84**	**$15,118.92**	**$6,084.08/2 (half year) $3,042.04**
Sp. Ed.	**$15,425.77**	**$29,655.55**	**$14,229.78/2 (half year $7,114.77**

	Richland:	Shade/Central City:	Additional Cyber/Charter Profits:
Reg. Ed	**$9,034.84**	**$11,236.05**	**$2,201.21/2 (half year) $1,100.60**
Sp. Ed.	**$15,425.77**	**$21,953.41**	**$6,527.64/2 (half year) $3,263.82**

In concluding, the Richland School District's Board of Education and leadership believe that comprehensive legislation needs reintroduced and passed that accomplishes the following:

1. Cap tuition to cyber charter schools at the per-student tuition of district operated cyber academies.

2. Require parents to pay for their child's tuition at a charter, cyber, or cybercharter school if their student's home district has an on-line program. This would currently net our district a savings of over $140,000 or a little over a half of a mill in property taxes.
3. Require parents to pay for their child's tuition if they elect to leave a public school that is meeting federal *Adequate Yearly Progress* targets or scoring in the "passing" range of the *Future Ready Index* ("C" or better) and elect to enroll their child in a failing or underperforming cyber, charter, or cybercharter school.
4. Require cyber, charter, or cybercharter schools to prominently display and clearly state that tuition is paid from state and local tax dollars. The display font cannot be no less than half the size of the largest font used in any advertisement and the verbal statement must be of the same volume used in the advertisement.
5. Require all cyber, charter, cyber charter and public school districts to prominently display their Future Ready Index score in their advertisements and on their webpage with a font that cannot be no less than half the size of the largest font used in the advertisement or webpage.

In closing, it has been an honor and a privilege to testify before you today.

Thank you for all of your efforts for the children of Pennsylvania.

Additional Exhibits:

Exhibit-I April 2011 Sanford University Study on Charter School Performance in Pennsylvania.

PA SCHOOLS WORK
INVEST IN STUDENTS, SECURE OUR FUTURE

Richland
School District Factsheet

Pennsylvania is not paying its fair share for public schools. It ranks 46th in the country in state share of education costs. Pennsylvania also has the widest gap in the U.S. between the highest and lowest spending school districts.

What does this mean for the Richland School District?

67% Share of school funding provided by local taxpayers to Richland.

1 The number of times Richland has raised property taxes in the last 8 years.

330 Richland rank in terms of local tax effort out of 500 school districts (#1 being highest).

$2M The increase in state funding for Richland if it were fully funded by the state.

How much is spent to educate district students?

$11,792 Current spending per student in Richland.

488 Richland rank in current spending out of 500 school districts (#1 being highest).

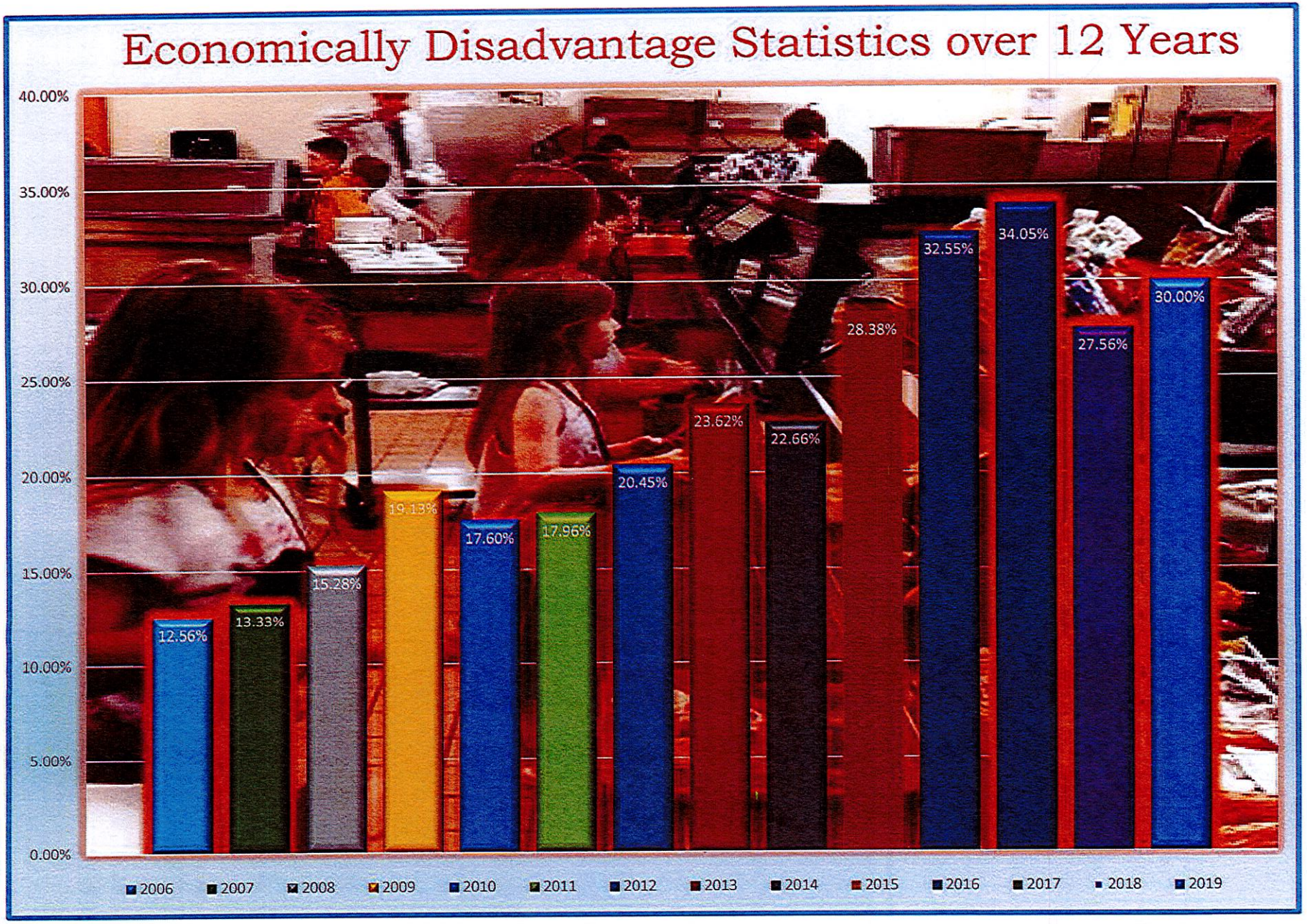
Contact these elected officials to let them know you support more funding for your schools and sensible property tax relief:

Senator

Sen. Wayne Langerholc (R)

Representative

Rep. Jim Rigby (R)


Economically Disadvantage Statistics over 12 Years
40.00%
35.00%
30.00%
25.00%
20.00%
15.00%
10.00%
5.00%
0.00%
12.56%
13.33%
15.28%
19.13%
17.60%
17.96%
20.45%
23.62%
22.66%
28.38%
32.55%
34.05%
27.56%
30.00%
2006
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2009
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2017
2018
2019

Richland School District

THE RICHLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT AND ITS PROUD SPONSORS WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE THE STUDENTS AND STAFF FOR THEIR MANY ACHIEVEMENTS IN ACADEMICS, ARTS, AND ATHLETICS.

HIGHSCHOOL SCHOOL ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

**Compared with the other 231 school in Pennsylvania that are configured grades 7 - 12*

Federal

English Language Arts/Literature
All Student Group Meets 2030 Statewide Goal

Percent Proficient or Advanced	81.4%
Statewide Average	63.0%
Statewide 2030 Goal	81.1%

- **#1 in IU8**
- **#2 Traditional Public School in PA**
- **#8 Overall School in PA**

Federal

Mathematics/Algebra
All Student Group Meets Interim Goal/Improvement Target

Percent Proficient or Advanced	62.9%
Statewide Average	45.5%
Statewide 2030 Goal	71.8%

- **#1 in IU8**
- **#3 Traditional Public School in PA**
- **#8 Overall School in PA**

Science/Biology
All Student Group Meets Interim Goal/Improvement Target

Percent Proficient or Advanced	74.2%
Statewide Average	64.3%
Statewide 2030 Goal	83.0%

- **#3 in IU8**
- **#8 Traditional Public School in PA**
- **#16 Overall School in PA**

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

**Compared with the other 533 school in Pennsylvania that are configured grades K - 6*

Federal

English Language Arts/Literature
All Student Group Meets Interim Goal/Improvement Target

Percent Proficient or Advanced	74.1%
Statewide Average	63.0%
Statewide 2030 Goal	81.1%

- **#2 in IU8**
- **#95 Overall School in PA**

Federal

Mathematics/Algebra
All Student Group Meets Interim Goal/Improvement Target

Percent Proficient or Advanced	67.9%
Statewide Average	45.5%
Statewide 2030 Goal	71.8%

- **#2 in IU8**
- **#44 Overall School in PA**

Science/Biology
All Student Group Meets 2030 Statewide Goal

Percent Proficient or Advanced	85.2%
Statewide Average	64.3%
Statewide 2030 Goal	83.0%

- **#9 in IU8**
- **#137 Overall School in PA**

HIGH SCHOOL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Richland High School was ranked #1 amongst all 7-12 public schools in Pennsylvania with 32.1% of students reaching advanced mathematics scores on state assessments (PSSA and Keystone Exams).
- Richland TSA(Technology Student Association) won the National Championship in Atlanta, GA.
- Musicians earned All-State recognition through the PMEA (Pennsylvania Music Educators Association)
- Our athletic teams have won the LHAC Conference and PIAA District 6 titles and have advanced to the PIAA State Tournament.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Richland Elementary School was names a TITLE I DISTINGUISHED SCHOOL for the 2018-2019 School Year, by the PA Department of Education, Division of Federal Programs.
- According to the Future Ready PA Index, the school achieved an Academic Growth Score of 100 in BOTH Math and English. Less that 5% of the schools statewide have this distinction.

FUTURE READY PA INDEX

*Source- PA Future Readiness Index Comparison Tool, Pennsylvania Department of Education. Appalachia Intermediate Unit 08 consists of 35 public schools in Bedford, Blair, Cambria, and Somerset Counties.

EMPOWERING EVERY STUDENT TO PURSUE EXCELLENCE EVERY DAY

CYBER SCHOOL	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	15-16 TOTAL	NONSPECIAL EDUCATION	SELECTED EXPENDITURE PER ADM	SPECIAL EDUCATION	SELECTED EXPENDITURE PER ADM	SPP 2015-16
Agora Cyber Charter School	11	89,580.72	89,580.72	9,033.35	-	15,423.24	**37.7 F**
Central PA Digital Learning Foundation	1	94.78	94.78	8,616.12	-	14,635.51	**47.6 F**
Commonwealth Connections	5	57,946.53	27,100.05	9,033.35	30,846.48	15,423.24	**47.5 F**
Pennsylvania Cyber Charter	9	61,414.35	49,430.49	9,033.35	11,983.86	15,423.24	**52.5 F**
Pennsylvania Distance Learning	1	5,026.07	5,026.07	8,616.12	-	14,635.51	**54.1 F**
Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School	5	45,166.75	45,166.75	9,033.35	-	15,423.24	**57.4 F**
YTD TOTALS		**259,229.20**	216,398.86		42,830.34		

2015-2016 Richland High School SPP 82.2
2015-2016 Richland Elementary School SPP 85.6

TRIB LIVE

Cyber charter school costs are under the microscope

DEB ERDLEY | Saturday, February 23, 2019 6:00 p.m.

Bryson O'Donnell logs onto his computer for his first day at 21st Century Cyber Charter School at his home in Forest Hills on Friday, Aug. 25, 2017.

Tiffany Nix, superintendent of Leechburg Area schools, watched in frustration for years as hundreds of thousands of dollars went out the doors of her small, cash-strapped district with families who enrolled their children in cyber charter schools.

“We were paying $13,000 to $24,000 a year for each of them. It comes to hundreds of thousands of dollars a year out of a budget of $15 million,” Nix said.

Last year, Leechburg settled on a new option and contracted with the Seneca Valley School District to launch its own cyber academy at a cost of $3,470 per student.

At the Jeannette City School District, which piggybacked with Hempfield Area’s cyber academy, tuition is even lower. Jeannette pays $1,500 a year for mainstream students who enroll in the local district’s cyber academy, business manager Paul Sroka said.

Nonetheless, districts must budget hundreds of thousands of dollars — or millions, in some larger districts — to cover tuition for families who opt to place their children in one of 16 licensed public cyber charter schools in Pennsylvania.

The costs affect every public school, in small districts like Leechburg and Jeannette with about 900 students each, to Pittsburgh Public Schools, which has about 23,500 students.

“Charter schools in general are a tremendous drain on school budgets, and cyber charters are part of it,” said Ira Weiss, longtime solicitor for Pittsburgh Public. “What’s more troubling with cyber charters is they are making an enormous profit because the cost of operating one is very small compared to a brick-and-mortar school.”

Cyber costs

Tuition for Pennsylvania’s public cyber charter schools is based on a calculation that uses local district costs. Tuition for those schools varies from one district to the next and can range from about $7,500 a year for mainstream students to as much as $40,000 a year for special education students.

Figures like that have made state lawmakers and public education advocates take notice.

Susan Spicka is executive director of Education Voters of Pennsylvania, a nonprofit public education advocacy organization. Her group crunched the numbers and analyzed payments that each of the state's 500 school districts paid to 16 public cyber charter schools in the 2016-17 academic year.

Then they ran the numbers a second time and used a formula capping payments at $5,000 a year for mainstream students and $8,865 for special education students. Education Voters of PA used those tuition estimates based on a study by the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators.

In the end, they found districts could have slashed costs from the $463 million spent to $211 million, a savings of more than $250 million in a single year.

"We singled out cyber charter schools because it is such an egregious problem that lawmakers cannot wait any longer to address ," Spicka said.

Public cyber charter schools don't have to maintain sprawling campuses, costly transportation systems or spiraling legacy pension costs. At the same time, the online schools can spend millions of dollars on sophisticated billboard, internet and television advertising campaigns designed to draw in students.

"That's wasting money that could be spent on students," Spicka said.

Cyber charter operators argue that they are required by law to make families aware that school choice is an option.

Bills for change

Pennsylvania passed a cyber charter law in 2000, and it continues to be a topic of debate.

Last week, state Rep. Curtis Sonney, R-Erie, again introduced a bill that some say could sound the death knell for the state's cyber charter schools. Acknowledging the growing proliferation of cyber academies within public schools, for those with such options, Sonney's bill would cap tuition to cyber charter schools at the per-student tuition of district operated cyber academies.

This is the third time Sonney has introduced such legislation.

State Rep. Mike Reese, R-Mt. Pleasant, estimates he has introduced sweeping charter school reform bills at least five times. None gained traction. But Reese said he believes bills that target single issues might have better luck.

As chairman of the House education committee, Sonney has the authority to travel the state and visit district cyber academies as well as the approved cyber charters.

“We’re going to do our due diligence. We want to be sure (the district-run) cyber schools are offering a comparable education before we run the bill,” he said.

A companion bill in the state Senate suggests there is some support for change.

“The proposal would reflect positively on the Hempfield Area School District,” Hempfield Superintendent Tammy Wolicki said.

Hempfield, which operates its own cyber academy and enrolls 47 students fulltime in grade 6-12, still had to budget $2.2 million next year to cover 164 students who opted to attend another cyber charter.

Defending choice

Limiting payments to cyber charters would effectively put them out of reach for most of the students now enrolled, said Ana Meyers, executive director of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools.

“Demand (for cyber schools) has increased over the years. Now, we have about 35,000 children enrolled in cyber charters. I think that says something. These parents are choosing to leave the district for a reason, and usually it is because the school does not meet their child’s need,” Myers said.

Norwin School District Superintendent William Kerr concedes there are valid reasons why families might prefer cyber schools, including serious medical issues and a preference for a cyber learning environment.

Nonetheless, Norwin tries to steer families to its district cyber academy where the cost for a fulltime student is $2,680 a year, compared to $9,741 a year for those who attend cyber charter schools.

That money belongs to students and their families as much as they do to their home school district, said Brian Hayden, CEO of the PA Cyber Charter School. Beaver County-based PA Cyber Charter is marking its 18th anniversary this year and serves about 11,000 students across the state.

“Our students, many of them and their families have chosen to leave public school not because this is a cyber school, but because they simply don’t feel they were being best served by the district they were in,” Hayden said. “I’m not sure how it benefits a student to stay in a district that is not the best for them.”

Much of the concern expressed by school districts stems from the way cyber charter schools are funded, said Jay Himes, executive director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officers.

“This is all local dollars,” he said. “(The legislature) created the charter schools and said, ‘Hey, you fund it.’ ”

Public schools like the ones in Leechburg have a commitment to the communities and students they serve, Nix said.

“This is bankrupting our students and what we can give them,” she said. “We’re here to help them and when they go to these cyber schools, we have no control over them.”

Deb Erdley is a Tribune-Review staff writer. You can contact Deb at 724-850-1209, ***derdley@tribweb.com*** *or via Twitter .*

Cyber charter school spending by district in Pa.

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Adams	Bermudian Springs	$388,511	$170,963
Adams	Conewago Valley	$843,844	$419,514
Adams	Fairfield Area	$470,055	$246,338
Adams	Gettysburg Area	$1,075,636	$665,546
Adams	Littlestown Area	$820,456	$446,818
Adams	Upper Adams	$391,290	$203,127
Allegheny	Allegheny Valley	$284,650	$194,257
Allegheny	Avonworth	$286,283	$164,472
Allegheny	Baldwin-Whitehall	$633,843	$316,936
Allegheny	Bethel Park	$571,466	$367,380
Allegheny	Brentwood Borough	$525,238	$327,745
Allegheny	Carlynton	$683,681	$439,477
Allegheny	Chartiers Valley	$641,095	$395,871
Allegheny	Clairton City	$293,141	$177,816
Allegheny	Cornell	$149,651	$92,835
Allegheny	Deer Lakes	$372,737	$212,307
Allegheny	East Allegheny	$765,633	$407,451
Allegheny	Elizabeth Forward	$343,877	$216,901
Allegheny	Fox Chapel Area	$636,524	$450,199

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Allegheny	Gateway	$912,432	$586,784
Allegheny	Hampton Township	$243,342	$136,942
Allegheny	Highlands	$1,222,365	$648,521
Allegheny	Keystone Oaks	$889,148	$572,855
Allegheny	McKeesport Area	$1,086,719	$521,162
Allegheny	Montour	$532,864	$351,484
Allegheny	Moon Area	$746,004	$464,592
Allegheny	Mt Lebanon	$425,895	$255,500
Allegheny	North Allegheny	$1,123,017	$676,367
Allegheny	North Hills	$780,015	$468,722
Allegheny	Northgate	$726,275	$423,821
Allegheny	Pine-Richland	$584,029	$335,334
Allegheny	Pittsburgh	$12,859,857	$8,439,654
Allegheny	Plum Borough	$1,141,487	$633,980
Allegheny	Quaker Valley	$310,740	$215,609
Allegheny	Riverview	$321,940	$220,620
Allegheny	Shaler Area	$1,137,832	$636,589
Allegheny	South Allegheny	$195,587	$110,151
Allegheny	South Fayette Township	$282,311	$149,239
Allegheny	South Park	$294,224	$153,506
Allegheny	Steel Valley	$798,115	$534,207
Allegheny	Upper Saint Clair	$317,751	$194,974
Allegheny	West Allegheny	$424,029	$239,462
Allegheny	West Jefferson Hills	$472,638	$255,854
Allegheny	West Mifflin Area	$485,512	$306,364
Allegheny	Wilkinsburg Borough	$760,508	$542,977
Allegheny	Woodland Hills	$2,408,333	$1,203,890
Armstrong	Apollo-Ridge	$501,715	$284,633
Armstrong	Armstrong	$1,359,955	$782,079

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Armstrong	Freeport Area	$367,095	$196,749
Armstrong	Leechburg Area	$320,215	$190,542
Beaver	Aliquippa	$648,861	$363,246
Beaver	Ambridge Area	$927,709	$492,978
Beaver	Beaver Area	$332,672	$159,897
Beaver	Big Beaver Falls Area	$709,581	$368,819
Beaver	Blackhawk	$663,765	$313,740
Beaver	Central Valley	$631,963	$328,824
Beaver	Freedom Area	$527,218	$280,208
Beaver	Hopewell Area	$710,265	$424,658
Beaver	Midland Borough	$189,673	$90,376
Beaver	New Brighton Area	$356,569	$189,903
Beaver	Riverside Beaver County	$395,813	$213,474
Beaver	Rochester Area	$780,191	$512,392
Beaver	South Side Area	$403,433	$271,103
Beaver	Western Beaver County	$352,453	$196,582
Bedford	Bedford Area	$195,904	$88,267
Bedford	Chestnut Ridge	$334,862	$143,192
Bedford	Everett Area	$352,173	$157,705
Bedford	Northern Bedford County	$225,182	$105,680
Bedford	Tussey Mountain	$253,596	$137,401
Berks	Antietam	$593,928	$361,015
Berks	Boyertown Area	$1,582,203	$879,210
Berks	Brandywine Heights Area	$115,723	$73,197
Berks	Conrad Weiser Area	$774,638	$433,972
Berks	Daniel Boone Area	$1,150,986	$596,068
Berks	Exeter Township	$951,270	$553,684
Berks	Fleetwood Area	$649,299	$371,922
Berks	Governor Mifflin	$922,174	$540,871

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Berks	Hamburg Area	$1,080,660	$631,800
Berks	Kutztown Area	$541,050	$381,241
Berks	Muhlenberg	$740,820	$388,188
Berks	Oley Valley	$488,434	$312,013
Berks	Reading	$5,882,276	$2,329,558
Berks	Schuylkill Valley	$503,658	$298,655
Berks	Tulpehocken Area	$556,291	$358,469
Berks	Twin Valley	$794,637	$448,681
Berks	Wilson	$681,027	$378,305
Berks	Wyomissing Area	$267,293	$157,145
Blair	Altoona Area	$2,023,268	$872,283
Blair	Bellwood-Antis	$82,602	$39,349
Blair	Claysburg-Kimmel	$108,165	$48,638
Blair	Hollidaysburg Area	$641,973	$306,322
Blair	Spring Cove	$521,390	$228,711
Blair	Tyrone Area	$345,129	$139,890
Blair	Williamsburg Community	$122,523	$60,058
Bradford	Athens Area	$684,419	$382,356
Bradford	Canton Area	$219,359	$123,942
Bradford	Northeast Bradford	$296,059	$175,894
Bradford	Sayre Area	$419,764	$255,713
Bradford	Towanda Area	$153,081	$80,254
Bradford	Troy Area	$461,898	$239,873
Bradford	Wyalusing Area	$650,750	$355,543
Bucks	Bensalem Township	$1,571,402	$1,052,877
Bucks	Bristol Borough	$438,335	$242,988
Bucks	Bristol Township	$4,759,442	$3,019,115
Bucks	Centennial	$597,091	$385,287
Bucks	Central Bucks	$1,383,453	$764,645

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Bucks	Morrisville Borough	$419,507	$275,159
Bucks	Neshaminy	$1,562,355	$1,027,966
Bucks	New Hope-Solebury	$81,615	$59,621
Bucks	Palisades	$476,204	$338,985
Bucks	Pennridge	$1,651,816	$945,882
Bucks	Pennsbury	$1,335,843	$839,305
Bucks	Quakertown Community	$1,748,269	$1,087,597
Butler	Butler Area	$2,542,881	$1,246,541
Butler	Karns City Area	$428,170	$238,701
Butler	Mars Area	$619,876	$286,506
Butler	Moniteau	$361,519	$184,036
Butler	Seneca Valley	$1,026,035	$576,119
Butler	Slippery Rock Area	$903,865	$478,715
Butler	South Butler County	$484,784	$231,210
Cambria	Blacklick Valley	$172,928	$97,321
Cambria	Cambria Heights	$171,102	$84,246
Cambria	Central Cambria	$147,482	$68,071
Cambria	Conemaugh Valley	$277,811	$137,210
Cambria	Ferndale Area	$231,971	$134,227
Cambria	Forest Hills	$248,610	$122,812
Cambria	Greater Johnstown	$2,532,971	$1,254,875
Cambria	Northern Cambria	$251,658	$134,259
Cambria	Penn Cambria	$428,637	$211,393
Cambria	Portage Area	$182,599	$92,783
Cambria	Richland	$264,416	$120,581
Cambria	Westmont Hilltop	$139,485	$67,528
Cameron	Cameron County	$467,303	$304,510
Carbon	Jim Thorpe Area	$1,647,283	$952,222
Carbon	Lehighton Area	$1,070,866	$581,813

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Carbon	Palmerton Area	$621,828	$318,958
Carbon	Panther Valley	$1,449,092	$738,389
Carbon	Weatherly Area	$182,947	$120,626
Centre	Bald Eagle Area	$167,474	$98,554
Centre	Bellefonte Area	$652,489	$394,309
Centre	Penns Valley Area	$237,235	$131,622
Centre	State College Area	$578,985	$367,914
Chester	Avon Grove	$748,192	$414,672
Chester	Coatesville Area	$3,371,083	$2,048,265
Chester	Downingtown Area	$1,563,317	$889,552
Chester	Great Valley	$983,409	$685,529
Chester	Kennett Consolidated	$815,622	$502,386
Chester	Octorara Area	$1,027,185	$658,869
Chester	Owen J Roberts	$976,495	$592,356
Chester	Oxford Area	$1,020,040	$545,601
Chester	Phoenixville Area	$688,522	$432,307
Chester	Tredyffrin-Easttown	$369,137	$232,678
Chester	Unionville-Chadds Ford	$457,713	$289,238
Chester	West Chester Area	$1,891,093	$1,161,044
Clarion	Allegheny-Clarion Valley	$132,574	$75,659
Clarion	Clarion Area	$352,566	$211,785
Clarion	Clarion-Limestone Area	$274,247	$147,704
Clarion	Keystone	$245,051	$132,898
Clarion	North Clarion County	$118,754	$60,338
Clarion	Redbank Valley	$309,025	$158,699
Clarion	Union	$386,622	$237,991
Clearfield	Clearfield Area	$847,318	$451,087
Clearfield	Curwensville Area	$165,466	$87,750
Clearfield	Dubois Area	$781,499	$402,746

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Clearfield	Glendale	$157,427	$95,863
Clearfield	Harmony Area	$127,540	$74,700
Clearfield	Moshannon Valley	$200,675	$106,650
Clearfield	Philipsburg-Osceola Area	$697,581	$385,356
Clearfield	West Branch Area	$323,061	$177,082
Clinton	Keystone Central	$1,077,260	$635,814
Columbia	Benton Area	$147,714	$81,267
Columbia	Berwick Area	$561,934	$292,177
Columbia	Bloomsburg Area	$316,722	$158,528
Columbia	Central Columbia	$332,394	$173,471
Columbia	Millville Area	$41,387	$23,887
Columbia	Southern Columbia Area	$208,889	$94,824
Crawford	Conneaut	$1,560,573	$847,320
Crawford	Crawford Central	$1,611,900	$816,660
Crawford	Penncrest	$1,606,652	$941,924
Cumberland	Big Spring	$1,457,150	$793,705
Cumberland	Camp Hill	$159,668	$88,759
Cumberland	Carlisle Area	$1,429,522	$736,192
Cumberland	Cumberland Valley	$1,736,152	$766,663
Cumberland	East Pennsboro Area	$1,023,842	$511,174
Cumberland	Mechanicsburg Area	$1,694,300	$940,226
Cumberland	Shippensburg Area	$1,089,022	$527,526
Cumberland	South Middleton	$528,676	$298,499
Dauphin	Central Dauphin	$4,538,414	$2,451,667
Dauphin	Derry Township	$406,498	$233,870
Dauphin	Halifax Area	$514,903	$313,276
Dauphin	Harrisburg City	$5,145,277	$3,029,945
Dauphin	Lower Dauphin	$1,005,883	$572,745
Dauphin	Middletown Area	$607,747	$350,710

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Dauphin	Millersburg Area	$460,017	$285,721
Dauphin	Steelton-Highspire	$1,577,518	$597,391
Dauphin	Susquehanna Township	$1,071,230	$631,488
Dauphin	Upper Dauphin Area	$666,597	$360,730
Delaware	Chester-Upland	$4,311,535	$2,322,114
Delaware	Chichester	$1,495,799	$995,130
Delaware	Garnet Valley	$443,875	$267,202
Delaware	Haverford Township	$343,559	$217,982
Delaware	Interboro	$464,898	$300,602
Delaware	Marple Newtown	$499,242	$334,909
Delaware	Penn-Delco	$723,315	$415,532
Delaware	Radnor Township	$44,391	$32,832
Delaware	Ridley	$612,299	$387,704
Delaware	Rose Tree Media	$557,044	$379,266
Delaware	Southeast Delco	$1,533,496	$835,751
Delaware	Springfield	$312,719	$176,863
Delaware	Upper Darby	$3,813,011	$2,068,617
Delaware	Wallingford-Swarthmore	$386,168	$266,299
Delaware	William Penn	$2,984,897	$1,805,396
Elk	Johnsonburg Area	$259,140	$157,489
Elk	Ridgway Area	$223,710	$129,692
Elk	Saint Marys Area	$256,148	$114,774
Erie	Corry Area	$595,396	$313,272
Erie	Erie City	$6,068,903	$2,765,865
Erie	Fairview	$105,541	$52,490
Erie	Fort LeBoeuf	$462,488	$217,864
Erie	General McLane	$334,620	$163,868
Erie	Girard	$618,930	$314,797
Erie	Harbor Creek	$313,550	$150,783

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Erie	Iroquois	$176,376	$92,860
Erie	Millcreek Township	$1,102,084	$512,180
Erie	North East	$304,211	$147,631
Erie	Northwestern	$564,113	$273,894
Erie	Union City Area	$459,622	$241,157
Erie	Wattsburg Area	$538,069	$286,199
Fayette	Albert Gallatin Area	$880,086	$448,657
Fayette	Brownsville Area	$1,469,117	$775,845
Fayette	Connellsville Area	$1,797,899	$805,290
Fayette	Frazier	$445,586	$200,173
Fayette	Laurel Highlands	$1,102,788	$608,960
Fayette	Uniontown Area	$1,577,085	$820,921
Forest	Forest Area	$326,168	$225,869
Franklin	Chambersburg Area	$2,783,602	$1,314,334
Franklin	Fannett-Metal	$221,020	$114,485
Franklin	Greencastle-Antrim	$410,833	$183,252
Franklin	Tuscarora	$755,675	$367,380
Franklin	Waynesboro Area	$1,141,641	$452,748
Fulton	Central Fulton	$359,697	$185,984
Fulton	Forbes Road	$133,839	$82,902
Fulton	Southern Fulton	$293,942	$157,007
Greene	Carmichaels Area	$512,336	$239,567
Greene	Central Greene	$616,337	$374,700
Greene	Jefferson-Morgan	$320,306	$184,204
Greene	Southeastern Greene	$170,496	$100,785
Greene	West Greene	$481,528	$325,992
Huntingdon	Huntingdon Area	$324,042	$149,813
Huntingdon	Juniata Valley	$188,317	$100,745
Huntingdon	Mount Union Area	$410,764	$182,696

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Huntingdon	Southern Huntingdon County	$491,802	$225,271
Indiana	Blairsville-Saltsburg	$872,006	$536,982
Indiana	Homer-Center	$314,909	$195,087
Indiana	Indiana Area	$825,797	$534,496
Indiana	Marion Center Area	$357,059	$206,369
Indiana	Penns Manor Area	$434,987	$266,803
Indiana	Purchase Line	$358,211	$228,069
Indiana	United	$808,597	$513,926
Jefferson	Brockway Area	$149,942	$78,888
Jefferson	Brookville Area	$248,131	$123,683
Jefferson	Punxsutawney Area	$1,066,764	$601,098
Juniata	Juniata County	$830,193	$333,981
Lackawanna	Abington Heights	$466,317	$233,625
Lackawanna	Carbondale Area	$906,463	$509,483
Lackawanna	Dunmore	$292,713	$152,752
Lackawanna	Lakeland	$465,296	$235,105
Lackawanna	Mid Valley	$709,705	$373,372
Lackawanna	North Pocono	$855,719	$478,559
Lackawanna	Old Forge	$176,306	$77,334
Lackawanna	Riverside	$436,168	$232,608
Lackawanna	Scranton	$3,255,116	$1,800,744
Lackawanna	Valley View	$344,790	$152,550
Lancaster	Cocalico	$631,282	$366,822
Lancaster	Columbia Borough	$616,107	$362,911
Lancaster	Conestoga Valley	$430,255	$217,534
Lancaster	Donegal	$952,273	$475,952
Lancaster	Eastern Lancaster County	$704,642	$396,893
Lancaster	Elizabethtown Area	$1,206,191	$626,836
Lancaster	Ephrata Area	$611,250	$320,595

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Lancaster	Hempfield	$1,512,489	$879,835
Lancaster	Lampeter-Strasburg	$498,846	$281,473
Lancaster	Lancaster	$2,309,086	$1,352,251
Lancaster	Manheim Central	$718,087	$402,062
Lancaster	Manheim Township	$875,768	$439,260
Lancaster	Penn Manor	$826,358	$414,045
Lancaster	Pequea Valley	$392,800	$240,287
Lancaster	Solanco	$679,777	$340,002
Lancaster	Warwick	$563,058	$305,470
Lawrence	Ellwood City Area	$542,900	$303,062
Lawrence	Laurel	$196,757	$104,665
Lawrence	Mohawk Area	$271,630	$149,175
Lawrence	Neshannock Township	$355,768	$185,708
Lawrence	New Castle Area	$1,115,190	$550,540
Lawrence	Shenango Area	$230,468	$127,752
Lawrence	Union Area	$172,949	$88,605
Lawrence	Wilmington Area	$537,835	$312,594
Lebanon	Annville-Cleona	$193,337	$101,931
Lebanon	Cornwall-Lebanon	$712,824	$393,291
Lebanon	Eastern Lebanon County	$699,061	$370,881
Lebanon	Lebanon	$1,016,566	$494,730
Lebanon	Northern Lebanon	$586,560	$306,423
Lebanon	Palmyra Area	$875,206	$379,650
Lehigh	Allentown City	$4,731,095	$2,439,364
Lehigh	Catasauqua Area	$446,908	$286,801
Lehigh	East Penn	$1,394,388	$784,009
Lehigh	Northern Lehigh	$593,611	$356,903
Lehigh	Northwestern Lehigh	$348,562	$210,265
Lehigh	Parkland	$1,341,981	$793,110

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Lehigh	Salisbury Township	$141,198	$93,694
Lehigh	Southern Lehigh	$1,013,227	$623,090
Lehigh	Whitehall-Coplay	$705,356	$344,461
Luzerne	Crestwood	$617,473	$288,729
Luzerne	Dallas	$572,007	$252,047
Luzerne	Greater Nanticoke Area	$391,490	$149,234
Luzerne	Hanover Area	$1,180,869	$528,656
Luzerne	Hazleton Area	$2,143,667	$859,911
Luzerne	Lake-Lehman	$484,926	$257,700
Luzerne	Northwest Area	$505,607	$270,258
Luzerne	Pittston Area	$802,017	$397,590
Luzerne	Wilkes-Barre Area	$2,754,182	$1,615,115
Luzerne	Wyoming Area	$623,162	$337,890
Luzerne	Wyoming Valley West	$1,606,268	$901,836
Lycoming	East Lycoming	$344,467	$181,680
Lycoming	Jersey Shore Area	$729,877	$401,492
Lycoming	Loyalsock Township	$316,849	$164,341
Lycoming	Montgomery Area	$276,927	$150,559
Lycoming	Montoursville Area	$421,834	$215,226
Lycoming	Muncy	$277,320	$158,248
Lycoming	South Williamsport Area	$421,719	$218,170
Lycoming	Williamsport Area	$1,808,348	$1,022,249
McKean	Bradford Area	$416,092	$202,796
McKean	Kane Area	$146,979	$81,089
McKean	Otto-Eldred	$170,311	$93,600
McKean	Port Allegany	$140,633	$79,708
McKean	Smethport Area	$337,873	$198,995
Mercer	Commodore Perry	$197,744	$118,682
Mercer	Farrell Area	$481,413	$318,684

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Mercer	Greenville Area	$194,308	$97,449
Mercer	Grove City Area	$607,085	$354,445
Mercer	Hermitage	$292,597	$151,475
Mercer	Jamestown Area	$136,568	$78,429
Mercer	Lakeview	$338,190	$187,205
Mercer	Mercer Area	$374,020	$199,459
Mercer	Reynolds	$266,874	$168,891
Mercer	Sharon City	$805,526	$433,096
Mercer	Sharpsville Area	$137,289	$63,991
Mercer	West Middlesex Area	$358,732	$197,079
Mifflin	Mifflin County	$449,239	$212,874
Monroe	East Stroudsburg Area	$3,157,698	$2,043,794
Monroe	Pleasant Valley	$2,554,728	$1,643,863
Monroe	Pocono Mountain	$5,976,724	$3,960,614
Monroe	Stroudsburg Area	$2,243,576	$1,376,421
Montgomery	Abington	$943,246	$600,411
Montgomery	Cheltenham	$396,804	$283,390
Montgomery	Colonial	$410,848	$283,042
Montgomery	Hatboro-Horsham	$495,208	$333,927
Montgomery	Lower Merion	$768,088	$601,014
Montgomery	Lower Moreland Township	$94,948	$61,008
Montgomery	Methacton	$604,510	$393,353
Montgomery	Norristown Area	$1,784,448	$1,095,003
Montgomery	North Penn	$1,928,469	$1,225,506
Montgomery	Perkiomen Valley	$466,522	$275,698
Montgomery	Pottsgrove	$925,648	$586,380
Montgomery	Pottstown	$1,783,049	$1,102,369
Montgomery	Souderton Area	$881,944	$546,832
Montgomery	Springfield Township	$132,292	$86,194

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Montgomery	Spring-Ford Area	$1,294,772	$808,957
Montgomery	Upper Dublin	$152,757	$101,207
Montgomery	Upper Merion Area	$427,247	$294,577
Montgomery	Upper Moreland Township	$273,357	$180,490
Montgomery	Upper Perkiomen	$1,115,285	$658,066
Montgomery	Wissahickon	$504,152	$361,251
Montour	Danville Area	$271,181	$154,292
Northampton	Bangor Area	$848,063	$510,551
Northampton	Bethlehem Area	$2,796,414	$1,558,543
Northampton	Easton Area	$1,881,859	$1,024,834
Northampton	Nazareth Area	$1,049,226	$603,002
Northampton	Northampton Area	$1,655,901	$899,217
Northampton	Pen Argyl Area	$473,535	$283,137
Northampton	Saucon Valley	$844,722	$549,635
Northampton	Wilson Area	$526,608	$296,876
Northumberland	Line Mountain	$425,735	$204,793
Northumberland	Milton Area	$479,347	$241,177
Northumberland	Mount Carmel Area	$644,485	$246,857
Northumberland	Shamokin Area	$1,506,985	$641,595
Northumberland	Shikellamy	$1,326,999	$730,401
Northumberland	Warrior Run	$457,774	$224,473
Perry	Greenwood	$369,748	$204,281
Perry	Newport	$732,725	$437,568
Perry	Susquenita	$1,019,985	$568,251
Perry	West Perry	$1,321,308	$654,703
Philadelphia	Philadelphia City	$67,993,446	$31,924,064
Pike	Delaware Valley	$593,028	$346,620
Pike	Wallenpaupack Area	$919,367	$618,433
Potter	Austin Area	$2,875	$2,103

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Potter	Coudersport Area	$261,598	$143,458
Potter	Galeton Area	$367,371	$242,229
Potter	Northern Potter	$67,549	$39,710
Potter	Oswayo Valley	$75,472	$45,138
Schuylkill	Blue Mountain	$807,330	$423,366
Schuylkill	Mahanoy Area	$461,727	$276,254
Schuylkill	Minersville Area	$457,279	$249,982
Schuylkill	North Schuylkill	$739,215	$374,961
Schuylkill	Pine Grove Area	$270,268	$122,312
Schuylkill	Saint Clair Area	$121,725	$48,953
Schuylkill	Schuylkill Haven Area	$414,991	$235,079
Schuylkill	Shenandoah Valley	$459,660	$262,988
Schuylkill	Tamaqua Area	$711,931	$350,246
Schuylkill	Tri-Valley	$204,271	$110,738
Schuylkill	Williams Valley	$502,101	$278,801
Snyder	Midd-West	$952,872	$451,007
Snyder	Selinsgrove Area	$536,622	$298,912
Somerset	Berlin Brothersvalley	$145,931	$75,031
Somerset	Conemaugh Township Area	$288,717	$148,667
Somerset	Meyersdale Area	$445,797	$252,477
Somerset	North Star	$502,343	$265,167
Somerset	Rockwood Area	$250,319	$135,792
Somerset	Salisbury-Elk Lick	$86,889	$49,774
Somerset	Shade-Central City	$173,602	$105,334
Somerset	Shanksville-Stonycreek	$50,524	$32,695
Somerset	Somerset Area	$852,845	$497,284
Somerset	Turkeyfoot Valley Area	$112,129	$53,538
Somerset	Windber Area	$467,327	$242,763
Sullivan	Sullivan County	$559,653	$388,866

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Susquehanna	Blue Ridge	$480,125	$247,369
Susquehanna	Elk Lake	$405,257	$226,389
Susquehanna	Forest City Regional	$209,648	$126,396
Susquehanna	Montrose Area	$579,537	$349,791
Susquehanna	Mountain View	$582,142	$361,237
Susquehanna	Susquehanna Community	$344,964	$211,988
Tioga	Northern Tioga	$423,039	$229,491
Tioga	Southern Tioga	$650,426	$353,794
Tioga	Wellsboro Area	$472,964	$269,460
Union	Lewisburg Area	$379,110	$229,861
Union	Mifflinburg Area	$637,452	$318,963
Venango	Cranberry Area	$450,217	$248,092
Venango	Franklin Area	$534,767	$305,608
Venango	Oil City Area	$647,219	$311,422
Venango	Titusville Area	$356,641	$187,482
Venango	Valley Grove	$174,991	$91,775
Warren	Warren County	$977,795	$551,707
Washington	Avella Area	$220,531	$135,486
Washington	Bentworth	$275,827	$140,509
Washington	Bethlehem-Center	$598,330	$304,283
Washington	Burgettstown Area	$622,579	$337,597
Washington	California Area	$338,409	$179,919
Washington	Canon-McMillan	$1,235,101	$574,200
Washington	Charleroi	$630,397	$306,707
Washington	Chartiers-Houston	$239,655	$128,092
Washington	Fort Cherry	$342,489	$201,668
Washington	McGuffey	$874,476	$532,972
Washington	Peters Township	$407,369	$214,573
Washington	Ringgold	$1,020,865	$488,031

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
Washington	Trinity Area	$925,251	$492,160
Washington	Washington	$705,613	$397,523
Wayne	Wayne Highlands	$1,547,878	$988,344
Wayne	Western Wayne	$986,232	$615,113
Westmoreland	Belle Vernon Area	$867,078	$470,474
Westmoreland	Burrell	$420,430	$233,401
Westmoreland	Derry Area	$810,760	$444,460
Westmoreland	Franklin Regional	$696,214	$390,169
Westmoreland	Greater Latrobe	$810,986	$378,506
Westmoreland	Greensburg Salem	$1,108,610	$572,561
Westmoreland	Hempfield Area	$1,782,875	$953,827
Westmoreland	Jeannette City	$763,512	$423,910
Westmoreland	Kiski Area	$1,063,086	$534,351
Westmoreland	Ligonier Valley	$1,467,647	$841,023
Westmoreland	Monessen City	$471,731	$278,972
Westmoreland	Mount Pleasant Area	$973,980	$486,612
Westmoreland	New Kensington-Arnold	$704,659	$397,781
Westmoreland	Penn-Trafford	$1,633,147	$788,991
Westmoreland	Southmoreland	$706,095	$371,163
Westmoreland	Yough	$611,684	$356,838
Wyoming	Lackawanna Trail	$795,532	$530,545
Wyoming	Tunkhannock Area	$1,103,372	$734,746
York	Central York	$778,977	$372,541
York	Dallastown Area	$658,342	$373,019
York	Dover Area	$736,437	$396,709
York	Eastern York	$899,970	$510,633
York	Hanover Public	$1,043,511	$587,842
York	Northeastern York	$1,210,230	$678,316
York	Northern York County	$853,664	$413,147

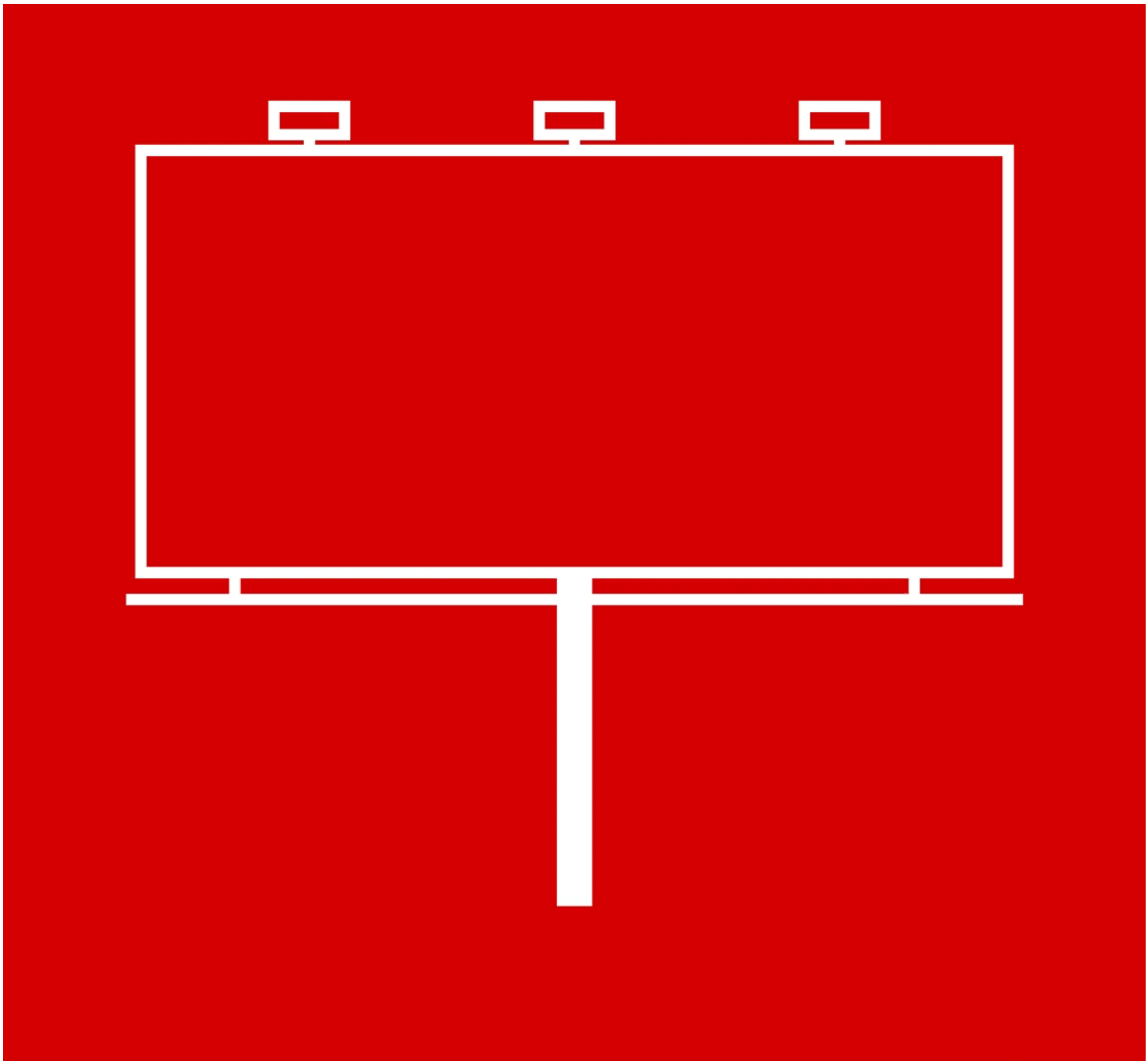
County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap
York	Red Lion Area	$1,451,502	$774,906
York	South Eastern	$864,892	$524,485
York	South Western	$736,219	$399,520
York	Southern York County	$460,042	$264,799
York	Spring Grove Area	$892,731	$491,580
York	West Shore	$2,982,399	$1,299,818
York	West York Area	$1,198,270	$684,812
York	York City	$3,922,474	$2,118,260
York	York Suburban	$856,434	$499,933

County	School district	Cyber charter school spending, 2016-17	Estimated spending with tuition cap

Note: Duquesne City, Penn Hills and Norwin school districts had insufficient or missing data; Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education

AUG. 17, 2017

By Stephanie Hacke and Mary Niederberger



(Gif by Natasha Khan and Ryan Loew)

PART OF THE SERIES

The Charter Effect |

local media outlets have reported on the sweeping change charter school choice has had on students and traditional school districts, our series will expand on that by teasing out the root of the tension between charters and other public schools: money and what appears to be differing standards of accountability.

This series will expose and explain the data and records behind the charter schools operating in Allegheny County.

If you're a parent, it's likely Facebook knows it.

If you're not happy with your child's current school, Facebook probably knows that, too. And you are likely to be hit with paid, highly targeted ads offering alternatives. That's why when you scroll through your news feed on Facebook you may see a sponsored photo of a wide-eyed child and parent thrilled about their tuition-free, personalized education at a Pennsylvania cyber charter school.

If you pay property taxes, you likely paid for this ad campaign.

See the ad on the side of the Port Authority bus that shows happy students and a message that Propel Montour High School has spaces available in grades 9 and 10.

Your property taxes paid for that, too.

Television ads, radio promotions, social media ads and billboards promoting cyber and brick-and-mortar charter schools are everywhere.

Some charter operators pay for online keyword searches that prompt their school's websites to show up first when a parent searches for certain terms related to charter schools or a student's need for an alternative education setting.

In the last three school years, 12 of the state's 14 cyber charter schools spent more than $21 million combined in taxpayer dollars promoting their schools, PublicSource found through Right-to-Know requests. The Commonwealth Charter Academy spent the most of the cyber charters on advertising; it spent $3.2 million in 2015-16 and $4.4 million in 2016-17.

Twelve of the 14 brick-and-mortar charter school operators in Allegheny County paid a total of about $678,000 over the same three school years to promote their schools and recruit students.

At the same time, most of the 43 traditional school districts in Allegheny County said they spent nothing on advertising or student recruitment. The main exception was Pittsburgh Public Schools, which spent $346,000 on commercial and government access TV productions aimed at what the district called increasing pride in the district.

Television ads for two Pennsylvania charter schools that ran during local and network news programs. (Photos by Mary Niederberger/PublicSource)

Leaders of traditional school districts say they either don't feel comfortable using taxpayer funds to advertise or have been told by residents it's not an appropriate use of public funds.

"It's not the best use of public dollars," said Steve Robinson, spokesman for the Pennsylvania School Boards Association. "It's still the mindset of the education community: They are here to educate students, not put out slick advertising campaigns to attract students."

But charter school leaders aren't shy about spending public dollars to advertise their schools. They say the promotions are needed to let parents know they have a choice on where to send their children outside of the traditional public school system. With cyber schools, students are able to enroll from across the state and their officials say they have a lot of ground to cover when it comes to advertising.

Tim Eller, executive director of the Keystone Alliance for Public Charter Schools, said charters do not have students automatically assigned to them based on where they live the way that traditional districts do.

"Charters have to attract students," Eller said. Advertising is the way to do that, he added.

One of the methods several cyber charter schools use to get more business is paid Internet searches, often through Google AdWords, where they pay to have their school's website show up first when parents search terms like "Pennsylvania cyber charter school."

Pennsylvania Distance Learning, which enrolled about 646 students in 2016-17, spent the majority of its advertising budget in the last three years on paid Internet searches. The school spent $155,000 of its $349,000 public relations budget on paid Internet searches in 2014-15; $233,000 of its $359,000 budget on the expense in 2015-16; and $225,000 of its $384,000 public relations budget in 2016-17 on the targeted searches.

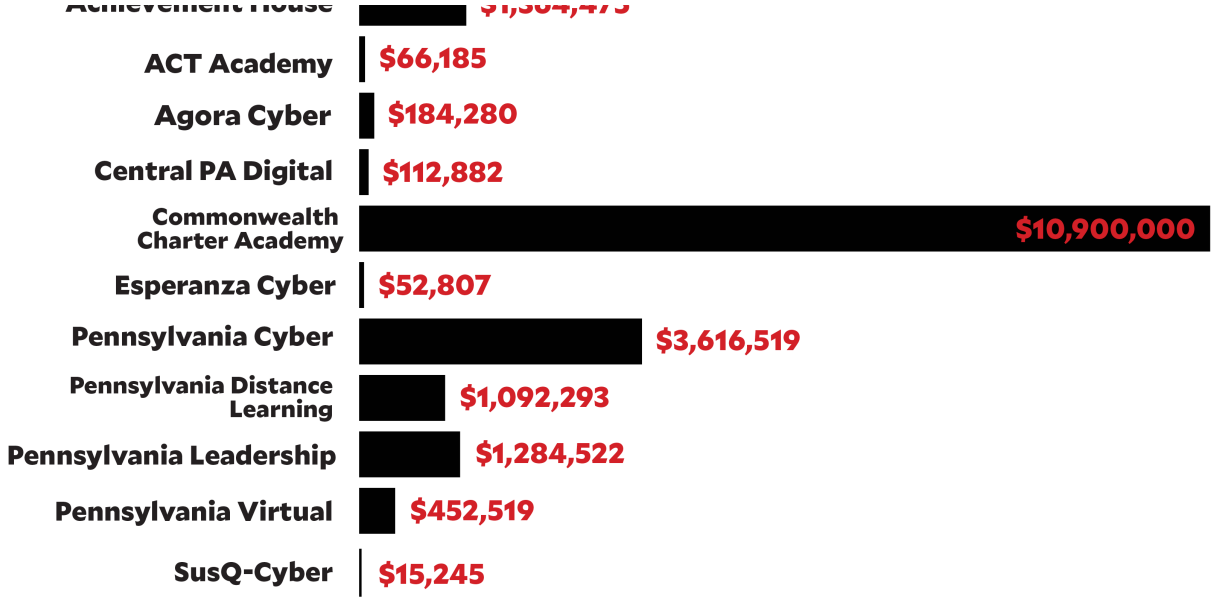
James Hanak, CEO of PA Leadership Charter School, said his school uses paid Internet searches as one of many advertising tools to drive traffic to its website, where they offer a wide variety of information on the school.

PA Leadership uses search terms that include "alternative school" and "whatever you think a parent might type" in if they're searching for a school, Hanak said. The idea, he said, is to get more traffic to the school's website, so people can find out more.

PA Leadership also has an agreement with the Reading Phillies Minor League baseball team, where they get a billboard in the outfield, occasionally throw out the first pitch at a game, have announcements made at the games and get several hundred tickets, which they give out to parents and students when they hold school nights at the ballpark.

The school spent $656,000 in 2014-15 and $628,000 in 2015-16 for marketing and communications related expenses. In 2016-17, it planned to spend $1.1 million in that area.

In the last three school years, 12 of the state's 14 cyber charters schools spent more than $21 million combined in taxpayer dollars promoting their schools.



(Source: Charter school records PublicSource received from Right-to-Know requests)

Out of all of its forms of advertising, Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School spent the most on TV ads. Of the $1.9 million it spent on advertising in the 2014-15 school year, it spent $946,000 on TV ads. One of the largest and oldest cyber charter school in the state, with about 10,900 students in 2016-17, PaCyber spent $1.7 million in 2015-16 and at least $1.4 million in 2016-17 advertising its school through the radio, Internet, TV, marketing services, periodicals and promotional events.

CEO Brian Hayden agreed $1 million in TV advertisements sounds like a lot of money, but pointed to the school's operating budget, which for the 2017-18 school year is at $142 million.

"In terms of how we are spending our money, that's not a very large percentage of our budget," Hayden said. "We spend far, far, far more — I mean tens of millions of dollars — on curriculum and other expenses directly related to what goes on in the classroom."

Commonwealth Charter Academy, with 9,200 students in 2016-17, spent the most of the state's cyber charter schools on advertising through sponsorships, and ads in print, TV, radio, Internet and outdoor marketing, along with sessions meant to provide more detailed information to interested families.

This equaled between 2.78 percent and 3.56 percent of the school's total operating budget for three years, according to the school.

The school changed its name in 2016-17 from Commonwealth Connections Academy to Commonwealth Charter Academy. It also ended its relationship with a national education management company and became fully independent with a Pennsylvania-based board of directors, leaders said. These changes prompted a boost in advertising in 2016-17 to inform people of the changes.

Charter School, indicated it pays a per-student fee to Connections Education, an educational management company, to provide a variety of services, including curriculum, technology and advertising. The methods of advertising and its associated costs are at Connections Education's discretion.

> **Twelve of the 14 brick-and-mortar charter school operators in Allegheny County paid a total of about $678,000 over the last three school years to promote their schools and recruit students.**

Of the brick-and-mortar charter schools in Allegheny County, Propel Schools spent the most on advertising with a three-year total of $174,032 on a variety of ads, sponsorships, kiosks at shopping centers and direct mail. But those costs were spread among 12 schools in the 2016-17 school year.

The single school that spent the most over the three years was City Charter High School which spent $136,797. CEO Ron Sofo said the funds were used to develop mail brochures, reminder notices of important dates, costs associated with promoting the school on its website, Facebook and Twitter.

Provident Charter School, which serves students with dyslexia, spent $73,847 in advertising for recruitment of students in its first year.

The school that spent the least was Environmental Charter School, with a total of $2,776. CEO Jon McCann did not provide details.

The second lowest was Urban Pathways 6-12 Charter School, which spent $5,438 in the the last three years for billboards, ads in the Pittsburgh Parent magazine and posters.

The Academy and Manchester Academic said they had no advertising costs. The Academy enrolls court-adjudicated students, and Manchester CEO Vasilios Scoumis said he has not needed to advertise to fill the seats at his school.

Among the 42 suburban districts, only a handful reported spending money to recruit students. The districts that advertised included McKeesport Area, which spent $3,560 for yard signs and banners to advertise kindergarten registration, and Duquesne, which spent $944 for kindergarten recruitment postcards. Also, the North Hills School District spent $238 to send postcards to students attending cyber charter schools inviting them to try out the district's cyber school, which launched in fall 2012.

The state allows for charters (and traditional public schools) to advertise for the recruitment of students and charter leaders say that's a good thing. House Bill 97, which sits in the House Rules committee, would amend the Public School Code to require public schools, including charters, to state in advertisements referencing free tuition that the money comes from taxpayer dollars.

Commonwealth Charter Academy CEO Maurice Flurie said advertising charter schools creates a "free market" and "true school choice."

"Our schools are different. And I think the better we are with our marketing and our advertising, it starts to draw out those differences so a parent can make an informed choice on, 'What's the best one for me?'" he said.

A Propel billboard is displayed on Hazelwood Avenue in Greenfield. (Photo by John Hamilton/PublicSource)

Agora CEO Michael Conti compares advertising his school to the marketing that department stores conduct. "It's the same reason Macy's or Penney's or anybody else advertises, to try and get customers to show up at

Agora contracts with K12 Inc., an education management company, for its advertising, Conti said.

Another reason for advertising is survival.

“If we didn’t advertise, we’d probably be 200 students strong,” Hanak of PA Leadership said. “We probably never would have reached economies of scale. We would be offering a very mediocre school to our students. And you can’t have a strong school until you reach about 1,200 students or so. Otherwise everybody is doing double duty.”

"...the better we are with our marketing and our advertising, it starts to draw out those differences so a parent can make an informed choice..."

Cyber charter school leaders point to traditional public schools, like the Bethlehem Area School District in Lehigh and Northampton counties, that are spending money to promote themselves as they lose students to charter schools.

But not many districts are making that choice.

In Woodland Hills, where 18 percent of the district’s budget goes to charter school tuition, Superintendent Alan Johnson said he hoped to hire a media firm to promote the district this year. But his board nixed the idea when residents at public meetings opposed the idea.

“It frustrates me more than I have the capacity to express in words because we are in a competitive market and in the market-based society where we live you get your market share by advertising, by getting your message out there,” Johnson said.

Charter school leaders also talk about the football stadiums built by traditional public school districts for their athletic programs.

“Can you make an educational argument that that’s money well spent? Sure you can,” said Hayden of PA Cyber. “But is that money better spent on technology or teachers’ salaries or library books or something? I don’t know. I mean, it’s judgement calls that all school districts make.”

Marylinda Maurer, who took over as CEO of the Central PA Digital Learning Foundation during the 2015-16 school year, pulled back on advertising as the school is in a transition period.

The school, with an enrollment of about 188 students in 2016-17, went from spending $47,000 in advertising in 2014-15 to $16,000 in 2016-17.

“I just felt that that was not a good way to be spending educational dollars,” Maurer said. “I’m not in it to be one of those schools that’s 1,000, 2,000 kids. My goals are a little different. I really want to stay personal, and it’s really hard to be personal when you have that many.”

"They are here to educate students, not put out slick advertising campaigns to attract students."

Even with the ads, Maurer said there was no way to know if they were what was bringing in students.

Maurer said the school put money into redeveloping its website in 2016-17. She plans to reintroduce advertising in radio and print in 2017-18.

“It’s just about informing people, letting them know we’re here,” she said. “It’s not about drawing people in.”

Despite the money spent on advertising, some school leaders say they get most of their students through parent recommendations and social media. Some of that happens on community Facebook pages where parents ask for advice on which school to send their children. On a Washington County community page, more than 50 people gave recommendations for cyber charter schools in January to a woman seeking advice.

“Quite frankly, our best form of advertising is serving our current parents really well because they reach out to other families and say, ‘I love this school. We think you should come, too,’” said Flurie of Commonwealth. “That’s the very best marketing and advertising we could ever do.”

STORY — STEPHANIE HACKE AND MARY NIEDERBERGER

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Proposed law could save Pennsylvania school districts money, but be 'death knell' for cyber charters

By JACQUELINE PALOCHKO

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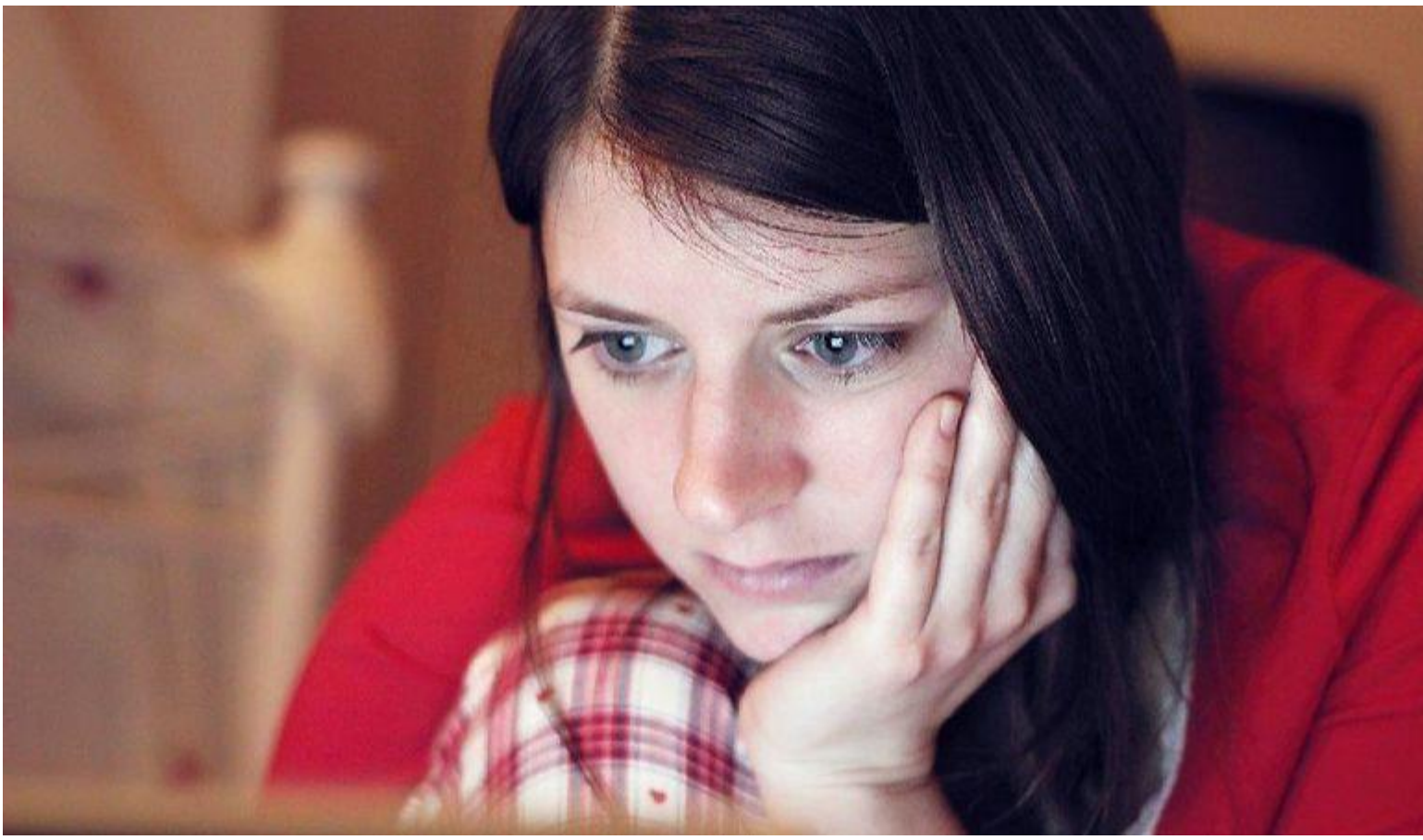

Bills in the Pennsylvania Senate and House would require parents to pay their child's tuition fee at a cyber charter school if the home district offers an existing online program. (Joseph Golby / TNS)

Proposed legislation in Harrisburg would save some Lehigh Valley school districts millions of dollars each year in cybercharter tuition, but could leave the online schools in a dire state and hinder school choice for parents and students.

Bills recently introduced in the state Senate and state House would require parents to pay their child's tuition at a cybercharter school if the student's home district has an online program.

Districts currently must pay cybercharter schools for each student who opts to attend one. The proposed policy changes have been introduced before, but may gain traction in the House. Chief sponsor Rep. Curt Sonney, R-Erie, now chairs the House Education Committee.

Sonney said in an interview he will examine the cyber programs offered both by the districts and by the online-only schools before pushing his bill.

But if the bill does go through, it will hurt the cybercharter schools that depend on money from the school districts.

"My bill is a death knell to cybercharter schools," Sonney said.

Cybercharter supporters say if passed, the policy changes would eliminate school choice for parents who can't afford tuition at a cybercharter school for their children.
"This legislation would … [force] students to remain with a district that does not serve and meet the expectations of families," said Ana Myers, executive director of Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools.

Cybercharter schools typically perform near the bottom on the state's standardized test scores. All Pennsylvania cybercharter schools had graduation rates below the state average of 86.6 percent, according to the state's measuring tool, the Future Ready PA Index.

Comparing that with district cybers chools is difficult. While the state website includes data on how each district's school does, it does not rate the district's virtual programs.

State Sen. Judy Schwank, D-Berks, introduced her bill in January after hearing from superintendents in her county about the costs of cybercharter schools.
“It’s incredible how much districts are spending,” she said. “I think taxpayers would be shocked if they knew where these funds were going.”

Districts must pay a per-pupil tuition fee for each student attending a cybercharter school. A 2018 survey by the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators found districts pay $11,306 for each regular education student attending a cybercharter, and $24,192 on average for special education students.

The Northampton Area School District sent $2 million for 130 students who attended cybercharters last year. Northampton has had its own cyberprogram for 10 years, but only 45 students are enrolled.

“Absolutely [the proposed change] would help the district,” Northampton Area Superintendent Joseph Kovalchik said.

Enrollment in districts’ own virtual programs remains lower than in competing cybercharter schools. The Allentown School District has 132 high school students enrolled in its online program, but sends more than 400 students to cybercharters at a cost of $5 million.

The Parkland School District has had its own cyberprogram for grades six through 12 since 2010, but still sent $1.65 million to cybercharter schools last year.
“I would be supportive of [the] legislation,” Superintendent Richard Sniscak said.
The Bethlehem Area School District, which sent more than 200 students to cybercharter schools last year, would save at least $2 million, even after factoring in any costs associated with returning students.

“If the law is passed as is, I don’t believe many families would choose to pay to go to a cybercharter,” Bethlehem Area Superintendent Joseph Roy said.

Schwank knows she will have to fight to have her bill passed, especially since it tasks families with picking up the costs. Right now, districts are the ones footing the bill for their own virtual programs and the cybercharters.

But she envisions a commission forming to explore the costs of cybercharter schools.

“At least it gets the conversation going,” she said.

Jacqueline Palochko

CONTACT

Jacqueline Palochko covers education and the Allentown and Bethlehem Area school districts. A Scranton native, Palochko graduated from Ithaca College in 2011 with a degree in journalism. She has previously worked at The (Hanover) Evening Sun, covering breaking news, and The Keene Sentinel in New Hampshire, where she covered city hall.

CHARTER SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN PENNSYLVANIA

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April 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Expanding on the 2009 CREDO National Charter School Study *Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States*, this report examines the performance of Pennsylvania charter schools for the period 2007 - 2010.

Compared to the educational gains the charter students would have had in their traditional public schools, the analysis shows that students in Pennsylvania charter schools on average make smaller learning gains. More than one quarter of the charter schools have significantly more positive learning gains than their traditional public school counterparts in reading, but their performance is eclipsed by the nearly half of charter schools that have significantly lower learning gains. In math, again nearly half of the charter schools studied perform worse than their traditional public school peers and one quarter outperform them.

This analysis builds on the methodology used for the 2009 study.[1] The approach uses a quasiexperimental design of matched pairs that are followed over time. Learning gains as measured on state standardized achievement tests are the outcome used to gauge the contributions of charter schools compared to the learning gains that would have occurred for those students in traditional public school settings.

To create a reliable comparison group for our study, we attempted to build a Virtual Control Record (VCR) for each charter school student. Our approach is displayed in Figure 1. We identify all the traditional public schools that have students who transfer to a given charter school; each of these schools is a "feeder school." Once a school qualifies as a feeder school, all the students in the school become potential matches for a student in a particular charter school. All the student records from all the feeder schools are pooled – this becomes the source of records for creating the virtual match. Using the records of the students in those schools in the year prior to the test year of interest (t_0), CREDO selects all of the available records that match each charter school student.

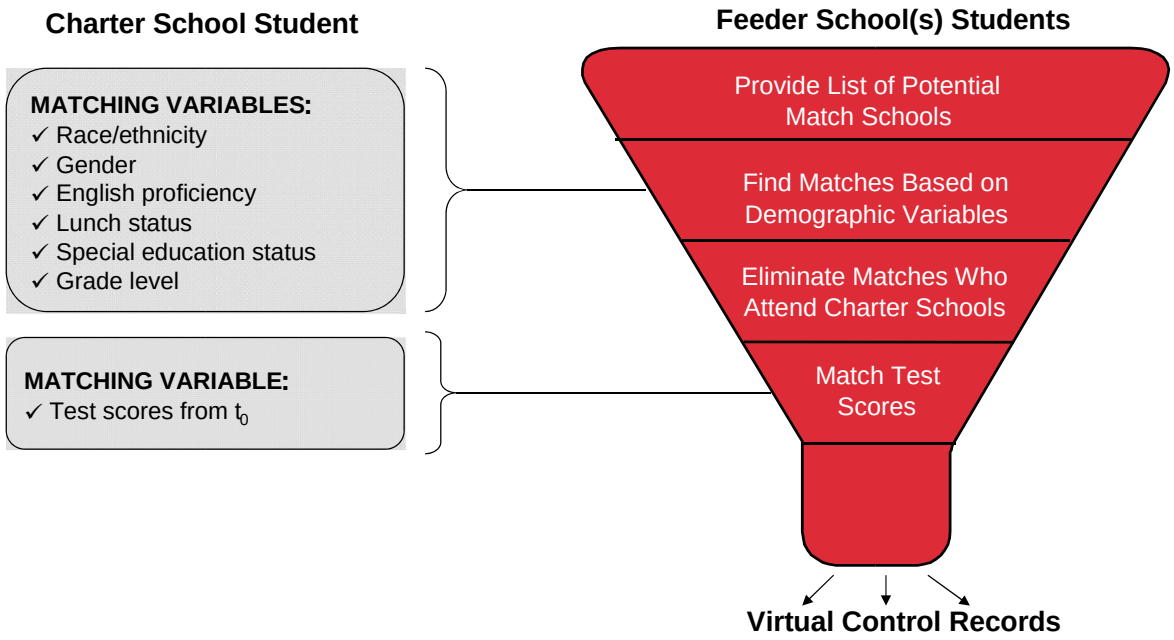
Match factors include:

- Grade-level
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Free or Reduced Price Lunch Status
- English Language Learner Status
- Special Education Status
- Prior test score on state achievement tests

The scores from the test year of interest are then averaged and a Virtual Control Record is produced. That record is completely masked, because there is no trace of the specific school that originated the contributing records. The VCR produces a score for the test year of interest that corresponds to the expected value results of matching techniques used in other studies, such as propensity matching. A technical appendix detailing our methodology is available at credo.stanford.edu.

[1] For the interested reader, the national report is available at credo.stanford.edu.

Figure 1: CREDO VCR Methodology



This document reports on the analysis of 4 years of schooling, beginning with the 2006-2007 school year and concluding with the 2009-2010 data. A total of 73,085 charter school students from 116 charter schools are followed for as many years as data are available. The students are drawn from Grades 3 - 8, since these are the grades that are covered by the state achievement testing program that could be linked over this time period using our VCR methodology. An identical number of virtual comparison students are included in the analysis. In Pennsylvania, it was possible to create virtual matches for 85 percent of the charter school students in reading and 84 percent in math. This proportion assures that the results reported here can be considered indicative of the overall performance of charter schools in the state. The total number of observations is large enough to be confident that the tests of effect will be sensitive enough to detect real differences between charter school and traditional school students at the $p<.05$ level. This is also true for each student subgroup examined, as can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic Composition of Matched Charter Students included in the Study, 2007-2010

Student Group	% in Charters	# in Charters
Pennsylvania Charter Students	100%	61,770
Brick & Mortar Students	70%	43,065
Cyber Students	30%	18,705
Black Students	47%	29,098
Hispanic Students	9%	5,692
White Students	41%	25,498
Free/Reduced Lunch Students	61%	37,617

Special Education Students	13%	8,164
English Language Learner Students	1%	775
Grade Repeating Students	2%	1,146

Academic growth on state achievement tests is used as the outcome of interest. For the purposes of this report, the time period denoted "2008" covers growth between the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. This period can also be thought of as the growth from the spring 2007 test to the spring 2008 test. The time period denoted "2009" corresponds to the year of growth between the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years, and the time period denoted "2010" corresponds to the year of growth between the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. In other words, the label refers to the second spring term of each growth period, not the spring of the initial testing year.

All test scores in each grade and for each subject were standardized around the statewide average score for that specific test. The transformation of scores puts all tests on a common reference scale so that scores can be compared across subjects, across grades and across years. Academic growth for an individual student is judged relative to his place in the distribution of scores over time. If all students learn exactly the same amount in a year, then their places in the distribution will not change; but if some students learn more than others, then their scores move ahead in the distribution.

In each case, the analysis examines whether students in charter schools in Pennsylvania outperform their traditional public school counterparts under a variety of scenarios. In all the scenarios, a number of control factors are applied to the estimation so that the contribution of the schools themselves can be isolated from other potentially confounding influences. Each of the scenarios is presented in the following sections of the report.

First, charter school performance overall is examined relative to traditional public schools, while holding all other factors constant. The results appear in Figure 2. Students in Pennsylvania charter schools learned significantly less on average than their virtual counterparts in both reading and mathematics.

A Roadmap to the Graphics

The graphics in this report have a common format.

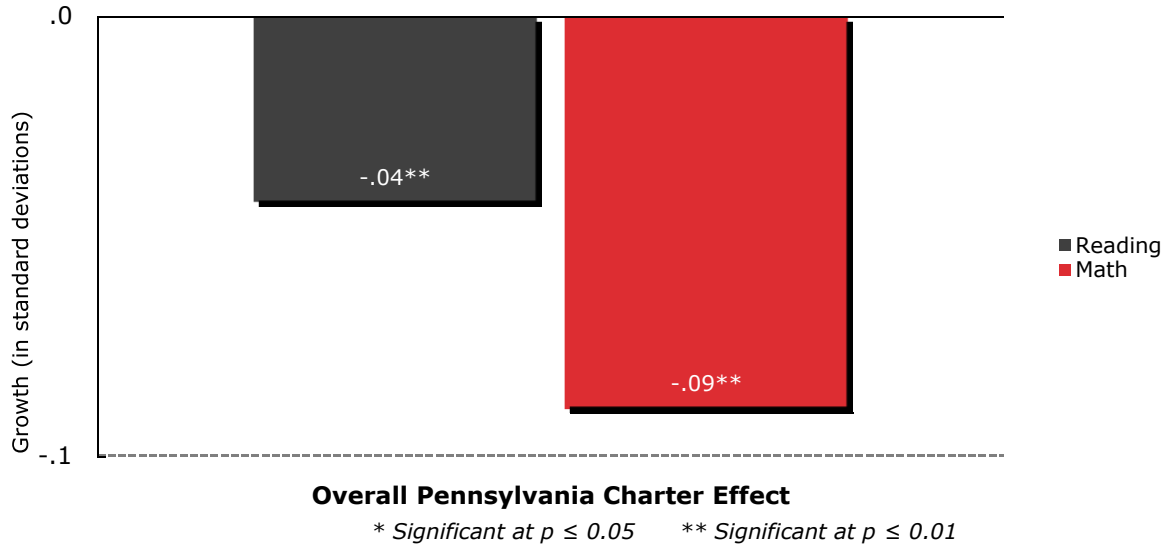
Each graph presents the average performance of charter students relative to their **pertinent comparison student**. The reference group differs depending on the specific comparison. Where a graph compares student sub-group performance, the pertinent comparison student is the same for both groups. Each graph is labeled with the pertinent comparison group for clarity.

The **height** of the bars in each graph reflects the magnitude of difference between traditional public school and charter school performance over the period studied.

Stars are used to reflect the level of statistical significance of the difference; the absence of stars means that the effect is not statistically different from zero.

Comparisons of the **performance of similar student sub-groups** contain an additional test of the absolute difference between the two subgroups. Where a charter school student subgroup has learning gains that are statistically significantly different, the bars have a gradient shade.

Figure 2: Average Learning Gains in Pennsylvania Charter Schools, 2007 – 2010 Compared to Gains for VCR Students in Each Charter Schools' Feeder Schools



** Significant at p ≤ 0.05 ** Significant at p ≤ 0.01*

DISTRIBUTION OF CHARTER SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN PENNSYLVANIA

While the numbers reported above represent the average learning gains for charter school students across the state, the average tells only part of the story. Parents and policy-makers are also interested in knowing the distribution around the average, and specifically how schools perform compared to it. In order to determine this distribution of performance, we test the average experience in the VCR sample for students in each school; put another way, we compared each school's average effect to the average of all the comparison students in traditional schools. The average VCR is the correct comparison, since charter schools are required to take any and all applicants or to select by lottery if they are oversubscribed.

Table 2 below shows the breakout of performance across the 116 Pennsylvania charter schools included in this study, apart from 17 schools in which there were an insufficient number of individual student records to calculate a representative school-wide average level of performance.

Table 2: Performance of Pennsylvania Charter Schools 2007 - 2010 Compared to Pennsylvania Average VCR Learning Gains

	Significantly Worse		Not Significant		Significantly Better	
Subject	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
Reading	39	39%	30	30%	30	30%
Math	46	46%	28	28%	25	25%

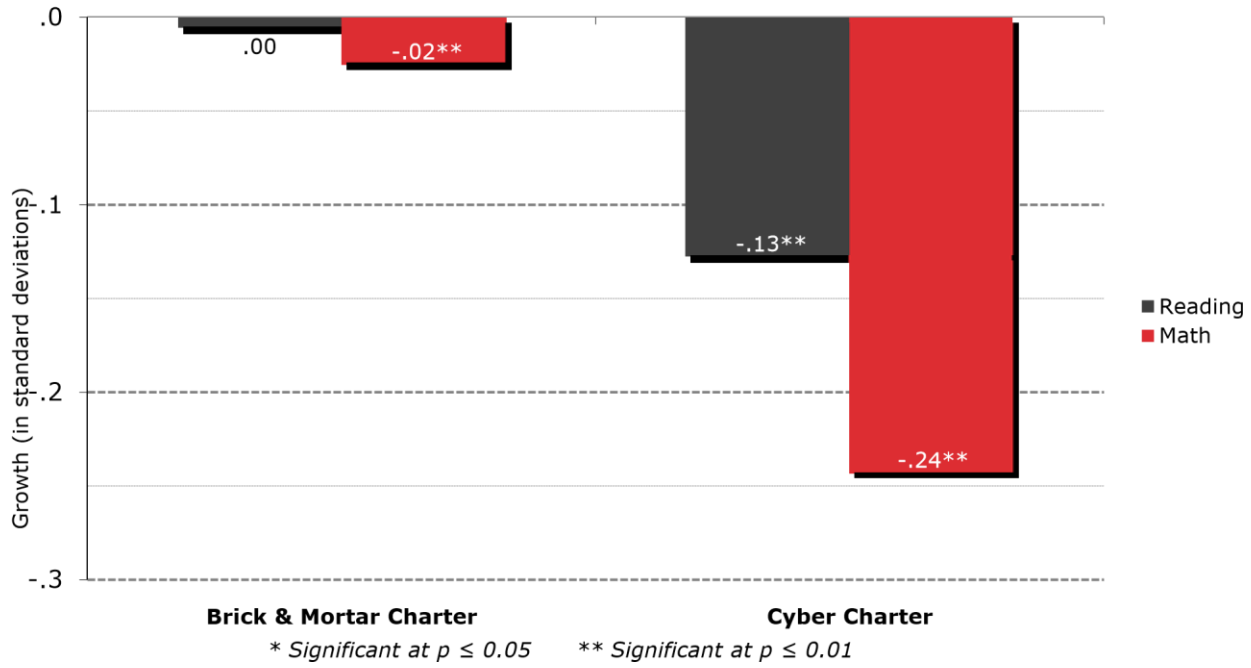
In reading, 30 of the 99 charter schools (30%) perform significantly better than traditional public schools, while 25 of the charter schools (25%) perform significantly better in math. Both of these results are better than the national average proportion of better-performing charters (17%). Additionally, there were a handful of outstanding schools in each subject; five schools (5%) in reading and seven schools (7%) in math had average growth scores that were above 0.2 with two schools in math achieving above 0.5. However, their

standout performance is mitigated by the 39 charter schools (39%) in Pennsylvania that perform at lower levels than traditional public schools in reading and the 46 charter schools (46%) that perform worse in math.

CHARTER SCHOOL IMPACT BY DELIVERY SYSTEM

Two types of charter schools are authorized in Pennsylvania: physical brick and mortar schools and cyber, or virtual, schools. The student populations at the two types of schools differ. The typical cyber charter student is white and ineligible for subsidized meals, while the typical brick and mortar charter student is black and receiving free or reduced-priced lunches. Furthermore, the starting score for cyber students is significantly higher than for brick and mortar charter students in both reading and math. Additionally, cyber students are more likely to be repeating a grade than brick and mortar charter students. The overall results separated by delivery system appear in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Average Learning Gains in Pennsylvania Brick & Mortar and Cyber Charter Schools Compared to Gains for VCR Students in Each Charter Schools' Feeder Schools



The learning gains for students in brick and mortar charter schools in Pennsylvania were not significantly different from their traditional public school counterparts in reading. Brick and mortar charter students learned significantly less on average than their counterparts in math. Cyber charter students have significantly smaller gains in reading and math than those of their traditional public school peers.

The results in Figure 3 represent the average learning gains for charter school students by delivery system. As with the overall results, knowing the distribution around the average for each delivery system provides a better understanding about individual school performance. In order to determine the distributions of performance for each delivery system, we first separated the schools and their VCRs into the two relevant

groups: 1) brick and mortar charter students with their VCRs and 2) cyber charter students with their VCRs. We then tested the average experience in the VCR sample for students in each school within a delivery system; put another way, we compared each school's average effect to the average of all the comparison students in traditional schools for that delivery system. The results appear in Table 3 below along with the overall numbers that were reported in the previous section.

Table 3: Performance of Pennsylvania Charter Schools 2007-2010 Compared to Pennsylvania Average VCR Learning Gains by Delivery System

		Significantly Worse		Not Significant		Significantly Better	
Subject	**Delivery System**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
Reading	All Charters	39	39%	30	30%	30	30%
	Brick & Mortar	31	34%	28	31%	32	35%
	Cyber	8	100%	0	0%	0	0%
Math	All Charters	46	46%	28	28%	25	25%
	Brick & Mortar	38	42%	28	31%	25	27%
	Cyber	8	100%	0	0%	0	0%

In both reading and math, all 8 cyber schools perform significantly worse than their traditional public school counterparts. For brick and mortar schools in reading, 32 of the 91 schools (35%) perform significantly better than their traditional public schools, while 25 of the charter schools (27%) perform significantly better in math. In reading, 31 brick and mortar charter schools (34%) perform at lower levels than their traditional public schools, and 38 of them (42%) perform worse in math.

Due to the differences in the student composition at brick and mortar versus cyber charter schools, the effectiveness of the two types of schools for different subgroups of students is displayed in Table 4 below. The all-charter effect for each of these subgroups is also listed in this table for reference; these results will be discussed further in subsequent sections of this report. In Table 4, the performance of charter school students in the subgroups of interest are displayed relative to the average white student in traditional public schools who does not qualify for Free or Reduced Price Lunch subsidies, Special Education services or English Language Learner support and who did not repeat a grade.

Table 4: Performance of All Pennsylvania Charters, Brick & Mortar Charters, and Cyber Charter Schools Compared to Pennsylvania Average VCR Learning Gains

	Charter Reading Effect			Charter Math Effect		
Subgroup	**All**	**Bricks**	**Cybers**	**All**	**Bricks**	**Cybers**
Black	-.11**	-.12**	-.20**	-.12**	-.12**	-.30**
Hispanic	-.17**	-.18**	-.21**	-.18**	-.18**	-.30**
Free/Reduced	-.08**	-.07**	-.13**	-.06**	-.04**	-.11**

Special Ed	-.25**	-.26**	-.24**	-.15**	-.16**	-.15**
English Learners	-.11**	-.12**	-.24*	.03	.00	.08
Grade Repeaters	.07**	.14**	.11**	.05**	.15**	.13**

** Significant at p ≤ 0.05* *** Significant at p ≤ 0.01*

In every subgroup with significant effects, cyber charter performance is lower than the brick and mortar performance. English Learner students at both types of charter schools have similar learning gains to fluent speakers in traditional public schools in math.

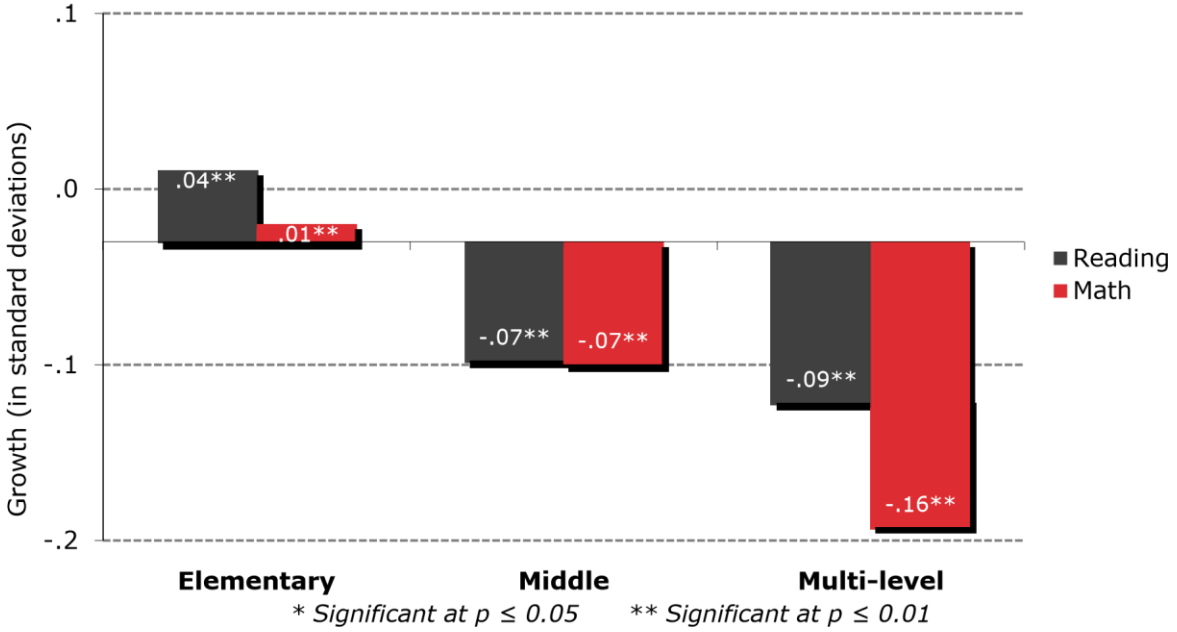
CHARTER SCHOOL IMPACTS BY SCHOOL LEVEL

There are often differential impacts by school level, and many charter operators decide to focus on particular ages, while others seek to serve a broader range of students. Nationally, multi-level charter schools, those serving grade ranges larger than traditional elementary, middle or high schools, perform significantly worse than those that offer more traditional grade ranges.

This study examined the outcomes of students enrolled in elementary, middle and multi-level schools. The results appear in Figure 4. Growth scores could not be calculated for high schools, since testing data exists for only one grade level in that grade span (grade 11).

Figure Average Learning Compared to

4:Gains in Pennsylvania Elementary, Middle and Multi-Level Charter Schools Gains for VCR Students in Each Charter Schools' Feeder Schools



** Significant at p ≤ 0.05* *** Significant at p ≤ 0.01*

Students enrolled in elementary charter schools learn significantly more in both math and reading compared to their peers in traditional public schools. However, students enrolled in charter middle and multi-level schools learn significantly less in both reading and math compared to their counterparts in traditional public schools.

CHARTER SCHOOL IMPACT BY AGE OF SCHOOL AND STUDENTS' YEARS OF ENROLLMENT

To delve deeper into the charter school effects in Pennsylvania, we tested the charter school effects based on the number of years a charter was open during the time period of study. These results can be seen in Figure 5 below.

5:Gains by Age of Charter School the Average Learning Gain for VCR students in Feeder Schools

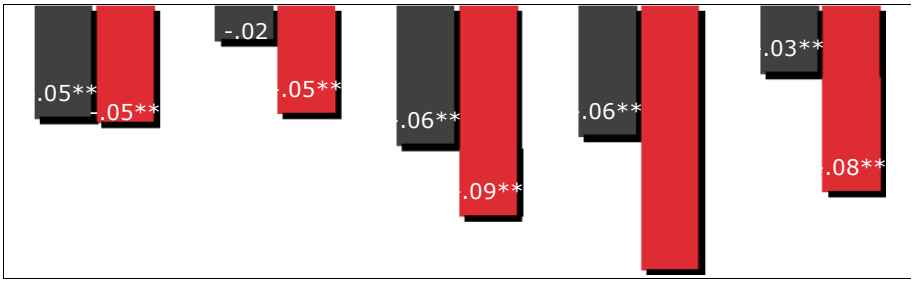
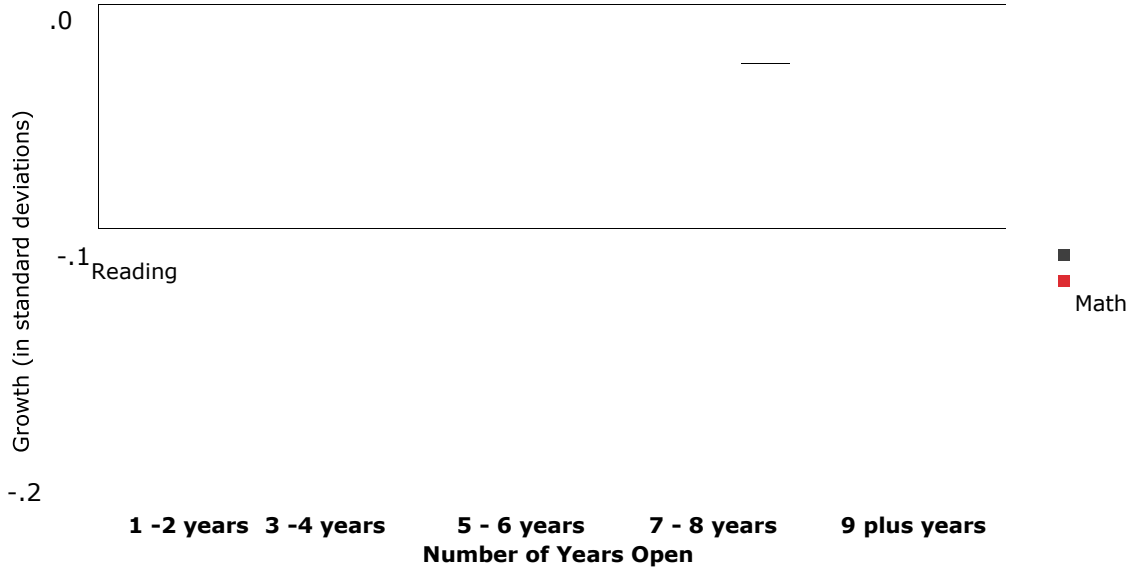


Figure Average Learning Compared to



** Significant at p ≤ 0.05 ** Significant at p ≤ 0.01*

The analysis shows that charter schools of all ages have negative and significant effects on learning gains in both reading and math for Pennsylvania charter school students as compared to their traditional public school peers. The sole exception is reading growth measured for students at charter schools open for 3-4 years, which was not significantly different than their traditional public school counterparts.

Regardless of the age of the charter school, student growth in charter schools may change over the years of enrollment. To test this, students were grouped by the number of consecutive years they were enrolled. In this scenario, the analysis is limited to the charter students who enrolled for the first time in the charter school between 2007-2008 and 2009-2010; although the number of students included will be smaller, it is the only way to make sure that the available test results align with the years of enrollment. This question examines whether the academic success of students who enroll in a charter school fluctuates as they continue their enrollment. The results appear in Figure 6.

6:Gain by Students' Years of Enrollment in Charter Schools 2007 - 2010 the Average Learning Gain for VCR students in Feeder Schools

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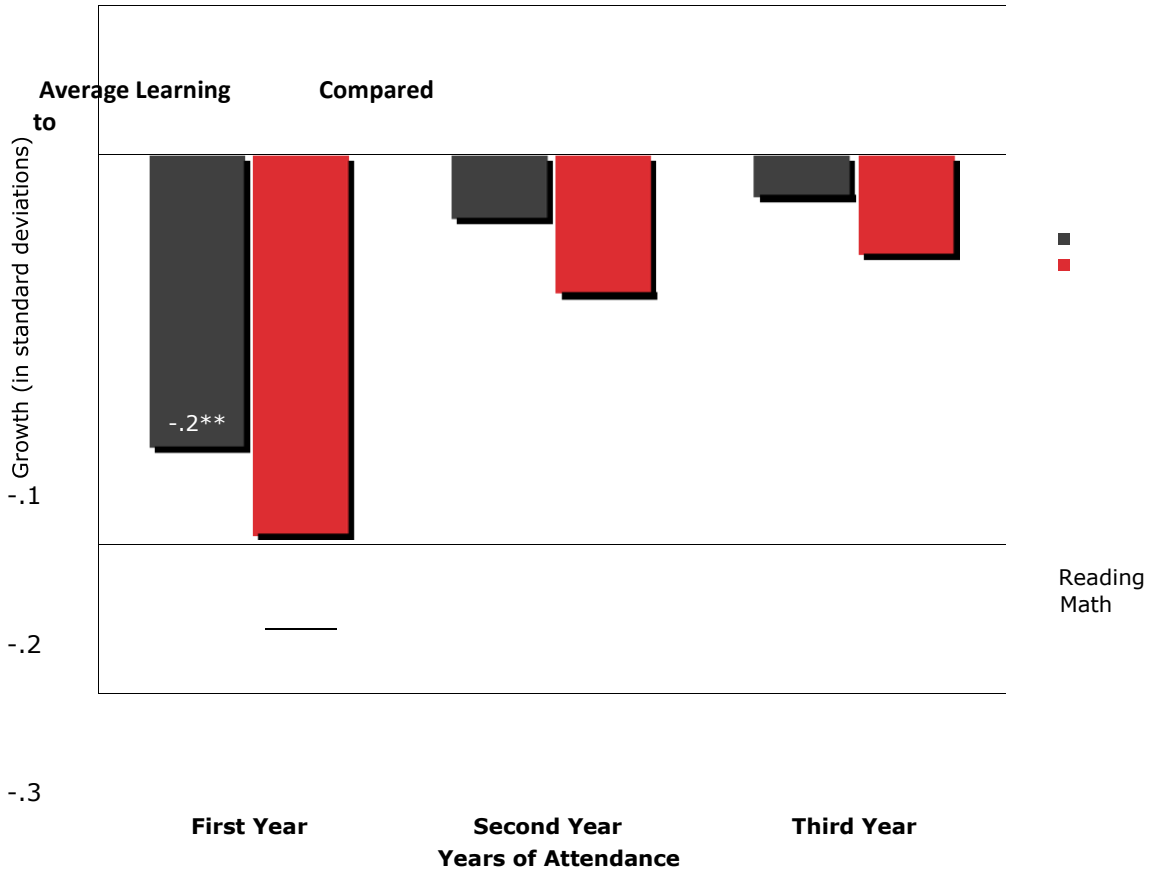
Figure Average Learning Compared to



** Significant at p ≤ 0.05 ** Significant at p ≤ 0.01*

The results suggest that new charter school students have a significant initial loss of learning compared to their counterparts in traditional public schools in reading and math. In the second year of attendance, a significant loss in learning compared to students in traditional public schools is again observed in both reading and math. Starting in the third year there is no significant difference in learning compared to their counterparts in traditional public schools in reading, and the loss in learning in math is a bit smaller than in the previous year. As only three growth periods were available, the trend in subsequent years of enrollment is not able to be determined.

CHARTER SCHOOL IMPACT BY RACE/ETHNICITY

Attention in US public education to achievement differences by racial and ethnic backgrounds has increased in recent years. The effectiveness of charter schools across ethnic and racial dimensions is especially important since so many charter schools are focused on serving historically underserved minority students. The impact of charter schools on academic gains of Black and Hispanic students is presented in Figure 7, below.

The graph displays two distinct comparisons, described below:

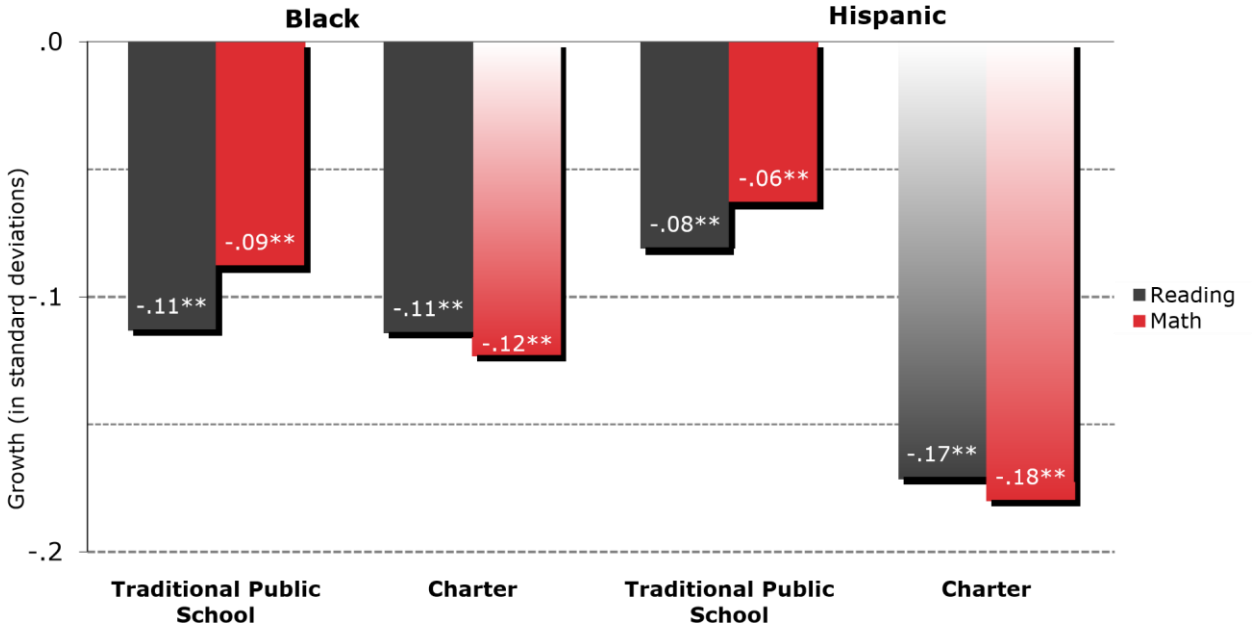
- The first comparison displays the performance of traditional public students in the subgroups of interest relative to the average white student in traditional public schools who does not qualify for Free or Reduced Price Lunch subsidies, Special Education services or English Language Learner support and who did not repeat a grade. The values that appear in each vertical bar indicate the

Figure Average Learning Compared to

magnitude of difference from the comparison student, with stars indicating the level of statistical significance. Thus, if there is no difference in the learning gains, the bar would be missing entirely; if the learning of the student group in question is not as great as the comparison baseline, the bar is negative and if the learning gains exceed the comparison, the bar is positive.

- A second comparison tests whether the learning gains in the charter school student subgroup differs significantly from their peers in the same student subgroup in their feeder traditional public schools. Where the difference is significant, the charter school bar has gradient shading.

Figure 7: Average Learning Gains for Pennsylvania Black and Hispanic Students Compared to White Traditional Public School VCR Gains



** Significant at p ≤ 0.05* *** Significant at p ≤ 0.01*

Black students in both traditional public and charter schools have smaller gains in reading and math than those of white students in traditional public schools, the baseline of comparison. Black students in traditional public schools and charters have indistinguishable learning deficits in reading. However, Black students enrolled in charter schools show significantly worse performance in math compared to Black students in traditional public schools

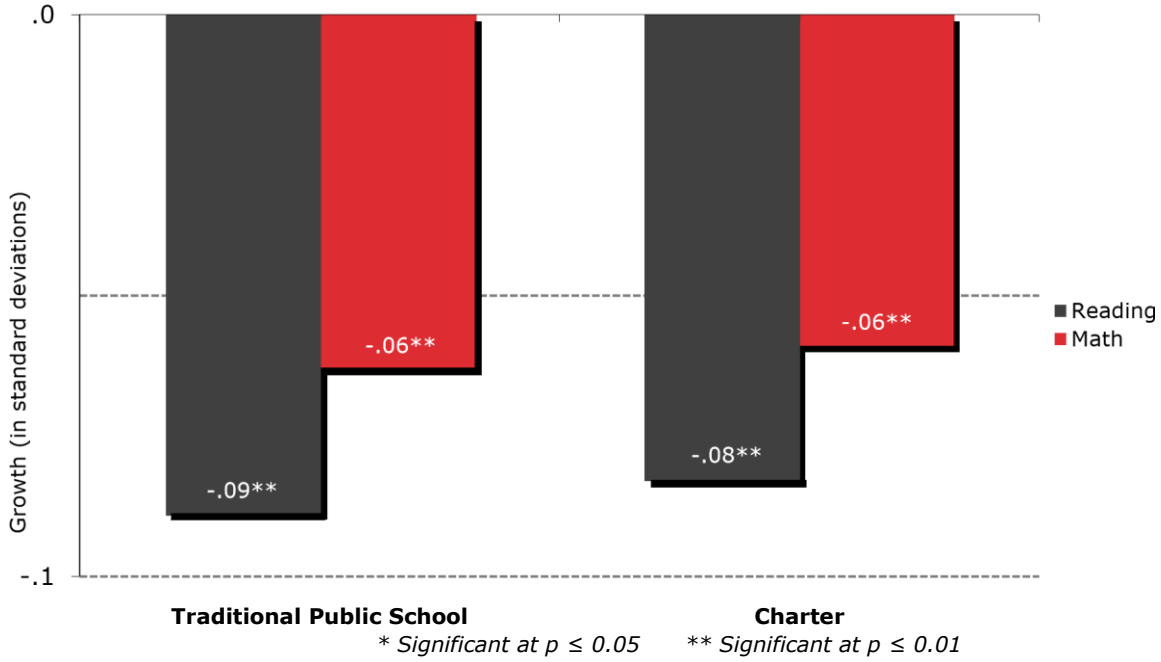
Hispanic students in both traditional schools and charter schools have gains in math and reading that are smaller than those of white students in traditional public schools, the baseline of comparison. In both math and reading, Hispanic students in charter schools perform significantly worse than Hispanic students in traditional public schools.

CHARTER SCHOOL IMPACT ON STUDENTS IN POVERTY

Much of the motivation for developing charter schools aims at improving education outcomes for students who are in poverty. The enrollment profiles of charter schools across the country underscore this fact; in the Pennsylvania sample, 61 percent of the matched charter students are eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch, a proxy for low income households. Thus, the impact of charter schools on the learning of students in poverty is important both in terms of student outcomes and as a test of the commitment of charter school leaders and teachers to address the needs of the population in better ways than in other settings. Figure

8 presents the results for Pennsylvania. In this graph, the comparison student is a student who pays full price for lunch, a proxy for not being in poverty.

Figure 8: Average Learning Gains for Pennsylvania Students in Poverty Compared to Non-Poverty VCR Gains



** Significant at p ≤ 0.05* *** Significant at p ≤ 0.01*

In Pennsylvania, students in poverty perform significantly worse than their non-poverty peers. As shown in the figure above, students in poverty enrolled in charter schools receive no significant benefit or loss in reading or math compared to students in poverty in traditional public schools.

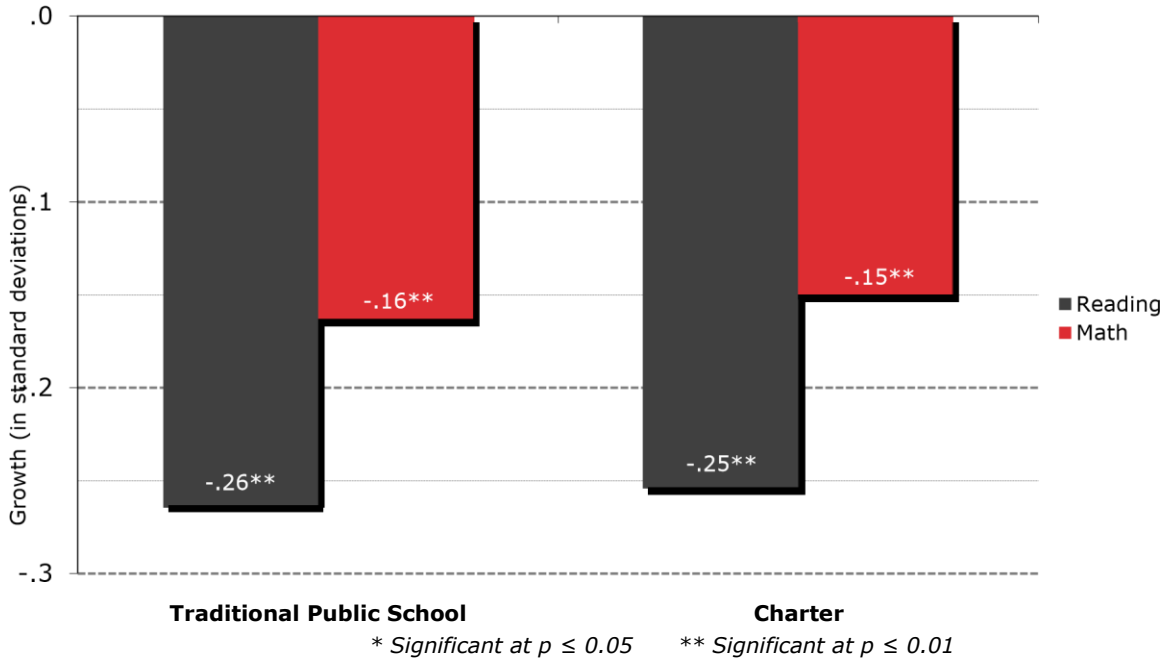
CHARTER SCHOOL IMPACT WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

The demographic comparisons in the CREDO national charter school report released in 2009 indicated that across the charter sector, schools serve fewer Special Education students and in smaller proportions of their enrollment base than the traditional public schools. In some cases, this result is a deliberate and coordinated response with local districts, based on a balance of meeting the needs of the students and consideration of cost-effective strategies for doing so. In Pennsylvania, the proportion of matched charter school students who are Special Education is 13 percent compared to 15 percent of students in traditional public schools receiving Special Education services in Pennsylvania.

It is especially difficult to compare outcomes of Special Education students, regardless of where they enroll. The most serious problem is caused by small numbers and diverse typologies in use across states; the result is that there is tremendous variation when all categories are aggregated, a necessary and messy requirement. Of all the facets of the study, this one deserves the greatest degree of skepticism. With this

cautionary note, the results are presented in Figure 9 below. The comparison baseline is the typical academic growth of a traditional public school student who is not receiving Special Education services.

Figure 9: Average Learning Gains for Pennsylvania Special Education Students Compared with Non-Special Education VCR Gains



** Significant at p ≤ 0.05* *** Significant at p ≤ 0.01*

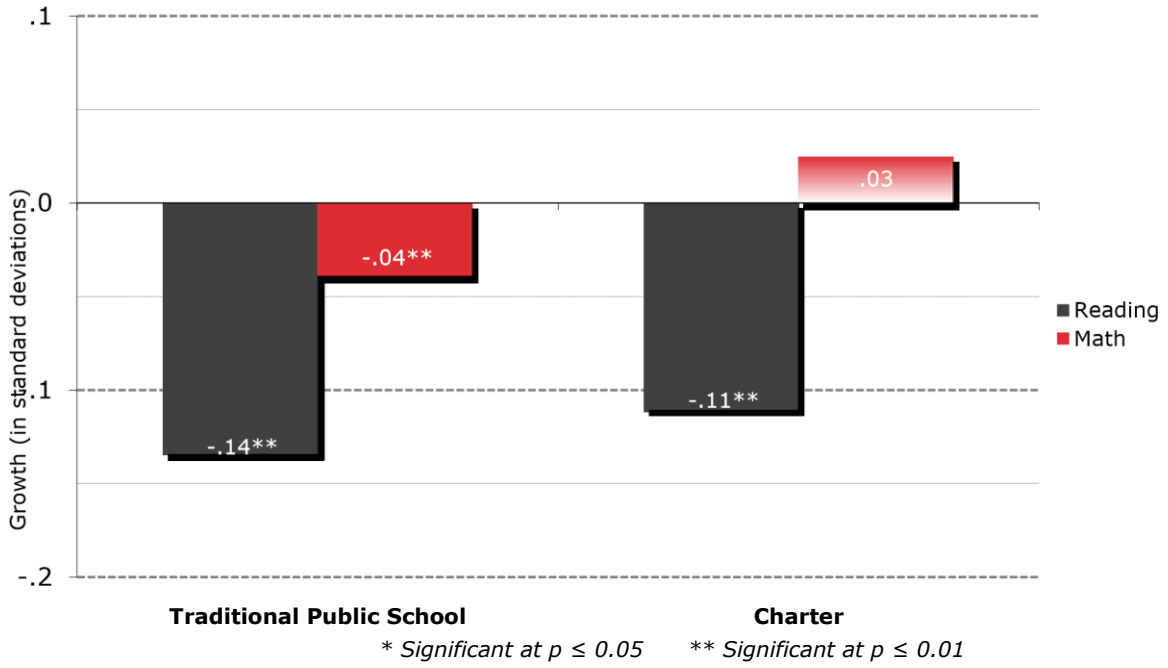
Special Education students enrolled in both traditional public and charter schools perform significantly worse than students not receiving special education services. In charter schools in Pennsylvania, Special Education students receive no significant benefit or loss from charter school attendance compared to their counterparts in traditional public schools in both reading and math.

CHARTER SCHOOL IMPACT ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Students who enroll in school without sufficient English proficiency represent a growing share of public school students. Their success in school today will greatly influence their success in the world a decade from now. Since their performance as reflected by National Assessment of Education Progress has lagged well behind that of their English-proficient peers, their learning gains are a matter of increasing focus and concern.

The comparison of learning gains between charter school English Language Learners and their traditional school counterparts in Pennsylvania appears in Figure 10. The baseline comparison student in this analysis is the typical traditional public school student who is a native English speaker.

Figure 10: Average Learning Gains for Pennsylvania English Language Learners Compared with Native English Speaker VCR Gains



** Significant at p ≤ 0.05* *** Significant at p ≤ 0.01*

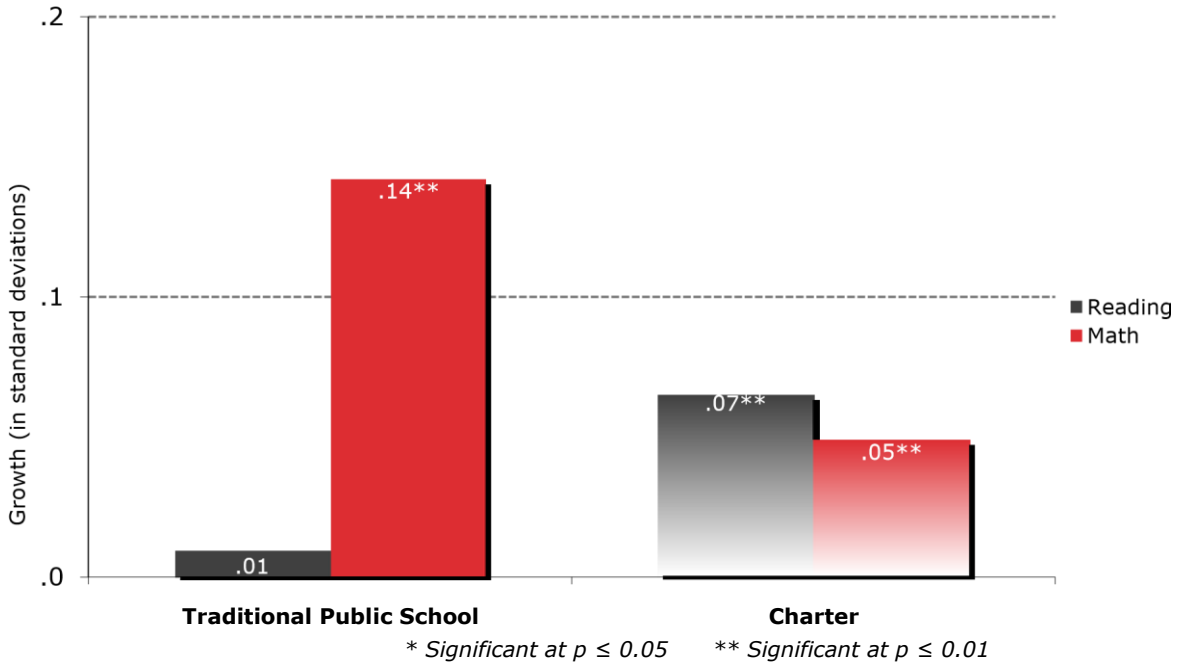
English Language Learner students in both traditional public schools and charter schools learn significantly less than native/fluent English speakers in reading. English Language Learners in traditional public schools learn significantly less in math than native/fluent English speakers, but those enrolled in charter schools have similar learning gains to fluent speakers in traditional public schools. English Language Learners in charter schools have similar gains in reading as their counterparts in traditional public schools and significantly better results in math.

CHARTER SCHOOL IMPACTS WITH GRADE-REPEATING STUDENTS

This study examined the outcomes of students who were retained. Often a highly charged topic, the underlying premise is that additional time in grade can help students by remediating deficits and shoring up grade-level competencies. Existing research on the outcomes of students who have been retained is limited.

Retention practices differ widely across the country and between the charter and traditional public school sectors. The fact that retained charter students have among the lowest match rates of any subgroup in our study suggests that charter schools are more likely to retain academically low-performing students. Regardless, in the observations of Pennsylvania students, sufficient numbers of matches were found to enable the learning gains following retention to be estimated. The results appear in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Average Learning Gains for Pennsylvania Grade-Repeating Students Compared with Non-Grade-Repeating VCR Gains



Retained students perform better than non-retained students in both traditional public and charter schools in math. In reading, retained students at charter schools outperform non-retained traditional public school students, but there is no significant difference between retained and non-retained students in traditional public schools. Charter school students learn significantly less compared to their counterparts in traditional public schools in math, but they learn significantly more in reading.

CHARTER SCHOOL IMPACT BY STUDENT'S STARTING DECILE

A general tenet of charter schools is a commitment to the education and development of every child. Further, many charter schools, including several in Pennsylvania, have as part of their mission a specific emphasis on students who have not thrived academically in traditional public schools and whose early performance is well below average. The performance of charter schools was examined to see if they produced equivalent results across the spectrum of student starting points and in relation to the results observed for equivalent students in traditional public schools.

To do this, students were grouped into deciles based on their baseline test scores in reading and math on Pennsylvania's achievement tests. The average growth of student achievement in each decile was then computed and compared. The results appear in Figures 12.a and 12.b below.

Figure 12.a: Impact by Students' Starting Decile - Reading

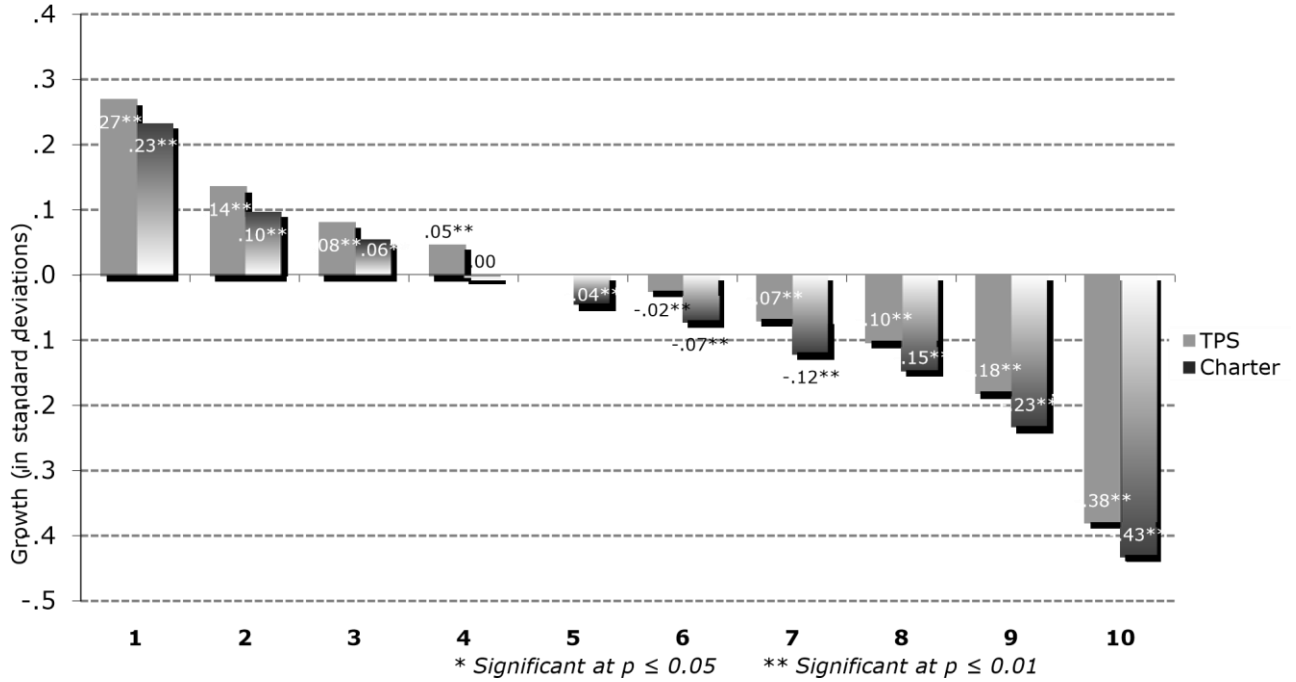
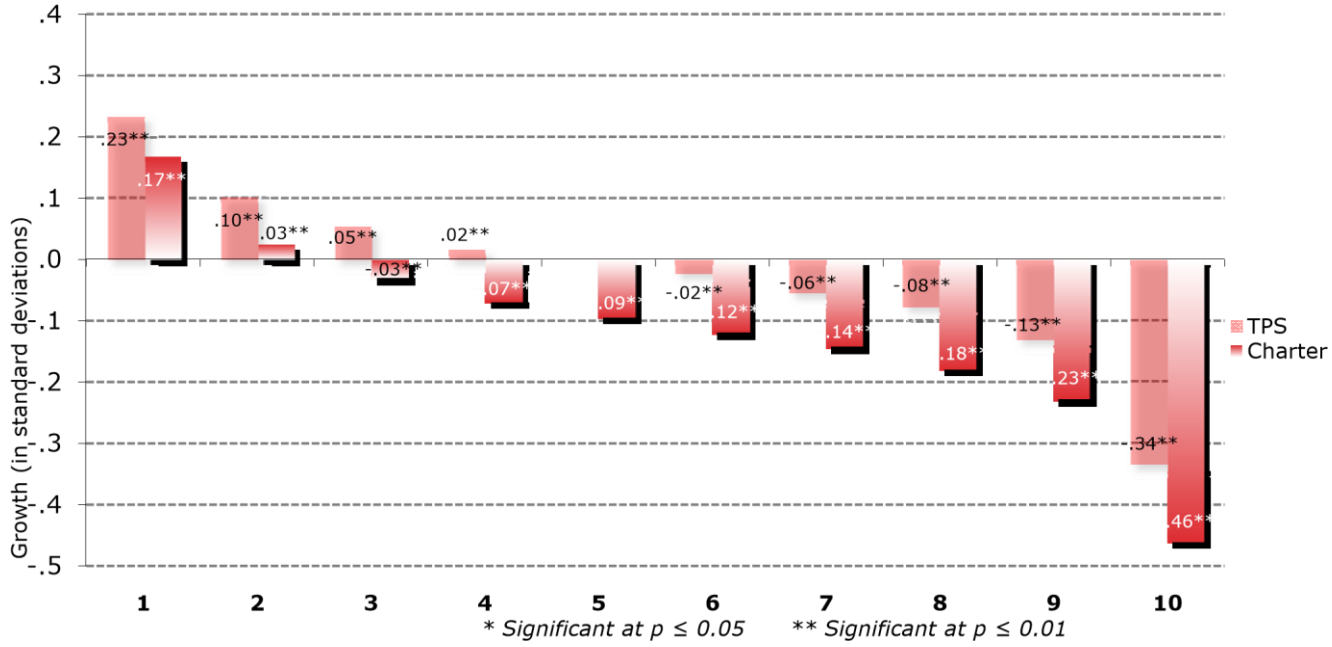


Figure 12.b: Impact by Students' Starting Decile - Math



Both figures demonstrate the expected "S"-shaped curve to the results. The overall curve reflects the typical pattern of larger learning gains for students with lower prior scores and larger learning losses for students with higher starting scores, a phenomenon known as "regression to the mean." Here, the relative magnitudes are important: Do charter schools produce relatively better growth results than traditional public

schools? If so, the charter curve would have larger gains on the low end and smaller losses on the high end of the distribution.

For students in Pennsylvania, Figures 12.a and 12.b show that charter schools do worse than traditional public schools in each decile. The effect of charter school attendance on growth results is positive across the first two deciles in math and is positive across the first three deciles in reading.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This report covers academic achievement growth at charter schools in Pennsylvania over a four-year period. Overall, charter school performance in Pennsylvania lagged in growth compared to traditional public schools. Looking at the distribution of school performance, 60% of the charter schools performed with similar or better success than the traditional public schools in reading and 53% of charter schools performed with similar or better success in math compared to traditional public schools. Performance at cyber charter schools was substantially lower than the performance at brick and mortar charters with 100% of cyber charters performing significantly worse than their traditional public school counterparts in both reading and math. Elementary school students enrolled in charter schools outperformed their peers in traditional public schools in both math and reading, while those enrolled in middle and multilevel charter schools performed worse in both subjects than their peers at traditional public schools. Charter schools of all ages in Pennsylvania on average perform worse than traditional public schools, and charter school students grow at lower rates compared to their traditional public school peers in their first 3 years in charter schools, although the gap shrinks considerably in math and disappears entirely in reading by the third year of attendance.

Hispanic students enrolled in charter schools perform significantly worse than their peers in traditional public schools in both reading and math, while Black students in charter schools perform significantly worse in math than Black students in traditional public schools but similarly in reading growth. Charter schools produced similar performance to traditional public schools in math and reading for students in poverty and for those with learning disabilities. Retained students in charter schools performed better than their peers at traditional public schools in reading but worse in math.

Ultimately, the story of charter schools in Pennsylvania should not be told using simple averages, as the significant variation in the distribution of charter school performance suggests. As is the case in many states across the country, a renewed focus on quality by the charter sector and among charter authorizers will help to ensure that the excellent performance provided by a significant proportion of the charter sector is emulated and reproduced, not mitigated by the poor performance of others. Without a vigorous focus on quality, the charter sector as a whole is put at risk by those schools that consistently underperform compared to their traditional public school peers.

A summary of the findings can be found in Table 5, below.

Table 5: Summary of Statistically Significant Findings for Pennsylvania Charter Schools Compared to the Average Learning Gain for VCR students in Feeder Schools

	Reading	Math
Pennsylvania Charter Students	Negative	Negative

Brick and Mortar Charters		Negative
Cyber Charters	Negative	Negative
Elementary Charter Schools	Positive	Positive
Middle Charter Schools	Negative	Negative
Multi-Level Charter Schools	Negative	Negative
Charter Schools Age 1 – 2 Years	Negative	Negative
Charter Schools Age 3 – 4 Years		Negative
Charter Schools Age 5 – 6 Years	Negative	Negative
Charter Schools Age 7 – 8 Years	Negative	Negative
Charter Schools Age 9 or More Years	Negative	Negative
First Year Enrolled in Charter School	Negative	Negative
Second Year Enrolled in Charter School	Negative	Negative
Third Year Enrolled in Charter School		Negative
Black Charter School Students		Negative
Hispanic Charter School Students	Negative	Negative
Free/Reduced Lunch Charter School Students		
Special Education Charter School Students		
English Language Learner Charter School Students		Positive
Retained Charter School Students	Positive	Negative

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

While the news in this report is sobering, previous work in other states has shown that similar populations of students can have more positive outcomes at charter schools than are seen here. The results of the extremely high-performing individual charter schools indicate that there are already some strong examples of quality charter schooling in Pennsylvania. The challenge for policymakers is to build on that success to drive quality throughout the sector. Charter school authorizing is one of the policy levers that can affect the overall quality of charter school options that are available for families. A systematic, thorough and well-designed charter authorizing process increases the likelihood that an applicant's desire to help students is matched by a sufficient level of competence and planning to actually be able to do so. A regular review and reauthorization process could also help maintain a high quality charter sector, especially if reviews focus seriously on both fiscal and academic performance benchmarks.[2] Instituting such reforms could help

[2] Further discussion of this topic can be found in publications such as the frameworks for academic and operational quality released by the Building Charter School Quality initiative and the National

to ensure that charters are granted to operators with the greatest likelihood to excel and that all charter schools are held accountable to high standards of performance.

Association of Charter School Authorizer's "Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizers."

June 14 — 4:40 pm, 2018

Pa. cyber charters consistently receive poor academic scores

Several states cracked down on cyber charters this school year, but Pennsylvania was not among them

Credit: report by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers and 50CAN.

No cyber charter school in Pennsylvania have ever received a passing academic score from the state, and very few have come close, according to information recently highlighted in a report from the office of Democratic State Rep. James Roebuck of Philadelphia.

Roebuck and other House Democrats have assembled a package of bills that would further regulate charters by reforming how they use reserve funds, rules for leasing buildings, special education payments, contracting, the teacher evaluation system, disclosure in advertising, school building closures, and the transfer of school records.

The package would not single out cybers, but other legislation has been introduced that would reduce their per-student reimbursement.

Pennsylvania has 13 cyber charters enrolling more than 34,000 students, or 10 percent of all the cyber students in the country.

These schools are authorized not by local districts, but by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. But districts must send per-pupil payments to cyber charters for each local student they enroll, and the payments are the same as for brick-and-mortar charters, even though cybers have fewer expenses.

This has proven frustrating not only to the districts and other proponents of traditional public schools, but to several groups that favor school choice and charters.

In 2016, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers and the national charter lobbying group 50CAN released a report on cyber charters, which found that compared to traditional public school students, full-time cyber students have poor academic growth. Overall, cyber students make no significant gains in math and less than half the gains in reading compared to their peers in traditional public schools, this report found.

Pennsylvania is among the “big three” cyber charter states, along with California and Ohio. Collectively, they enroll more than half of the country’s full-time cyber charter students.

Timothy Eller, a former press secretary for the Pennsylvania Department of Education during the administration of Republican Gov. Tom Corbett, registered as a lobbyist in 2015 and formed the Keystone Alliance for Public Charter Schools. The alliance advocates for brick-and-mortar charters but does not allow membership for cyber charter schools.

It’s been a difficult school year for many U.S. cybers. Ohio’s largest chain was forced to close mid-year, and others closed down in Georgia, Indiana, Nevada, and New Mexico. In the past, it has been rare for states to close cyber charters despite low achievement across the sectorand several financial scandals.

Pennsylvania was not part of this wave of closures, though it does have cybers with poor academic records and at least one major financial scandal.

Of the 43 states that allow charter schools, only 35 allow cyber charters. The eight that do not are Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Virginia. Only 23 of the states that allow cybers have actually authorized any, according to the report from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. Those states plus Washington D.C. have a total of 135 full-time cyber charter schools. Cybers make up just 2 percent of all charters in the country.

At its peak, Pennsylvania had 14 cyber charters, more than 10 percent of the nation's total. However, Education Plus Cyber closed in December 2015 during the state budget crisis after its bank pulled the school's line of credit. Some staff also alleged financial mismanagement.

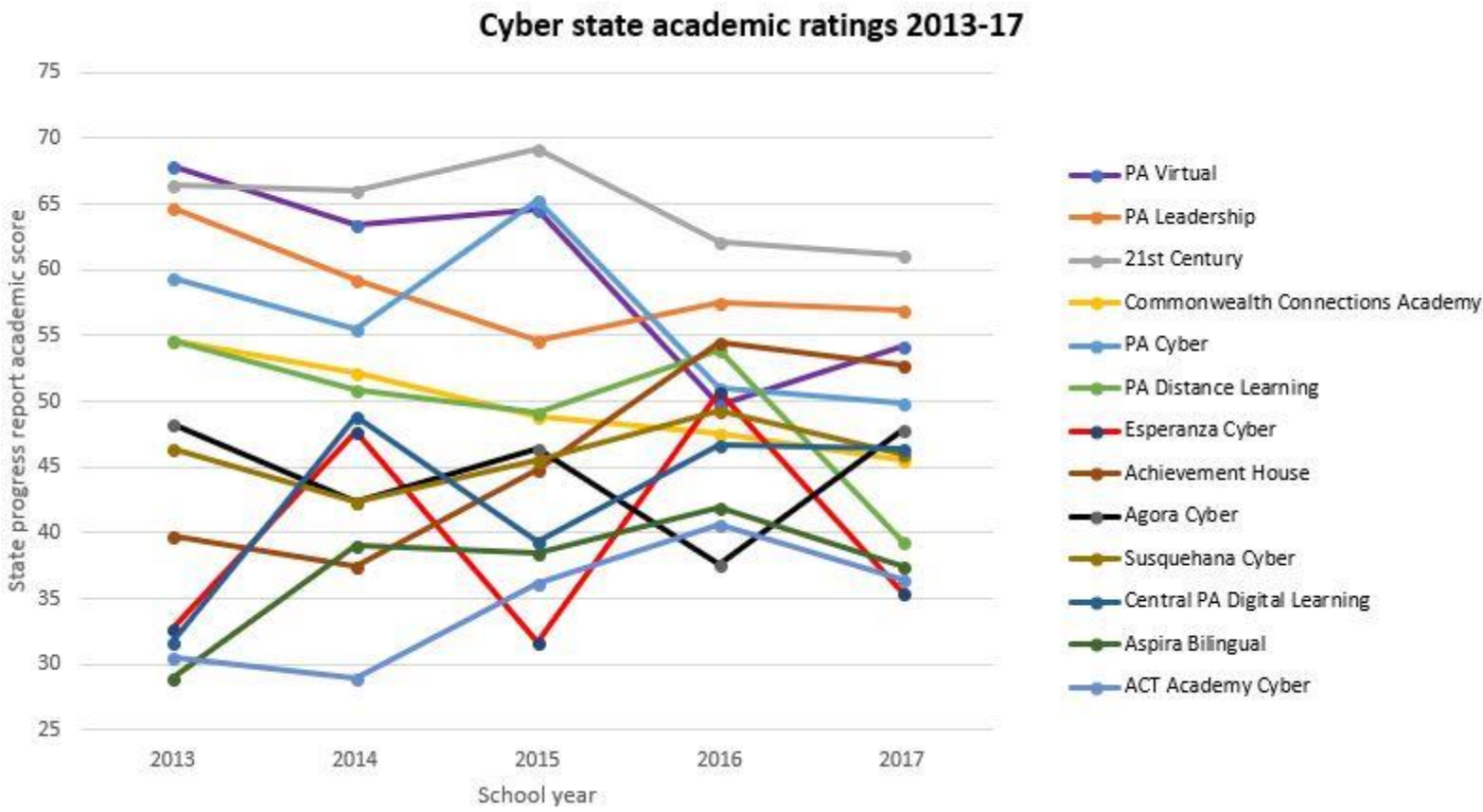
Education Plus is one of five cybers in Pennsylvania that have closed over the years. In 2013, after just one year in operation, Solomon Cyber announced it would have to close at the end of the school year. Einstein Cyber, the state's first and at one time its largest cyber charter, closed in 2003 after a litany of problems from financial mismanagement to inadequate services for special education students and a failure to supply computers to all students.

The 2016 report by the national charter authorizing group and 50CAN found that 70 percent of cyber charters are run by for-profit management companies, while only 15 percent of brick-and-mortar charters are run by for-profit companies. And the cyber charters serve significantly more white students and fewer Latino students than traditional public schools throughout the country.

The report also found that the typical cyber student stays for two years and that students who leave are dramatically more likely to transfer schools again afterward.

Out of the 13 full-time cyber charters in Pennsylvania, educating over 34,000 students, only four have come close to receiving a passing grade of 70. The rest have received the lowest rating on the state's academic rubric every year.

21st Century Cyber Charter comes within a few points of passing each year, and it's the only one that can make this claim. Pennsylvania Cyber, Pennsylvania Leadership Cyber, and Pennsylvania Virtual Cyber have all come close in recent years, but fell in the ratings by 2017.



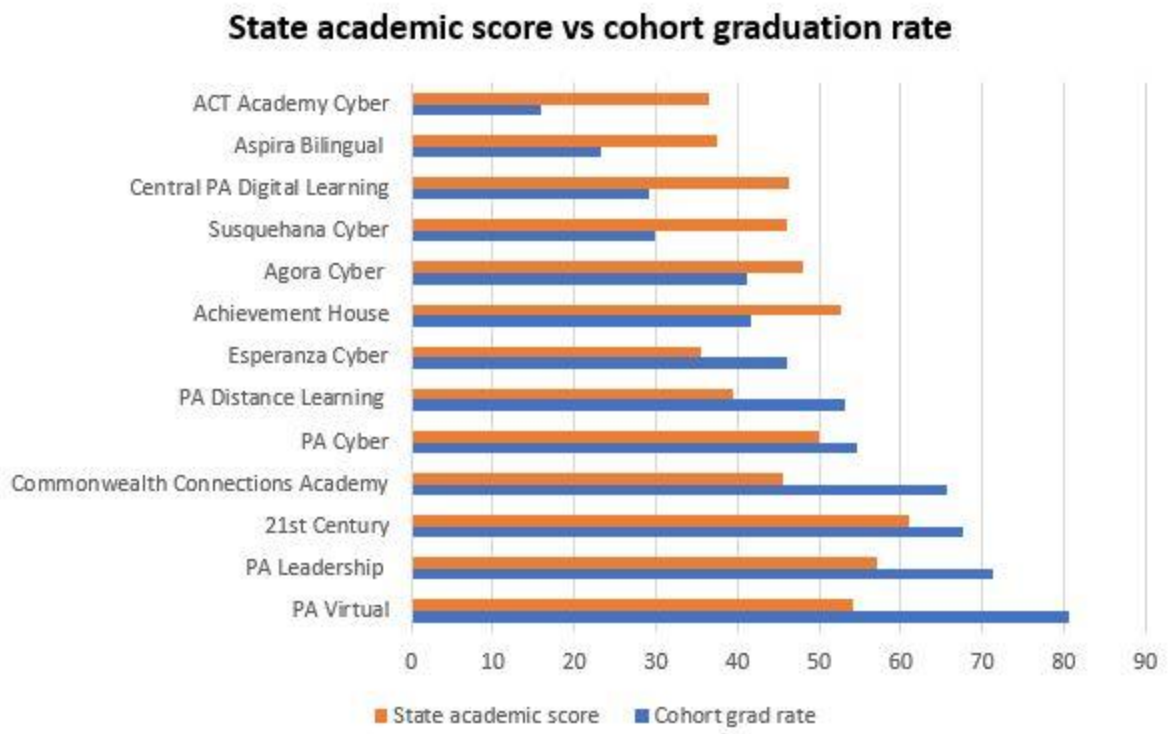
Credit: Greg Windle. Data from Pennsylvania School Performance Profiles, compiled by the state Department of Education.

The graduation rates range from great to abysmal, and there is inconsistent correlation between the state's academic scores for the charters, largely determined by student proficiency on tests, and schools' graduation rates. Esperanza Cyber, for instance, has the lowest academic rating (35), but a typical graduation rate for a Pennsylvania cyber (46 percent).

ACT Academy Cyber has a similar academic score (36), but its four-year cohort graduation rate in 2017 was just under 16 percent.

At the same time, 21st Century Cyber had the third highest graduation rate (68 percent) and the highest academic rating (61).

PA Virtual Academy had the highest graduation rate (80 percent) and the third highest academic metric (54).



Credit: Greg Windle. Data from Pennsylvania School Performance Profiles, compiled by the state Department of Education.

Although the Pennsylvania Department of Education has not cracked down on these cyber charters, there are efforts underway in the House and Senate to reform how they operate.

Senate Bill 551, now in the education committee, would allow districts to refuse per-pupil payments to cyber charter schools if they offer their own in-house cyber program – just as Philadelphia does. The only requirement is that the in-house program must be "equal in scope and content to an existing publicly chartered cyber."

Philadelphia created its own cyber program, Philadelphia Virtual Academy, five years ago in partnership with the Chester County Intermediate Unit, which has experience running its own in-house cyber program. The program helped stem the tide of tax dollars flowing out of Philadelphia to cyber charters around the state, but the state academic scores are low for Philadelphia Virtual as well. One advantage for students is that Philadelphia Virtual Academy, unlike some cyber charters, allows students to attend classes in person whenever they choose. Besides the package introduced by Roebuck and other Democrats, other pending legislation in the House would reform cybers.

Republican State Rep. Mike Reese's bill, HB 97, would allow school districts to reduce per-pupil payments to cyber charters. First introduced in 2017, the bill has been moving back and forth between the education and appropriations committees for almost a year.

It has picked up some amendments during that time. Although the bill would have originally saved the state $47 million, the mechanism to reduce per-pupil payments has been weakened enough that it would now provide only

$26 million in savings. Philadelphia went from potentially saving $6.7 million to $3 million in the bill's current form.

Roebuck, chair of the House Education Committee, first put forward his bills in 2017 as a statewide charter-reform package. The most recent report on that package frames them as a response to the inadequacy of HB 97, the original charter legislation that hasn't been significantly amended since first enacted in 1997.

Roebuck's report found that the average statewide academic performance of charter schools was well below the average rating for traditional public schools, and cyber charters were rated even lower than brick-and-mortar charters.

But his latest package of bills does not contain provisions directly targeted at cybers.

"The core idea of our legislative package is this: charter schools and traditional public schools should be treated equally under the law," Roebuck said in a statement. "Both receive tax dollars and both are already considered public schools under Pennsylvania law."

Part of that legislative package is HB 1198, introduced by state House Democrat Mike Carroll, which would take significant excess fund balances at all types of charter schools and return them to the school districts that make annual per-pupil payments to the schools.

Larry Feinberg has his own frustrations with cyber charters and gw attributes them to a poorly written charter school law. Feinberg has been a school board member in Haverford Township for over 20 years, is on the board of the Pennsylvania School Board Association, and co-founded the Keystone State Education Coalition — a group that advocates for traditional public education, including stronger regulations on charters.

"Every month in school board meetings, I have to approve payments to cyber charters," Feinberg said. "Our test scores are 30, 40, 50 points higher than theirs. We never authorized any of them. … They are all authorized by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. That allows them to reach in and take our tax dollars.
"There's just no way it can cost as much money to educate them without a building and full-time staff. So there's huge profits to be made."

In Pennsylvania's cyber charter scandal, the former CEO of Pennsylvania Cyber, Nick Trombetta, has yet to be sentenced after siphoning $8 million from the school — used to finance a lavish lifestyle. He was indicted by a grand jury on 11 counts of tax fraud and conspiracy charges in 2013, and pleaded guilty to conspiring to defraud the Internal Revenue Service. Trombetta and his accountant are scheduled for sentencing in July.

The school, still Pennsylvania's largest cyber charter, has cut ties with Trombetta. The current enrollment exceeds 11,000 students.

Feinberg pointed out that Trombetta was ultimately convicted of tax fraud, *not*embezzlement, because the law is so lenient about how charter money must be spent.

"He was making so much money he couldn't spend it all, but he didn't even break any state law — he was just convicted on tax evasion," Feinberg said. "As the charter law is written, it permits that $8 million he gave his organizations."