

August 6, 2019

Chairman Curt Sonney  
214 Ryan Office Building  
PO Box 202004  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2004

Dear Chairman Sonney and Honorable Members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools (PCPCS) which represents the majority of our Commonwealth's 180 charter schools, including 13 of the 15 cyber charter schools. I wanted to take a few minutes of your time to address the request that was made by you and the Committee for an extensive amount of data and information from each cyber charter school on July 10 (I have included the text of this request below for your reference).

We appreciate your interest in learning more about the operations of Pennsylvania's cyber charter schools and our schools are always willing to accommodate the requests made by members of the House and Senate. That being said, we were disappointed with the Chairman and the Committee's unwillingness to work with the schools on a revised deadline (August 2) for the request due to: the large amount of information requested; the schools' limited staff on hand during the summer; and the schools being busy preparing the state-mandated annual report for cyber charters due to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) on August 1 ([Section 1743-A\(f\) of the Public School Code](#)). The majority of the schools that we represent worked diligently to pull together the information you requested by the deadline you imposed but, in the future, we ask that the Chairman and the Committee either provides the schools more time to comply with requests or be flexible when they come to you asking for more time. There are so many mandates from the state already placed on public schools, on top of the day-to-day obligations that come with educating students and running schools. On behalf of the schools we represent, we are asking that the Chairman and the Committee work with schools to not add to these stressful demands.

I also wanted to provide the Chairman and the Committee with an explanation for why some of the information you requested was not provided by the schools. Some of the data/information the Chairman requested is either not available at this time, been verified by PDE or required by law for the cyber charter schools to create/maintain. While some of the schools may have had the capacity to calculate the data you requested, if it was not already required of them to maintain, but others only felt comfortable providing data/information that was already publicly reported and accessible:

- **Dropout Policy** – Based on our reading of the School Code, school districts and charter schools are not required by law to create individual dropout policies. In talking with our schools, many noted that they follow the guidelines/procedures outlined in the law when dealing with a situation where a student drops out of school.
- **Performance by Grade** – The Chairman has asked for student performance results for the 2018-19 school year but these scores have not yet been verified or made publicly available by PDE. Additionally, the [Future Ready PA Index](#), which PDE uses to evaluate all public schools, does not report student performance by grade nor is it

a requirement that public schools maintain this data-set. Student performance by grade is only a requirement for [federal accountability](#) and the most recent, publicly accessible data is from the 2016-17 school year.


- **Dropout Rates by Grade** – Please note that PDE does not [report dropout rates](#) by grade and public schools are not required to maintain this data-set.
- **Transfer Rates by Grade (from your cyber charter school to the student's home school district)** – Neither state law or PDE requires charter schools and school districts to maintain or report this data-set.
- **Transfer Rates by Grade (from the student's home school district to your cyber charter school)** – Neither state law or PDE requires charter schools and school districts to maintain or report this data-set.

While you examine the information provided by the cyber charter schools in an effort to get a better understanding of cyber education in Pennsylvania, it is our expectation that you will also be asking for this information from each school district that operates a virtual program/school. Though there has been much discussion about the effectiveness and cost-savings generated by district-run cyber schools, there is actually no data to support any of these claims and zero accountability/transparency for these schools. Unlike cyber charter schools, district-run cyber schools are not required to report their student performance results as separate schools/LEAs and receive no Future Ready PA Index report from PDE, making it impossible for parents and taxpayers to know the effectiveness of these programs. Despite the lack of evidence of success, there have been several pieces of legislation introduced to strip families of their right to choose a free, public cyber charter education if their home district offers a virtual program. We do not believe any elected official should be telling parents what educational environment is best for their child, especially families who have limited financial means relying on free, public school options who will be affected the most.

We greatly appreciate your time in reviewing our comments and concerns. We hope that the information provided by the cyber charter schools will give you a better understanding of how cyber charters operate in Pennsylvania. However, data and policies cannot paint the whole picture of how impactful and important charter schools are in the lives of the students and families they serve. I urge the Chairman and Honorable Members of the Committee to visit a cross-section of cyber charters (and brick-and-mortar charters) when school is back in session to see the extraordinary work taking place at these schools every day. I would be happy to coordinate these visits for any lawmaker who is interested in a school visit. Please feel free to contact me at (267)884-6335 or via email at [a.meyers@pacharters.org](mailto:a.meyers@pacharters.org).

Thank you and I look forward to working with the Committee on pursuing legislative proposals that increase student access to high-quality charter school options.

Sincerely,



Ana Meyers  
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable James Roebuck, Minority Chairman of the House Education Committee  
Honorable Rosemary Brown

Honorable Ed Gainey  
Honorable Valerie Gaydos  
Honorable Mark Gillen  
Honorable Barbara Gleim  
Honorable David Hickernell  
Honorable Carol Hill-Evans  
Honorable Mary Isaacson  
Honorable Mike Jones  
Honorable Josh Kail  
Honorable Patty Kim  
Honorable Jerry Knowles  
Honorable Maureen Madden  
Honorable Stephen McCarter  
Honorable Dan Miller  
Honorable Gerald Mullery  
Honorable Jason Ortitay  
Honorable Michael Puskaric  
Honorable Meghan Schroeder  
Honorable Jared Solomon  
Honorable Craig Staats  
Honorable Mike Tobash  
Honorable Jesse Topper  
Speaker Mike Turzai  
Majority Leader Bryan Cutler  
Alaina Koltash, Executive Director of the House Education Committee

**Email Request from House Education Committee Staff:**

Dear Cyber Charter School Leaders,

Chairman Sonney, of the House Education Committee, and the Committee, are dedicated to learning about our cyber schools' accountability best practices and understanding how the General Assembly can address the needs of our students attending cyber schools offered by both traditional public schools and cyber charter schools. At this moment, the Committee is focusing on learning more about our cyber charter schools' attendance and accountability policies.

On behalf of the Chairman, I am requesting copies of your cyber charter school policies, procedures, and data related to:

- Policies:
  - Enrollment;
  - Attendance;
  - Truancy; and
  - Dropout
- Procedures:
  - Engagement- how do professional employees engage with your students and their parents/ guardians when an academic issue arises?
  - Achievement- how do professional employees assist your students in meeting their educational goals (for instance, when a student is behind a reading level) ?
  - Graduation rate- how are professional employees working to improve your graduation rate?

- Data for school years 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019, if available:
  - Performance by grade;
  - Drop-out rates by grade;
  - Transfer rates by grade;
  - From your cyber charter school to the student's home school district,
  - From the student's home school district to your cyber charter school.
  - Performance measurements- how does your cyber charter school measure your students' achievement; beyond ESSA requirements?

You may also provide information regarding how those policies and procedures assist with meeting your cyber charter school's virtual-specific goals.

The deadline to submit this material to me is no later than Friday August 2, 2019.

Please let me know if you have any questions. And, thank you in advance for your cooperation.