House Education Committee
Informational Meeting
Cyber Charter School Outcomes
April 25, 2025, 10am., Lancaster Middle School

10:00am   **Call to Order**
        Committee Member Introductions
         Opening Remarks- Chairman Schweyer
            Representative Smith Wade-El

10:10am   **Panel 1- School District Perspective**

        Dr. Sherri Smith, Executive Director
        Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA)

        Ms. Susan Spicka, Executive Director
        Education Voters of PA

10:45am   **Panel 2-Teacher Perspective**

        Ms. Melanie Upton, Administrator for Non-Traditional Learning & Career Readiness
        Conestoga Valley SD

11:20am   **Panel 3- Charter Perspective**

        Dr. Maurice Flurie, Chair
        PA Coalition of Public Charter Schools

11:55am   Closing Remarks/Adjournment

All times are approximate and include time for questions.
Live streamed at www.pahouse.com/live

Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators
Testimony to the House Education Committee
Friday, April 25, 2025
Cyber Charter Outcomes
Dr. Sherri Smith
Executive Director, PASA

Good morning Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Cutler, and members of the House Education Committee. I am Dr. Sherri Smith, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators. Thank you for the opportunity for PASA to speak on behalf of more than 1100 PASA members, including over 600 who are sitting school superintendents, assistant superintendents, and executive directors.

Although PASA could speak to many concerns consistently shared by our members regarding cyber charter programs - most specifically, to the extreme funding overpayments and financial drain to their district programs – we will concentrate on the ask of this hearing, which is cyber charter outcomes.

Cyber charter schools ARE public funded schools and should be held to the same standards and requirements of districts and brick and mortar charter schools.

Outcome concerns fall into several categories:
- Student Academic Performance, inclusive of Student Participation
- Attendance
- Graduation
- Enrollment and Residency

Student Academic Performance

The performance of Pennsylvania's cyber charter schools continues to lag far behind that of traditional public schools and brick-and-mortar charter schools.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education's most recent School Performance Profile data and Future Ready PA Index, **cyber charter schools in the state rank in the bottom tier for academic achievement and growth**. Many have failed to meet basic standards for graduation rates, standardized test performance, and student growth measures for years. This long history is outlined in the PA Department of Education (PDE) two research studies conducted in 2014– Policy Brief: Revisiting Cyber Charter School Performance and in 2019 – The Effects of Charter Schools on Student Outcomes in Pennsylvania - that both demonstrate poor academic performance and growth. This is not a new problem -it's a systemic issue spanning over many years as to how students are performing in our cyber charter programs.

As to this year's data on the combined Math and English Language Arts proficiency, listed on PDE's ESSA Report Card, PA's 9 largest cyber charter schools all saw a decline in their 2 Year Math and ELA Growth score. So, in other words, there has been a decline in student achievement, not an increase.

Percent Proficient on State Assessments 2024	
All Students	
ELA Proficiency	Math Proficiency
47.50%	25.50%
24.70%	7.20%
11%	4.70%
27.40%	12.50%
21.60%	8.20%
34.50%	16%
19.30%	6.30%
20%	4.40%
46.90%	27.40%
27.40%	12.50%

The low performance of our cyber charter students is not just based on the performance of our secondary school students. To demonstrate this, the following are the third (3rd) grade scores of our largest cyber charter programs, who have students in 3rd grade:

Percent Proficient on PSSAs 2024	
3rd Grade ELA	3rd Grade Math
22.90%	11.20%
36.40%	17.50%
38.90%	17.10%
15.50%	5.20%
41.60%	23.80%
22.10%	11.70%
21.40%	5.40%
47.40%	26.00%

To have a chance of doing well on the required State Assessments, schools must have their students participate in the test. For comparison, below are the participation rates from 2023-2024 assessments and from the 2018-2019 assessments. Some loss of participation is certainly explainable as we have seen this across a lot of our PA public schools, however ones with huge deficits in participation are difficult to explain away except as a lack of compliance to the requirement of all public schools to have students attend and take state assessments.

Participation Rate English		Participation Rate Math/Algebra	
2023/2024	2018/2019	2023/2024	2018/2019
69.10%	82.40%	71.70%	83.90%
78.30%	86.50%	77.50%	87.00%
24.60%	79.40%	25.90%	80.00%
65.60%	79.50%	65.90%	79.40%
88.40%	93.80%	88.40%	94.50%
70.40%	81.00%	70.10%	82.00%
72.50%	86.30%	72.70%	86.40%
72.70%	80.80%	72.50%	80.90%
76.40%	85.80%	76.60%	86.40%

It is often pointed out that state assessments are not the appropriate measure of success for students, therefore I share this statement sent to me by one of our districts:

We were just sent a grade report for a student who attends Commonwealth Charter Academy. This student currently has an F in Algebra, a D- in Career Planning, an F in Entrepreneurship, an F in Health and Phys Ed, a D in Intro to Social Media, a D- in Life, and a D in United States History.

This student's Cumulative GPA is 0.5006. It says that on his "OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT." And right next to that it reads, "Class Rank: 501 out of 3656." Apparently, there are 3,000 ninth graders at Commonwealth Charter Academy who have worse grades than that.

As a state, we should be very concerned about the ongoing issue of low performance and participation compliance of cyber charter schools.

Attendance

Regular attendance in school is necessary for any student to perform well on their academic learning. This is no different for students who are enrolled in cyber/virtual programs. The attendance rates for our largest cyber charter schools, as listed on the Future Ready PA Index, are the following:

Regular Attendance
90.85%
63.38%
88.60%
80.56%
79.45%
88.13%
86.87%
58.93%
93.97%

This data poses two questions –

- If there is a high rate of attendance -why is the academic performance still so low?
- If there is a low rate of attendance – an indication that these students are not learning well in a cyber environment - why are we allowing them to continue in a cyber program?

This brings another question of how cyber charter schools are taking attendance. Is it just logging onto the site every day, but not attending to the work? Would it make more sense to ensure our students' success if attendance is taken by work completed on a weekly basis? (6 courses, 5 days = 30 assignments a week).

Cyber programs have a higher stake in ensuring that their students are attending to their learning, such as logging on and ignoring their lessons.

Graduation Rates

According to the 2023–2024 Future Ready PA Index, the four-year cohort graduation rate for cyber charters averages just 65%, more than 20% lower than the state average of 87%. Every cyber charter school is currently performing in the lowest 5% of schools in Pennsylvania.

For your information, in the chart below we are also sharing the 5-year Graduation Rates with the 4-year Graduation Rates that are both posted on the Future Ready PA Index (2022-2023):

4- Year	5- Year
68.14%	75.14%
50.64%	60.78%
64.27%	70.27%
61.04%	69.50%
59.56%	63.11%
83.19%	92.63%
79.98%	88.13%
68.06%	68.52%
75.62%	82.51%

Adding another year of high school education for our cyber charter students improves the graduation for some students, however except for 2 of the schools listed above, they are still behind the state average for 4-year Graduation Rates with a 5th year. This raises concerns of many students leaving these programs without obtaining a high school diploma.

Enrollment and Verification of Residency

Detailed information about cyber charter enrollment patterns - the flow of students to and from these schools - would advance our understanding of the cyber charter schools' performance. High rates of student turnover within a single academic year signals additional cause for concern regarding the

state's cyber charter students' performance, as research indicates student mobility – especially among vulnerable populations – is linked to academic outcomes.

Another growing concern of PASA's members is the issue of residency of cyber charter students in their districts. There are currently no consistent checks and balances to ensure that the students that districts are being invoiced for are in the correct districts. Interestingly, when districts attempt to verify residency of students they believe are not living in their districts, there is pushback from cybers to confirm residency through documentation, stating FERPA. PASA members can provide many examples of how this lack of oversight on student residency has impacted their taxpayers for students who are not actually residing in their districts, including students living outside the state.

PA needs a formal process in place to ensure accurate residency for billing of student tuition to our districts.

The online learning environment may not be suitable for all students, particularly those who need more structured support or who prefer face-to-face interaction. It works great for some students, however there are a lot of students who do not have the ability, will or study habits to succeed in virtual education. A practice I personally instituted at Lower Dauphin in our virtual program for full-time students was for them to take an assessment prior to beginning in this program to be sure that they were a successful candidate for online learning.

Additionally, if students did not attend regularly to engage and complete their work (attendance), then we would meet with the students and parents to improve, and if not, return them to more structured in-person instruction. Allowing students to continually struggle and/or just not attend to their virtual lessons is not a good practice and a disservice to these students. It is a systems failure of our children in PA. Cyber charters need to be held to this same standard to ensure the best outcomes for our students to learn, grow, graduate, and be successful in their future careers and life.

PASA respectfully urges our lawmakers to:

1. **Implement a fair and accurate funding formula** for cyber charter schools that reflects the Strue cost of virtual education.
2. **Increase academic accountability** for cyber charters, including performance-based renewal and closure standards to ensure the academic success of our students.
3. **Enhance transparency and oversight** of cyber charter spending and operations to ensure responsible stewardship of public funds and following state and federal requirements.

Reform is not only necessary, but also long overdue. Let's work together to build a public education system inclusive of cyber charter schools that is equitable, sustainable, and committed to student success.

We appreciate the House Education Committee providing PASA with the opportunity to provide our expertise on the Cyber Charter Outcomes. We welcome further collaboration to engage in other creative thinking and discussion to strengthen the measures of success of our schools across the Commonwealth.

Comments for the House Education Committee Meeting, April 25, 2025
Susan Spicka, Executive Director, Education Voters of PA

Thank you very much for inviting me to provide comments today. Education Voters of Pennsylvania has been working on cyber charter accountability for more than a decade. We are very grateful for and encouraged by this committee's focus on issues related to cyber charters and the work you are doing to help ensure that this industry will be more accountable to taxpayers and to the students they educate.

One key purpose of our public schools is to ensure that students have the skills and knowledge they need to graduate from high school and go into the world as adults where they will be able to successfully continue their education or get a job and, ultimately, build the life and future that they want for themselves. This is good for students, and it is good for the commonwealth, which has an increasingly aging population and needs every single young person to realize their potential and enter the workforce prepared for the jobs that will need to be filled in the years to come.

Cyber charters have a very long track record of failing to ensure that their students meet this goal. For more than two decades they have been among the lowest performing schools in the commonwealth. This failure has been extensively documented from the gold standard 2015 and 2019 studies from Stanford University to the August 2024 Good Jobs First report, which details how Pennsylvania's cyber charters particularly fail black and brown students.

The average four-year cohort graduation rate for a cyber charter is 65% compared with 88% in school districts. The average six-year cohort graduation rate for cybers is 75% compared to 92% for school districts.

Another way to look at what this means for students is through the dropout data.

Information from PDE shows that in the 2023-2024 school year cyber charter schools enrolled just 5% of Pennsylvania public school students in grades 7-12, but they were responsible for 20% of the total number of dropouts that year. Students in cyber charters are far, far more likely to drop out of school than their counterparts who remain in district schools.

In actual numbers, 2339 cyber charter students dropped out of school in the 2023-2024 school year. To be crystal clear, these are students who were enrolled in a cyber charter and left before graduation without transferring to another school or institution. These young people are now adults who are trying to build a life for themselves without a high school diploma, which, I think we can all agree, is going to be very difficult.

Cyber charters are a billion dollar a year industry in Pennsylvania and for many, increasing revenue and enrollment appears to be a much higher priority than ensuring the students entrusted to their care are actually learning and will graduate and go into the world as adults with a diploma and the ability to support our workforce.

What are cyber charters focusing on while they fail to improve the academic outcomes of the students they enroll?

Cybers dedicate an enormous amount of energy and funding to real estate development, as we've seen from the hundreds of millions of dollars that CCA has spent on dozens of properties and buildings in their real estate portfolio

Cybers focus immense energy and tens of millions of dollars every year on marketing and promotion, with advertising budgets and campaigns that would be the envy of Fortune 500 companies.

The cyber industry puts a lot of time and energy into planning and throwing parties and events, from dinner at Cork and Fork and Dockside Willies to tickets, catering and parking at a Major League ballgame for the whole family.

They hire armies of high-priced lawyers who are dedicated to fighting Right to Know requests, spend copious amounts of money and time on lobbying, and manage hundreds of millions of dollars that they hoard in bank accounts and investments.

The cyber industry really knows how to spend tax dollars on perks for their own. They lavish Target, Starbucks, and other gift cards on students. They give cash payments to families to reimburse them for their children's leisure activities. They pay their employees to drive to work, providing a $400/month fuel stipend to anyone who comes into the office, regardless of how far they have to drive. They give out computer monitors to families like candy. And, apparently, these don't need to ever be returned, because I have one here that was given to me by a cyber parent who wanted to get rid of hers and didn't know what else to do with it.

And, cyber charters take very good care of their executives, providing them with lucrative salary and benefits, fancy cars, and even a corporate platinum membership to the Hill Society in Harrisburg so they can smoke cigars, drink bourbon and "enjoy the good stuff," courtesy of Pennsylvania's taxpayers.

The cyber charter industry has lost its way in Pennsylvania and it is past time for the legislature and Governor Shapiro to use their power to hold this industry accountable both to the students they enroll and to taxpayers.

Right-sizing tuition for cyber charters by enacting a $8000/student regular education tuition rate will have multiple positive impacts. First, this will save school districts $278 million and allow them to make additional investments in programs and services for students while reducing the need to raise property taxes.

Right-sizing tuition will also help cybers get back to the basics and focus on educating students without the distraction of building real estate empires, designing expensive marketing campaigns and the endless other work associated with figuring out how to spend/waste the hundreds of millions of excess tax dollars they receive from school districts every year.

There is an urgency for action. Pennsylvanians cannot afford for the cyber charter industry to continue wasting tax dollars and student potential because those with power in Harrisburg fail to fix this system again this year.

Thank you.

Testimony to the House Education Committee
Re: The Attributes and Impact of Conestoga Valley Virtual Academy (CVVA)

Honorable Chair and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony on behalf of the Conestoga Valley Virtual Academy (CVVA), a K-12 cyber program proudly offered through the Conestoga Valley School District (CVSD). Since 2007, CVVA has provided a transformative educational experience to thousands of students seeking a flexible, personalized, and connected learning environment.

CVVA is not just a virtual learning option—it's a bridge to opportunity, belonging, and graduation for students whose circumstances, interests, or ambitions make traditional school settings difficult or limiting.

Why Students and Families Choose CVVA

CVVA supports a wide variety of learners—each with unique goals and life experiences. Reasons for enrollment often include:

- Mental Health & Anxiety
- Full-Time College Students who must complete HS Graduation Requirements
- Medical Issues/Chronic Illness
- LCCTC (Lancaster County Career & Technology Center) Attendance
- Employment Needs
- Early Graduation
- Housing Insecurity or Split Living Arrangements
- Non-CV Athletic Commitments (e.g., Olympic Training, Competitive Sports)
- 12+ Grade Students Returning to Earn a CVSD Diploma
- Expulsion (offering an educational lifeline to continue coursework)
- Internship Availability & Career Path Exploration
- Complex Scheduling Conflicts (family obligations, advanced coursework)
- Family Travel or Parents' Job Mobility
- Intent to Drop Out (as an intervention pathway to re-engage learners)
- Blending Advanced Placement (AP) with CVVA for Schedule Flexibility
- NCAA-Approved Courses (for students seeking athletic scholarships)
- Translation and Language Support for English Language Learners (ELLs)

In short, CVVA creates accessible on-ramps to education for students who prefer a non-traditional learning experience.

Academic Rigor Meets Flexibility
CVVA offers both fully online and blended models of instruction. All courses are taught by certified Conestoga Valley teachers, ensuring continuity in curriculum quality and alignment with state and district standards. Support structures include:

- Synchronous sessions for younger learners and their Learning Coaches
- Virtual office hours and consistent feedback for secondary students
- In-person support via CVVA's Elementary Learning Center and Middle and High School Internet Cafés
- Access to tech tools including a CV-issued laptop and iPad

Students engage in academics using the Accelerate Education and eDynamic platforms, through which students can access accelerated courses, electives and enrichment options, credit recovery opportunities, and NCAA-approved coursework for college-bound athletes.

CVVA Is About More Than Academics
CVVA ensures that students remain part of the broader CVSD community and grow socially and emotionally through:
- Field trips and educational excursions
- In-person and virtual events
- Full access to district extracurriculars, including athletics, clubs, school-wide celebrations, Prom, pep rallies, spirit weeks, and Graduation

Even while learning virtually, CVVA students maintain a strong identity as Buckskins and graduate with a Conestoga Valley High School Diploma.

Competition from Outside Cyber Charter Schools
School district cyber programs struggle to compete with outside cyber charter schools, and CVVA is no exception. During the 2023-2024 school year, CVSD paid $1,270,227.17 in tuition for our students to attend a program that is not connected to our district. Parents who have chosen an outside cyber option often note their lack of stringent regulations, such as attendance requirements, as a reason for their choice. When families return to CVSD from outside cyber schools, the reason for the return is most often no previous knowledge of the CVVA program, or lack of student success and support. The data from Keystone Exam scores reinforces this perspective, as 50% of CVVA students scored Proficient or Advanced in Biology and Literature Keystones this Fall. The 2023-2024 Algebra Keystone score comparison below shows that CVSD scored well above the cyber charter schools, with 41% of CV students in general scoring Proficient or Advanced compared to only 23% of four major cyber charter schools combined scoring Proficient or Advanced on the Algebra Keystone Exam.

Algebra Keystone Comparison 23-24:

% Proficient or Advanced
Statewide Avg: 38.3%
CV: 41%
Agora: 6%
CCA: 5%
Reach: 8%
PA Cyber: 4%
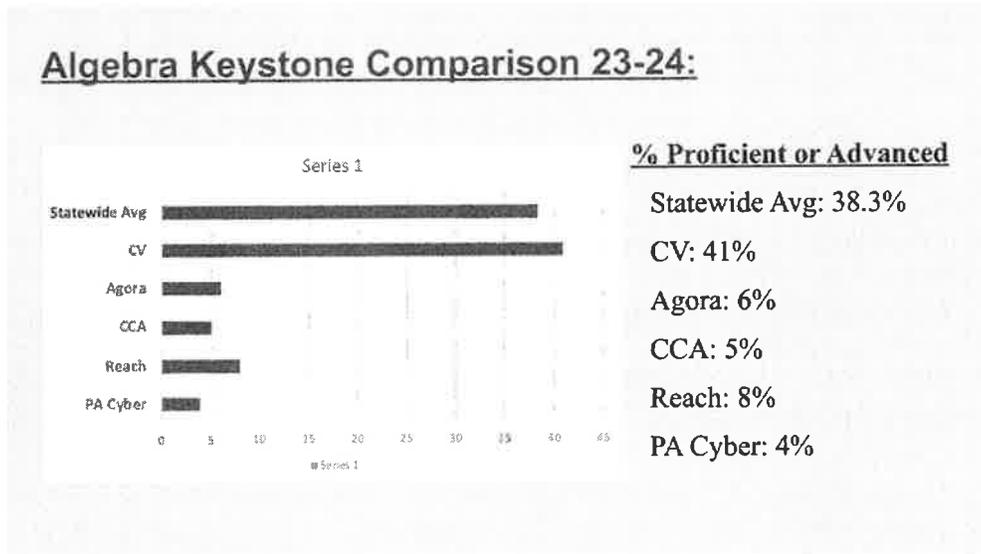
Local Supports for Cyber Education
CVVA is a member of IU13 Lancaster Lebanon Virtual Solutions, which provides 20 Lancaster Lebanon school districts with supports that one district alone could not provide, including monthly advisor meetings to collaborate cross-districts, the enriched virtual forum to support and grow district cyber programs by partnering with Quality Matters, Distance Learning Collaborative, and the use of National Standards for Quality

<u>Online Learning</u> that informs creation of online courses using both district created and vendor content, and more. This partnership with LLVS and area districts provides a strong network for school districts in Lancaster and Lebanon Counties to support personalized learning for our students.

Conestoga Valley Virtual Academy is a model of educational adaptability—offering a responsive, high-quality learning experience to meet students where they are. Whether a learner is dealing with mental health challenges, seeking advanced athletic opportunities, facing housing instability, or exploring a flexible path to a diploma—CVVA provides a way forward.

We urge the committee to continue supporting virtual academies like CVVA, which are critical to public education's mission of equity, inclusion, and personalized learning.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to Pennsylvania students.

CVVA At-a-Glance

Cabinet Member	Assistant to the Superintendent for Secondary Education			
Building Level Principal	Administrator for Non-Traditional Learning and Career Readiness			
Program Director	HS Coordinator	MS Coordinator	ES Coordinator	Special Services Facilitator (IEP, GIEP, 504, ELLs)
Grades Served	9-12	6-8	K-5	K-12
# of CV Teachers	17 Teachers Shared with Building	12 Teachers Shared with Building	1 Teacher CVVA Only	NA
# of Students Full Time	63	23	32	HS: 16 MS: 3 ES: 9
# of Students Blended	94	5	2	HS: 34 MS: 3 ES: 4
Courses Offered	Over 60 courses offered. In addition, core courses have different leveling options (Honors, CP, General) Courses offered through CVVA only: • History of the Holocaust • Social Media Business Marketing • Mental Health and Wellness	20 courses offered across 3 grade levels MS students have the ability to enroll in HS level courses: i.e. Spanish and various math courses Courses offered through CVVA only:: • 2D Studio Art • Animation • Digital Photography • Coding	Approximately ½ of our enrollment takes advantage of the Learning Center on a regular basis for academic sessions; more attend special events Students have the opportunity to participate with same-age peers for in-person related arts classes (PE, Art, Music, Library)	NA

Pennsylvania House of Representatives
House Education Committee
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Testimony of Maurice "Reese" Flurie, Ed.D., CEO
The Flurie Solutions Group

Good morning, Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Cutler, and honorable members of the House Education Committee.

My name is Dr. Maurice "Reese" Flurie, and I am the CEO of The Flurie Solutions Group. Prior to my retirement, I worked at a public cyber charter school, including serving 10 years as president and CEO.

Before my time in the public cyber charter school sector, I spent more than two decades working in school districts as an assistant to the superintendent, a building-level administrator, and a teacher. My background also includes serving as an adjunct instructor at the collegiate level, teaching graduate courses in educational law, current issues in education, school finance, and educational psychology.

I appreciate the opportunity to present the committee with information about public cyber charter schools.

But first, let me be clear, cyber charter schools are public schools. State laws, regulations, and policies classify cyber charter schools as public schools, and any information to the contrary is misleading and deceives the public.

As public schools, cyber charter schools are required to file with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) their annual budgets, annual financial reports, annual independent audits, and annual operations reports. In addition, since state law also classifies public cyber charter schools as 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations, cyber schools must annually file Form 990 (Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax) with the federal Internal Revenue Service.

Cyber schools have been an integral part of Pennsylvania's educational landscape since 2002. Until 2020, a small number of families across the state leveraged the programs, services, and support provided by these schools.

Importance of Reliable Information

Although this committee is considering and debating important policy and statutory changes that would have a significant impact on the more than 60,000 students and their families who rely on these schools, a member of today's first panel, who is the executive director of an anti-cyber

charter school organization, recently published information that was misleading and contained significant errors.

What this organization communicated to you, your colleagues, and the public was wrong by at least $64 million, yet this organization has been given a platform in front of this committee even after its credibility is now called into question.

Public cyber charter schools are a politically charged topic, and it is critically important that you, your colleagues, and the public have reliable data when contemplating changes to public policy.

COVID-19 Pandemic Enrollment Increase and Why Families Choose Cyber Charters

When the COVID-19 pandemic gripped the nation in 2020, interest in cyber charter schools skyrocketed, with enrollment in these schools more than doubling over the past five years.

When the pandemic abated, many expected cyber charter enrollments to return to pre-pandemic levels; however, the exact opposite has occurred. Unfortunately, no one has asked why.

Funding for cyber charter schools has been an ever-growing issue with the governor, state lawmakers, school districts, and anti-cyber charter school organizations, but no one has done a deep dive to understand why families are leaving school districts.

What studies have been commissioned to find out why more and more families are fleeing school districts and enrolling in cyber charter schools?

Cyber schools have looked at this, and here is what the data shows:

- Nearly 50% of families want more flexibility in their child's education. They don't want the typical sit-at-your-desk model in which the mature generations are accustomed.
- More than one-third of families choose cyber charter schools due to their children having anxiety, depression, or medical concerns.
- Nearly one-third of families say that their children are not safe in their local school district, whether it's bullying, fighting, or weapons in schools.

Another important point is that families who leave their school districts and enroll in cyber charter schools do so because the relationship with the district has been compromised. Whether it's because their children's special education program was not being appropriately implemented, the loss of trust, or because of mistreatment and disrespect, tens of thousands of families are exploring alternatives for their children to receive the education they deserve.

The same issues apply to school districts that attempted to ramp up online learning during the pandemic. Many cyber charter school families tried their school district's cyber programs, and they were not pleased with the rigor or lack of live teaching. Families sought alternatives and found what they needed with cyber charter schools.

Even now, families are still leaving their district's cyber programs due to the lack of quality and the overburdensome requirements for students to be eligible to participate. Families want school choice, and cyber schools meet this need.

Public School Fund Balances

Since the auditor general released his cyber charter school audit report, there has been an unprecedented amount of attention on cyber school fund balances, but the other side of the story always seems to be ignored: school districts are sitting on a collective $12.1 billion in total fund balances, with nearly 200 school districts having 40% or more of their total expenditures in reserve.

All public schools have fund balances, but assertions that elevated fund balances are unique to the cyber school community are without merit and are disproven by the data.

The $8,000 Per-Student Cyber Charter Tuition Rate

While many proposals have been put forward to reduce funding to cyber charter schools, none are more egregious than the governor's and last session's House Bill 1422 scheme to set a flat rate of $8,000 per student.

There have been no in-depth studies, detailed analyses, or wide-ranging assessments of what it costs to provide a comprehensive education in a public cyber charter school.

Although many school districts claim it only costs between $3,000 and $5,000 per student, we must remember that what school districts provide versus what cyber charter schools provide is in no way comparable. School districts offer cyber programs, cyber charter schools provide an online education with the necessary wrap-around services and support to be a comprehensive public school. Many school districts exclude costs for their cyber programs to artificially lower the per-student amount.

Based on data from the 2022-23 school year posted on PDE's website, cyber charter schools, on average, spent nearly $10,500 per student for just instructional costs. This doesn't include other mandated support services and programs.

We cannot haphazardly underfund our children's education to score political points. We must ensure all children are funded equally and fairly.

State Assessments

When looking at the Future Ready PA Index, it appears that the academic performance of cyber charter schools is below the state average; however, when digging into the data and looking at raw scores, cyber charter schools are nearly on par with or outperform many traditional public schools.

Pennsylvania permits families to opt their children out of taking the state assessments, but under Pennsylvania's federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) State Plan, schools that have less than 95% of eligible students participate in the state assessments are penalized. Every student who reduces a school's participation below 95% is rated as not proficient on the state assessments.

For example, let's say 100 students are eligible to take the state assessments. For the school to meet the state participation requirement, 95 students would have to take the exams. If only 50 students take the assessments and 50 students opt out, 45 of the opt-out students will be rated as not proficient, even though they never completed the exams.

Pennsylvania's current state assessment scheme is not conducive for students enrolled in cyber charter schools. With no option for students to test remotely or from home, cyber charter school families opt their children out of these assessments because of the burden of making arrangements for their child to go to a state testing location. Some parents cannot afford the transportation costs, cannot take off work, or know their children will not test well in an unfamiliar location. In addition, many families do not see the value of state assessments because these exams have no impact on a student's grades or overall academic performance.

Graduation Rates

Another area where cyber charter schools receive unnecessary attention is graduation rates. While the state tracks a school's four-, five-, and six-year cohort graduation rates, only the four-year cohort rate is used to assess a school's performance.

Because of the at-risk populations that are served by cyber charter schools, many students who enroll in a cyber school are outside of their graduation cohort before they enrolled.

For a variety of reasons, nearly 30% of students who enroll in high school at a cyber school lack the requisite credits from their previous school to graduate on time. While cyber charter schools work closely with students and families to get these students back on track, sometimes it takes an extra year or two for these students to graduate, but they do graduate.

When nearly one-third of newly enrolled students are already outside of their cohort, the best a cyber charter school can expect is a 70% graduation rate; however, this does not stop these schools from enrolling these students and helping them cross the finish line. We all know the long-term importance of earning a high school diploma, and some students need some extra time and additional assistance.

High Percentage of At-Risk Students

Compared to school districts, cyber charter schools enroll a higher percentage of at-risk students. Whether they're teen parents, students experiencing homelessness, students who are caretakers for family members, students with mental health challenges, students who work full-time, or students who identify as LGBTQ+, cyber charter schools provide the flexibility and

customization for these students to complete their education while managing multiple, competing demands.

More than 60,000 students are enrolled in cyber charter schools. Their families have made this decision because it meets their children's unique learning needs. No family should be denied the ability to send their child to a school that meets their needs and learning style.

Cyber charter schools are uniquely situated to serve these students and families. Slashing their funding and forcing them back into their local school district is the wrong approach and doesn't serve their best interests.

While there are those who strongly oppose cyber charter schools, we must remember that tens of thousands of students and families across the state heavily rely on them. Many students' lives have been turned around because of the opportunity to attend a cyber school.

We cannot be shortsighted by denying students the education they deserve and want.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.