Debunking Myths about Cyber Charter Schools

Cyber charter schools are a popular school choice enrolling over 38,000 students across Pennsylvania. Cyber charter schools are the only form of public school choice that is open to all students in the state – any student living anywhere in Pennsylvania may enroll. As the demand for cyber charter schools continue to grow, misinformation concerning these schools of choice also increases. The following facts set the record straight.

Cyber charter schools save taxpayers money!

Yes—cyber charter schools educate students with less money! How?

Funding:

- Pennsylvania law established a statewide funding formula used by all cyber charter schools and school districts. The formula is based on each district's cost-per-student. Since each school district spends a different amount, per-student payments to cyber charter schools also vary by district.
- Cyber charter schools receive payments from the home school district of each student. The payment, calculated using the state formula, is usually only 75%-80% of the district's per-student cost. So if a district spends $12,000 per student, cyber charter schools receive only $9,000 to educate the student. The home district keeps the remaining 25%-30% to defray certain expenses. Cyber charter schools truly educate students using only a fraction of the amount spent by the home districts.
- School districts are required to make monthly payments directly to the cyber school. Since there is no penalty for non-payment, more than half of the districts refuse to pay the cyber school for their children in a cyber school. Cyber charter schools are forced to borrow money to meet expenses, apply to the Department of Education (PDE) for "redirection" of funds, and then wait several months until the PDE makes the payments.

- It is important to note that each cyber school's budget is limited by the total amount of payments received from school districts. Since cyber schools do not have the authority to tax, they must live within their budget.

Costs:
In addition to traditional expenses, such as curriculum materials, salaries for teachers and specialists, and buildings to house staff and onsite programs, cyber schools have many unique expenses:

- Equipment – All students receive laptops, printers, accessories and Internet reimbursement.
- IT Support – A team of experts keeps student and staff computers running smoothly and the technology infrastructure working.
- PSSA and Keystone exam expenses – Unlike traditional schools that use their own classrooms when administering state assessments, cyber schools must rent facilities across the state and pay expenses for teachers and staff to travel to the sites to give the tests. Cyber schools may use upwards of 30 sites across the state.
- Additional staff – To make the enrollment process easy, a pupil services team handles admissions paperwork and follow-up. Another team provides thorough orientations that enable students to have a smooth start and give parents tools to check their students' work and grades.

Financial records of each cyber charter are audited and monitored by the state to ensure accountability.

Cyber charter schools are real schools.

Cyber charter schools are real, tuition-free public schools approved by the PDE. A rigorous chartering and 5-year renewal process ensures that every aspect of a cyber charter school is carefully examined by the PDE on a regular schedule.

As a public school, cyber charters:

- follow designated PDE regulations and submit annual audits and reports;
- administer state assessment tests (PSSA and Keystone);
- offer a comprehensive program of study that meets or exceeds Pennsylvania and/or Common Core Academic Standards;
- confer valid high school diplomas recognized by colleges, employers, and the military. In fact, cyber charter schools are now considered Tier 1, along with traditional schools;
- employ highly-qualified teachers, guidance counselors, specialists and support personnel.

Cyber charter schools are an option for all families that wish to enroll their children.

All Pennsylvania students are eligible to enroll in a cyber charter school as stated in Section 1723-A of the Charter School Law:

- "All resident children in the Commonwealth qualify for admission to a charter school."
- "A charter school shall not discriminate in its admission policies or practices on the basis of intellectual ability, athletic ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, status as a person with a disability, proficiency in the English language or any other basis that would be illegal if used by a school district." Pennsylvania cyber charter schools are the only form of tuition-free public school choice that is open to any student living anywhere in the state.

Cyber school students enjoy time to socialize.

Cyber school students have many opportunities to socialize, including:

- participating in live, virtual classes;
- forming virtual friendships in online classes and clubs;
- working with other students virtually or in person if attending onsite programs;
- meeting students face-to-face at field trips, community service projects, and other sponsored activities;
- joining local community sports programs, youth activities, volunteer projects, etc.;
- participating in extracurricular activities available in their home districts.

Cyber charter school teachers also have more time to interact one-on-one with students. In fact, many cyber students find they have more individual, one-on-one attention than in traditional schools.

With so many academic and social options to meet teachers and other students, parents of cyber school students are better able to create the optimum social environment for their child by selecting the most appropriate activities for him or her.

Parents are the sole decision makers in choosing a cyber charter.

Parents do not need to receive approval from the home district to enroll their children in a cyber charter school. In fact, if the home district puts restrictions on students leaving to enroll in an independent cyber charter school, parents should request a copy of written school policies outlining such steps or contact PDE directly.

Enrolling in a cyber charter school is easy:

- Parents complete required forms and present required documents.
- Parents and student attend an orientation (onsite or virtual).
- Students take placement tests to ensure assignment to appropriate courses.
- Students receive a free computer, printer, and accessories as well as Internet reimbursement.
- Parents should withdraw their student from the home district on the day of cyber charter school orientation. They may also ask the school to send transcripts and other documents to the new school. The cyber charter school will also officially notify the home district of the student's enrollment and request copies of specific documents.

Students may participate in sports and clubs at their home districts.

"The Charter School Law requires a charter school student's school district of residence to allow the student to participate in the school district's extracurricular activities if the student is able to fulfill the requirements of participation and the charter school does not provide the same extracurricular activity. The requirements of participation shall apply equally to charter school students and students attending schools of the school district." (PA BEC, 24 P.S. Section 17-1701-A)

Cyber charter schools support the rights of their students to utilize activities in their home district. Districts who care about students living within their borders comply with this mandate, which benefits the student and the school.

Cyber charter schools meet the diverse needs of students.

Students and parents chose cyber schools for a variety of reasons:

- Seeking an environment that provides a safer learning environment than their local school.
- Wanting more customization so the education experience meets the academic needs and learning style of the individual student.
- Needing more challenging courses.
- Needing personalized special education.
- Pursuing a career in the arts, sports, science, or any other interest that requires flexibility.
- Switching from a home school program to be part of a more structured education model.
- Coping with life situations, such as parenting, illness, or bullying.
- Not succeeding in their traditional school and needing a fresh start.

In a cyber charter school, students can find a program that enhances their educational options…and it is free to all students living in Pennsylvania!

[Fact Check compliments of Achievement House Charter School](#).