

# Reach Cyber Charter School

## Testimony provided to the Basic Education Funding Commission

November 16, 2023

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Good afternoon,

My name is Jane Swan, and I am the CEO of the Reach Cyber Charter School. I would like to thank the members of the Basic Education Funding Commission for inviting me to present information to you today.

In August 2016, Reach opened our doors with 16 staff members and 463 students with a mission to improve academic growth and cultivate curiosity through integrated STEM opportunities, K-12 personal instruction, and career exploration. Due to the popularity of public cyber charter schools and parent demand for robust, comprehensive virtual education, today Reach is educating 6,500 students across the Commonwealth and has over 800 staff members to serve our students.

Reach serves a diverse array of students from every corner of the Commonwealth, from gifted students who seek an accelerated track, to competitive athletes and performers, pregnant and parenting students, students with disabilities or compromised immunities, military families who need to relocate often, and others who seek an individualized approach to education and a flexible schedule.

Cyber charter schools are schools of choice in Pennsylvania whose demand has continued to increase dramatically over the past few years. Parents choose to leave a district because the district does not meet their child's needs or has failed their child either academically or from a relationship standpoint. Over 70,000 families have chosen cyber charter schools in the Commonwealth for those reasons.

The plaintiffs in the recent Commonwealth Court case argued that Pennsylvania's school system violates the constitution's equal protection clause, saying the kids in low-wealth districts are not being educated on a level playing field with those in wealthier districts. Cyber Charter Schools are uniquely able to level the playing field, providing all students with access to high quality resources, certified teachers, and opportunities for engagement regardless of their parents' income. They provide the ultimate scenario where all students are offered the same meaningful opportunities regardless of if the student lives in poverty or affluence.

Cyber education is a different form of delivering learning that the established educational institutions do not yet understand. The delivery model is different, and so are the costs associated, but that does not mean that the costs are less than with traditional models. The average cost to educate a student at Reach student is \$15,178.00.

There are many unique cost considerations of Public Cyber Charter Schools, and I have included a list of some of these in my written testimony. Some of the significant cost considerations include -

Furthermore, cyber charter schools are a great value and save money! Under the current funding mechanism, for every student that attends a cyber charter school, school districts have additional money to support the students that remain within their brick-and-mortar building. On average, cyber charter schools receive just 75% of the per-pupil allotment for each student. School districts keep the remaining 25% that they can use for payments on debt, adult education programs, pre-K programs, transportation costs, and building and ground maintenance.

In addition, cyber charter schools are subject to the same mandates and requirements as traditional public schools. Cyber charter schools are required to comply with all local, state, and federal financial accounting, reporting, and auditing requirements, provide both regular and special education services including supports to parents and families as necessary to help each child achieve their academic goals, and comply with all state testing mandates and ensure equal access to safe, physical environments for students to attend and complete PSSA and Keystone exams.

In closing, I want to thank the Commission again for holding a hearing on this important topic and for providing Reach with an opportunity to present information. Public funding is essential for cyber charter schools to give Pennsylvania families the right to choose the education that is best for their students. I would be happy to take any questions you have.

### **Unique cost considerations of Public Cyber Charter Schools**

- Building and facility leasing for administrative offices, including registrars, pupil health, special education, enrollment services, technology support, and teacher office space.
- Technology equipment for students, staff and administration including distribution and reclamation.
- Shipping curriculum and educational support materials to and from students.
- Research, development, and implementation of innovative teaching design including all materials and resources.
- 24/7 Technical Support statewide.
- Learning Management and Student Information Systems.

- Enrollment Services statewide.
- Internet reimbursement allocation for in home services.
- Travel expenses for teachers and staff to fulfill State testing mandates, field trips, graduation, and other student and family support activities.
- Facility rental to comply with all State testing mandates.
- Family Supports and Services statewide.
- Contracting with various related services providers to meet individual student goals.
- Individual in home therapies including all travel related expenses.
- Coordination with various social services agencies statewide to provide in home support for students and families.
- Travel expenses required to maintain and enforce daily attendance mandates including truancy related court appearances.