



PASA POINTS

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The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators

About PASA

The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) is an organization that is instrumental in developing successful school leadership through advocacy, support, sustainment of high quality school administrators and a statewide collegial network.

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It's time to improve the Pennsylvania Charter School Law.

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Charter School Reform

The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) believes that the Pennsylvania Charter School Law can be improved for both charter schools and traditional public schools based on more than two decades of data and observation of charter school operations in the commonwealth. The charter school law is based on the deeply flawed assumption that the same amount of money can appropriately fund two separate and distinct systems of education. The underlying flaws of the charter school legislation are cause for serious concern and require serious action. PASA offers the following information and recommendations regarding charter school reform:

1. The funding formula for charter schools must be updated to reflect the actual cost needed to educate students in these alternative environments. Charter school tuition increased by \$170 million across the commonwealth in 2018-2019 and is projected to increase by at least that much again in 2019-2020. The current charter school funding formula results in significant percentage increases in charter school tuition each year. Just as school districts are limited to increasing property tax revenue by the annual Act 1 Index, charter school tuition should not exceed the Act 1 Index either. This limitation could save school district taxpayers approximately \$95 million per year.
2. There is a significant difference in funding needs between a brick-and-mortar charter school and a cyber charter school. Yet, both are funded using the same formula. Many traditional public school districts are operating full-time, on-line learning programs for their students at substantially less cost than what they are paying for a student to attend a cyber charter school. The tuition formula needs to reflect a realistic operating cost for cyber charter schools based on actual expenditures. See PASA's 2018 White Paper comparing the significant cost differential of cyber charter schools and district-operated cyber learning programs at the following link:

<https://www.pasa-net.org/Files/SurveysAndReports/2018/CyberCharterRPT06-19-18.pdf>



PASA Principles

All partners in education must stand accountable for their contributions to public schools and the impact their role has on student learning. This includes:

The Commonwealth's commitment to public education and recognition of shared responsibility with local communities for providing resources adequate to comply with laws and regulations regarding public education and essential to support student learning in Pennsylvania's public schools

The teaching profession's obligation to utilize evidence-based and research-based instructional strategies

Administrators' obligation to ensure that high quality leadership is in place to lead efforts to improve student learning

Student and family commitment to pursue, promote and support the value of education and life-long learning

Higher education's commitment to preparing future teachers, offering dual-enrollment courses for students and partnering with school districts to ensure student readiness

Commitment from the profession, the public, the media and the wider community in acknowledging the high importance of public education and the teaching profession to ensure a strong democracy

The greater business community's commitment to workforce development and career and college readiness

3. The cost of special education students attending charter schools needs to be changed to more accurately reflect the costs of educating special needs children. The current formula assumes that 16% of the district's population is classified as special education. Therefore, the total cost of a district's special education expenditures is divided by 16%, which is added on the tuition bill for cyber students if they have an IEP. If a district had a 22% special education percentage rate, the district's special education expenditures would be divided by 22%, reducing the additional cost sent on to the charter school. Today, more than 400 districts have a special education population over 16%, and all are paying more than is necessary to charter schools for special education services. This change alone could save Pennsylvania School Districts \$65 million annually.
4. Over-identification of special education students by charter schools must be addressed. PASA continues to receive reports that students entering some charter schools are immediately tested for special education and offered an IEP with limited special education services so the charter school can collect almost double the tuition from the sending school district.
5. Professional educators in charter schools must meet the same certification requirements as educators in traditional public schools. The current law allows up to 25% of charter school teachers to be uncertified by the state. This is a poor educational practice that should be discontinued. All children should be taught by a highly qualified teacher certified by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.
6. Several studies and reports, including a 2019 study from Stanford University's Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO), have indicated that the academic performance of most cyber charter schools in Pennsylvania is abysmal. The CREDO study compared cyber charter school students with traditional public school peers. A Pennsylvania student enrolled in an online charter loses the annual equivalent of 106 days of learning in reading and 118 days in math, the study said. We should not be subjecting students to such poor educational results in the name of school choice. Some students may never recover academically from these learning losses as it compounds over multiple years. You can review the study at the following link:

<https://credo.stanford.edu/publications/charter-school-performance-pennsylvania>
7. With the introduction of the PA Future Ready Index, it has become clear that most cyber charter schools are performing poorly. Cyber charter schools were identified for Comprehensive School Improvement Status in the 2018 Future Ready Index at a much higher rate than traditional public schools or brick-and-mortar charter schools. The CSI designation places schools in the bottom 5% of academic performance in the state. More scrutiny and review must be applied to cyber charter schools, as their academic performance is significantly lower than brick-and-mortar charter schools and traditional public schools. You can find the listing of CSI designated schools at the following link:

<https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/ESSA/ESSAReportCard/AMD/Pages/CSI-Schools.aspx>