

REPORT OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Bettie Menchik

The Education Committee met, virtually, on April 16th. We discussed a chapter from ***Virtual Schools in the U.S. 2019*** from the National Education Policy.

We began our discussion with looking at the definitions of virtual schools, cyber schools, online programs, blended programs, and blended schools. The term “cyber schools” is generally used when referring to full-time forms of K-12 online learning (where students do not attend a brick-and-mortar school at all). However, in some states, the term “cyber charter school” is described the same way. Early literature in the field used the term “virtual school” as a way to describe the general field of K-12 online learning. Much of what is known about the K-12 online learning was written by non-academic organizations, various government agencies, and even the popular media. Authors are inconsistent in how they use the different terms, often using them interchangeably as synonyms.

Next, we examined the literature of virtual schools. Consistently, the reports find that the percentage of virtual schools achieving an acceptable school performance rating was lower than the percentage of brick-and-mortar schools. Also, the four-year graduation rate for students attending virtual schools was significantly lower than the national average. This is consistent over time and across every state where there has been research.

A 2016 report by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now, and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, entitled ***A Call to Action to Improve the Quality of Full-Time Virtual Charter Public Schools***, stated,

The well-documented, disturbingly low performance by too many full-time (online and blended) schools should serve as a call to action to state leaders and authorizers across the country. It is time for state leaders to make the tough policy changes necessary to ensure that this model works more effectively than it currently does for the students it serves. It is also time for authorizers to close chronically low performing virtual charter public schools.

At this point in the committee’s discussion, we realized if the charter school associations thought the model was flawed, that was enough for us.

We turned to a discussion of the virtual experiment going on in the state’s classrooms. We will be examining what is being done in the Lansing area. We will ask teachers to comment on how the rollout of virtual schooling has gone in their districts. This will be at our next virtual meeting on Thursday, May 14 at 4 pm. If any LWV members are teaching now, we’d love to have you participate. Please contact either Bettie at 402-3903 or Judy at 944-1256. And, of course, we welcome new members to join our committee.