

Testimony before the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Subcommittee on Special Education October 6, 2021

On behalf of The Pennsylvania Coalition for Public Charter Schools (PCPCS), I would like to thank Education Committee Curt Sonney, Minority Chair Mark Longietti, and Special Education Subcommittee Chair Jason Ortitay for the opportunity to share the ways in which cyber schools successfully served our special education students throughout the pandemic.

I am Brian Hayden, the CEO of The Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School. Headquartered in Midland, Beaver County, PA Cyber annually enrolls over 11,000 students from every county and every public school district in the Commonwealth. Of those students, we typically have 2300 special education students (about 25% of our student population).

At PA Cyber, we say “the learning never stops”. The challenges public education faced beginning in March 2020 were significant, especially for our special education students, their families, teachers, and administrators. Nevertheless, the people of PA Cyber were resilient and worked hard with our families to ensure that our special education students had high quality and effective classes and services throughout the duration of the school closing and beyond.

Compliance/Special Education Timelines

PA Cyber continued to remain in compliance of each special education student’s IEP by providing a continuum of special education services and programming, related services, and other supplemental programs and services to all students with special needs in order to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) consistent with the need to protect the health and safety of students with disabilities and those individuals’ providing education, specialized instruction, and related services.

PA Cyber also continued to meet all federal and state mandated special education timelines and continued to follow all typical practices and processes to ensure parents and/or guardians were active participants in IEP meetings and had the opportunity to participate meaningfully.

Instruction

All special education teachers continued to provide distance instruction and resource room opportunities virtually **with no interruptions** through PA Cyber’s online learning platform, recorded videos, and/or other modes to students with special needs. Placements in the general classroom

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included: regular education classroom (least restrictive), co-taught classroom with supplementary instruction and services, regular or co-taught classroom with resource room (academics) and regular or co-taught classroom with resource room (social skills/behavior). Placements in the separate classroom included: learning support, emotional support, life skills support and autism support. Students with special needs continued to have the opportunity to engage in online tutoring, teacher office hours, as well as supplemental programs and services that were provided at department and school-wide levels.

Related Services

PA Cyber continued to provide related services to all students. Some students were previously receiving these services in a face-to-face environment. During the week of March 16, 2020, these face-to-face services were all migrated to virtual/teletherapy services with no complications. All students either had or were provided with the appropriate technology to implement these virtual related services. Services provided virtually included occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, psychological services, tutoring, social skills, counseling, transition/vocational services, instructional aid, and behavior services. For any services that were not able to be provided virtually or not appropriate for educational benefit in a virtual setting (vision/orientation and mobility), PA Cyber had issued a PWN/NOREP to the parent/guardian in order to postpone those services and provided those services through covid compensatory services when the social distancing ban was lifted.

Currently, PA Cyber is providing 1,154 related services to 825 different students. Of these services, 1,120 are being provided virtually while the other 34 are being provided in a face-to-face capacity. As a result, **97% of the related services provided by PA Cyber are currently being provided in a virtual capacity**. This would suggest that majority of the parents are in favor of virtual related services and have decided to have their students remain in this environment. PA Cyber has had minimal request from parents to transition services to a face-to-face setting. As those requests come through, PA Cyber is willing to offer those services if there are related service providers in the area that are willing to provide in a face-to-face capacity.

All fourteen of Pennsylvania's public cyber charter schools remain committed to providing the highest level of special education services to our students and their families. The above clearly describes with many ways in which we accomplished this during the past two school years and continue to do so now. I look forward to answering any questions you have about cyber school special education services.

Thank you.

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