

November 3, 2016

The Impact of Cyber Charter Schools on the North East School District

Funding for public schools in Pennsylvania continues to be a major concern for all of us. I am sure that you are reading about what is happening in the Erie School District. If additional funding is not allocated to their district, they are seriously considering closing their high schools. One of the ways that this could be prevented would be through a change in the way that cyber charter schools are funded and how much the state funds cyber charter schools. I am sure that you have seen or heard one of the many ads encouraging parents to enroll their children in a “tuition-free” program that their students can participate in from their home. “Tuition free” is a bit of a mis-statement as the cost to pay for this program comes directly from the funds given to the public school where the student/family resides.

In 2015 alone, over \$430 million was spent on cyber charter programs. In North East, for the 2015-16 school year, cyber charter school tuition cost the district \$317,978.15. This is the equivalent of .52 mills of tax or 3.8% of our annual local tax revenue that went directly to fund failing programs *and* we can do nothing about it.

For educators, it is all about the success of the student. If students demonstrated success in their programs, then how could we argue against funding them? The problem is that success is not happening. In the North East School District, the two programs used by most of the families are the Agora Cyber program and the Pennsylvania Cyber program. How are these programs measuring up to Pennsylvania standards?

In the recent release of School Performance Profile data where schools are given an overall score measuring achievement, North East received the following scores:

➤ North East High School	85.4
➤ North East Middle School	78.9
➤ North East Intermediate Elementary	82.4
➤ Davis Primary	73.9

In comparison, the Agora Cyber school ranking was 37.7 and the Pennsylvania Cyber ranking was 52.5. In the areas of math and reading, both programs performed below the 25th percentile.

The North East School District must pay \$8,970.44 per student in tuition to the cyber charter schools. For special education students, this amount increases to \$16,484.78 per student. Something needs to be done to address this. The only people who can do anything about it are our state legislators. If you feel as I do about this issue, I would urge you to reach out to them. When we speak to them, they are quick to tell us that they do not hear from their constituents on this issue. We need to change this perception. Here is the contact information:

State Representative Curt Sonney
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Erie, PA 16510
(814) 897-2080
csonney@pahousegop.com

State Senator Sean Wiley
1314 Griswold Plaza #101
Erie, PA 16501
(814) 453-2515
senatorwiley@pasenate.com

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Please let your legislators know how you feel. It is all about doing everything that we can to provide the best education for our students. They most certainly deserve this. Currently, the product being delivered through the cyber charter programs is not it.

Sincerely,

Frank M. McClard, Ed.D.
Superintendent