

KEY POINTS

1. Under the charter school law, tuition payments are calculated based on the budgeted expenditures of the student's school district of residence, rather than the charter school's cost to educate a student.
2. **Tuition is not free.** It is paid by tax dollars being sent from school districts to charter/cyber charter schools.
3. Charter and cyber charter schools must accept students from all 500 school districts and, because of disparities in the per-pupil funding formula, they may receive up to 500 different basic education tuition rates and 500 different special education tuition rates.
4. In 2018-19, PA charter/cyber charters are receiving, **on average, \$12,540 per regular education student and \$28,003 per special education student** from Berks County school districts.
5. Berks County school **districts can provide in-house cyber education at a cost that is at least 20% to 30% less than** what they are paying outside cyber charter schools.
6. In 2017-18, Berks County schools spent **more than \$17 million** on cyber charter schools.
7. A school district pays a charter school the same rate for each child with special needs, based on the school district's prior year expenditures, regardless of student differences in educational need, cost, or services provided (PSBA).
8. Special Education tuition payments paid by school districts do not have to be spent entirely on Special Education expenses by charter/cyber charter schools.
9. In almost all cases, school district costs are not reduced when students attend charter/cyber charter schools.
10. For 2016-17, the average total fund balance for Pennsylvania cyber charters is **22.31%** (latest data available from PDE).



BERKS COUNTY
COLA
Committee on Legislative Action

BCIU Berks County
Intermediate Unit
an educational service agency

PURPOSE:

The Berks County Committee on Legislative Action (COLA) provides school districts with a forum for review, analysis, and comment on state and federal legislation and regulations affecting education in Berks County and across the Commonwealth. The committee will identify, study, and discuss legislative and policy issues regarding public education, and will speak with one voice to advocate for high quality education for all students.

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What is the difference between a Charter School and a Cyber Charter School?

Charter School

Independent public schools established and operated under a charter from the local school board. These schools focus on teacher-led discussion imparted to students through face-to-face interaction at the schools' physical facilities.

Cyber Charter School

Independent public schools established and operated under a charter from PDE in which the school uses technology to deliver a significant portion of instruction to its students, virtually, without a requirement that students be present at a supervised physical facility, except on a very limited basis, such as for standardized testing.

Academic Performance



Charter/Cyber Charter Schools Currently Serving Berks County School Districts	2018 PA STATE ASSESSMENTS Percent Advanced/Proficient (All Students)		
	ELA/Literature	Math/Algebra	Science/Biology
21st Century Cyber CS	66.7	45.1	56.8
Achievement House CS	44.9	21.6	28.9
ACT Academy Cyber CS	13.6	4.6	4.6
Agora Cyber CS	37.5	12.8	34.4
ASPIRA Bilingual Cyber Charter School	21.1	7.8	11.8
Central PA Digital Learning Foundation CS	20.0	9.3	20.0
Commonwealth Charter Academy CS	43.1	16.8	38.6
Esperanza Cyber CS	24.0	5.3	27.5
Insight PA Cyber CS	35.8	7.3	29.6
Pennsylvania Cyber CS	45.3	22.8	45.3
Pennsylvania Distance Learning CS	28.7	8.9	32.5
Pennsylvania Leadership CS	54.6	31.1	55.2
Pennsylvania Virtual CS	50.4	22.4	45.2
Reach Cyber CS	36.0	11.3	32.5
Susq-Cyber CS	IS	IS	IS
Circle of Seasons CS	56.6	14.3	72.9
I-LEAD CS	5.4	3.3	0.0
Statewide Average	63.0	45.5	64.3

IS: Insufficient Sample

Source: Future Ready PA Index

School Performance Profile Scores for PA Charter / Cyber Charter Schools Serving Berks County

A score of 70 is considered passing

School Name	SPP Scores	
	2017	2018
21st Century Cyber CS	61.1	65.6
Achievement House CS	52.7	51.4
ACT Academy Cyber CS	36.5	22.0
Agora Cyber CS	47.9	53.2
ASPIRA Bilingual Cyber Charter School	37.4	50.4
Central PA Digital Learning Foundation CS	46.4	36.6
Commonwealth Charter Academy CS	45.5	56.0
Esperanza Cyber CS	35.5	46.8
Insight PA Cyber CS	NA	50.2
Pennsylvania Cyber CS	49.9	50.3
Pennsylvania Distance Learning CS	39.4	43.3
Pennsylvania Leadership CS	57	58.4
Pennsylvania Virtual CS	54.2	66.4
Reach Cyber CS	44.8	41.1
Susq-Cyber CS	46	28.8
Circle of Seasons CS	64	72.4
I-LEAD CS	44.1	32.3

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education website

As a study by the National Education Policy Center (NEPC) concludes, full-time virtual schools – many of them organized as charters – continue to lag behind traditional public schools on graduation rates, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and state performance rankings.

According to the NEPC report, state laws governing the funding and accountability of cyber schools tend to be vaguely-worded, incomplete, and are often not enforced when data is available that suggests a problem exists. The report points to examples in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee where aggressive lobbying by for-profit providers circumvented legislative attempts to slow down cyber school expansion in the face of evidence that the schools were underperforming.

The process of identifying schools for support — termed “Annual Meaningful Differentiation” by ESSA—results in two federally-prescribed designations, made at least every three years beginning December 2018:

- **Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI):** Schools facing the most significant challenges in academic achievement, student growth, and other areas; and
- **Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI):** Schools in which performance by one or more student groups is at or below the level of the CSI schools.

Statements and Press Releases From the Auditor General

“Pennsylvania has the **worst charter school law** in the nation.”

“Publicly funded charter schools are meant to provide an alternative opportunity to educate students, **not to line the pockets of private individuals and management companies.**”

“**It is time that we seriously consider ending the way charter schools are funded in Pennsylvania.**”

Charter/Cyber Charter Schools	Designation
21st Century Cyber CS	ATSI
Achievement House CS	CSI
ACT Academy Cyber CS	CSI
Agora Cyber CS	CSI
ASPIRA Bilingual Cyber Charter School	CSI
Central PA Digital Learning Foundation CS	CSI
Commonwealth Charter Academy CS	CSI
Esperanza Cyber CS	CSI
Insight PA Cyber CS	N/A
Pennsylvania Cyber CS	CSI
Pennsylvania Distance Learning CS	CSI
Pennsylvania Leadership CS	ATSI
Pennsylvania Virtual CS	
Reach Cyber CS	CSI
Susq-Cyber CS	CSI
Circle of Seasons CS	
I-LEAD CS	CSI