

Hi my name is Jennifer Sheehan, I an Agora Cyber Charter School parent,

I am here today to talk about why school choice is important for all families, not just mine. To do so, I need to introduce my family. I am the mother of two wonderful little girls. Grace, my oldest, is 8 years old and has started the 4th grade at Agora. Elizabeth is my 4 year old, a preschooler who is learning to overcome Apraxia of speech, a condition which makes communication very difficult.

When we first moved into our house, we heard wonderful things about our school district so Grace attended Kindergarten and first grade at Lickdale Elementary School in Northern Lebanon School District. In Kindergarten, Grace was coming home and reading Dr. Seuss, Curious George and the first book of the Harry Potter series. We asked her what she learned in school and the response was, “we are reviewing preschool.” Knowing that preschool was not mandatory in the state, I was willing to accept that and we moved on to first grade. In first grade Grace started bringing work home - reading and spelling. Reading consisted of five words on a photocopied work book page. Grace would come home and read it out loud for me. Then she was off to read the next two books in Harry Potter and the first 3 books of Chronicles of Narnia. By mid year Grace figured out she gets more personal attention from the teacher by failing tests than by passing them. She was also being teased for being too smart for the first grade. Then we had her evaluated, trying to find her potential. They stopped the test one question short of calling her gifted. Now let's be honest. Think back to when you were 6 years old. When some one asked you what do you breath with how many of you would choose the bronchi, lungs or trachea? (Grace chose the nose and mouth) this was not the right answer.

At Agora Cyder School Grace stated the second grade taking the Dora and Doma. These are on-line evaluations in both English and math. It was determined that my second grade, 7 year old was reading at an 8th grade level and could comprehend math at a fifth grade level. We were granted asynchronized status allowing Grace to move at her own pace. We are closely monitored by the school to make sure we are making progress in all subjects. We receive monthly phone calls asking if there is

anything we need help with. We have monthly field trips for socialization. Sometimes it is to a park with a nature walk and picnic other times a science museum or a rollerskating rink but plenty of opportunity for inter-school socialization. In our 2 years with Agora we have studied the basics of English which includes literature. Most recently Grace completed a unit on 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea. Spelling, Vocabulary, Composition and Grammar are included in the language arts program. In math we have covered the basics of multiplication, division, fractions, decimals, and an introduction to geometry and algebra. World history started in 500bc and ended with the discovery of the new world. We also studied social studies, Sciences, Health, Gym, Spanish and of course test prep.

The result of all of this is that Grace is currently working about half a year ahead of grade level. She is also attending ALP classes (Advanced Learners Placement) three times a week where they read novels and plays and study the stars and Spanish. The main focus is on keeping the kids engaged and interested in learning.

In the local public school Grace was bored and clearly did not enjoy learning. As an Agora student, she looks forward to the start of each new day and the intellectual challenge it will bring.

Now for my youngest, Elizabeth. She is 4 years old and has childhood apraxia of speech. Apraxia is a condition where it is difficult to string sound and syllables together to form words. Elizabeth keeps us busy with 3 speech therapy sessions a week and 2 days at preschool. Currently we receive services through the I U 13. We drive to Lebanon 2 times a week for speech therapy. Since our daughter only has one disability, we are not eligible for the head start program, although she needs the extra help with communication skills. When it comes time for kindergarten, we will have to see who can offer the most in special education and speech therapy services. As of right now there is no full day kindergarten in Northern Lebanon which means Elizabeth would be taken out of the class room for her speech therapy services and miss a lot of her kindergarten year. The other alternative is to cyber school her as well. When I asked about this option, Agora said they would send someone to the house as many times a week as needed to help with the more severe speech issues.

The cyber charter funding reform bills, HB 618 and HB 759, are designed to reduce the budget of the cyber schools. As a mom I feel that we should have a state wide cost base for funding education in both the public brick and mortar and cyber based schools. The bill claims that cyber schools do not have property to maintain. The truth is we are dependent on renting space from churches, libraries, municipal buildings, colleges and youth based organizations such as the YMCA, for all of our state mandated testing such as the PSSA's and the privately funded testing such as the AIM'S web testing. We also use these locations for social gatherings and field trips including game nights, nutrition courses, and community service projects.

Agora Cyber school only receives 70% of what it would cost to send a child to public school. While it is true that we don't pack our kids on buses every day the school still provides health care service and screening, family coaches, guidance councilors and personal one on one attention for every student. Agora is also on the forefront of special education with a large portion of special needs children for whom main stream classrooms are not a good fit. Agora offers these children a special modified curriculum and on line classes geared to their needs. This requires personal one on one attention by certified special needs teachers and support staff. Such as speech therapist, occupational therapist and physical therapist just to name a few. For the more severe needs these specialists may be sent to the house or the child brought to the specialists office. For the simple cases services may be provided on line, in one on one lessons with a live therapist.

In your note announcing this meeting you say that only 2% of the students from the district have chosen to cyber school. This is a total of 69 children. Your proposed budget for the coming school year includes \$789,258 to support those students in cyber school. No where close to your proposed 4 million dollar budget savings.

Furthermore, if those children transfer back to Norther Lebanon, at least that much money will be needed. Why has Northern Lebanon chosen to set up their own cyber school the V3 Academy? Has

this school been approved by the state? What is the percentage of parents who have chosen to send children to private and religious school or to homeschool. What percentage of parents would like to take these options but simply cannot afford to or have the time to sufficiently supervise their students. If there was an option that supported the needs of my children I would gladly take it but right now I do not see that option available. Like many of your families, if I could afford to send my child to private school I would happily do so. And as far as traditional home schooling, I do not feel that I am qualified to make sure that my child does not miss the little things now that snow ball as they grow up.

Cyber schools are nonprofit public schools, chartered by the state, following state curriculum and open to all who apply. They may contract out to provide management services and supplies as does Agora. This is no different from the school district practice of ordering materials, lunches, bus service, etc. from profit making businesses.

With the current house bill the 16 certified cyber schools around the state will receive budget cuts between 5% to 20%. This will have a major effect on the 35 thousand student's state wide. The smaller schools will be forced to close their doors sending the kids back into the public schools which will have to stretch their budgets even further to adsorb the influx of returning students. The remaining cyber schools will have to cut their budgets which includes laying off teachers, larger class sizes, and less services for the students and families.

I encourage every one to look at what works best for each of your kids and make your education choices based on what is best for them and your families. I encourage you to vote on fair funding for both the traditional brick and mortar schools and the the cyber charter schools. Every child deserves the best education we can provide. Every family deserves a choice in their education. The fact that the school distracts consider it a financial loss when a family opts to choose a cyber school for their children instead of evaluating why the family left and what they can do to retain the family makes the brick and mortars feel cold and impersonal.

Agora Cyber charter school Draws students from 490 of the over 500 school districts in the state. For a total amount of over 10,000 students. It is a certified NON PROFIT Public School. Agora receives 79% of its funding from the Home school district of these students. The amount paid by each school district is different and based on the yearly cost of education a child in that district. Another way the amount of school taxes collected divided by the amount of kids in the district attending the public schools minus the cost of buildings, busing, extra Curricular activities. Now all this money is pooled and divided evenly amongst the students so a child from an underprivileged school district receives the same standard of education as a child from a more prosperous area. The cost of each student is then divided again using the following formula.

Staff receives 28% of the overall funding

Student Curriculum is 26%

Administration 15%

computers 9%

special Education 5%

and family support 3% (This is 2 ink cartridges a year and approximately 125 in internet reimbursement for the year.)

While many people confuse us with the K12 System let me clear the air on this. While K12 is a national for profit organization it is also a vendor of text books, computers, and administration staff. Just like many traditional public schools hire for profit vendors for food, busing, text books, computers and office supplies.