



# **PA Families** for Public Cyber Schools

*Many Families...One Voice*

**Senate Education Committee  
Testimony Provided by:  
Pennsylvania Families for Public Cyber Schools  
Jenny Bradmon, Executive Director  
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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. On behalf of more than 35,000 families, I would like to thank you for giving the parents of public cyber school students an opportunity to be heard.

My name is Jenny Bradmon and I am the Executive Director of Pennsylvania Families for Public Cyber School. We are a grassroots organization of parents who have found hope and possibility for our children's education through public cyber schools.

This innovative way to educate our children has been a tremendous asset for families who have special needs or difficult circumstances, or simply believe it's their child's best opportunity to receive the education they will need to thrive and compete in the 21st century.

As a proud parent of children who attend one of Pennsylvania's public cyber schools, I can tell you the experience has been tremendous for my children.

While any parent of the 35,000 students could share stories of how our public cyber schools have helped their children, please let me take a moment to share my story.

As a proud parent of two children who attend one of Pennsylvania's public cyber schools, I can tell you the experience has been tremendous for my children.

I would like to give you an update on my children. My oldest daughter, Rachel, was diagnosed with dyslexia during her kindergarten year in public cyber school. Because of her intensive work through the public cyber school we were able to diagnose this problem early. Had she attended a traditional public school, she would not have been tested for dyslexia until the third grade. Thanks to her early diagnosis, Rachel is now finishing eighth grade and reading at grade level.

As you can imagine, it hasn't been easy for her. She has worked very hard, but she hasn't worked alone. Her public cyber school has given her the tools she needs to help her succeed.

The school gave Rachel a wonderful teacher to work with her who was amazing. She helped Rachel when she was struggling and encouraged her when she was doing well. She knew Rachel's strengths and weaknesses.

Rachel was part of the Title 1 program. Because of Rachel's hard work and the help of her school, she was able to go from reading 45 words a minute to over 121 in less than 18 months, and all of this was accomplished without an IEP. As a result, she's no longer in need of the Title 1 program because her public school – a cyber charter school – set in place the tools necessary to ensure my daughter continues to make progress.

My youngest, Rebecca, who is also finishing eighth grade, has worked a grade level ahead since entering a public cyber charter school. Rebecca hasn't had to deal with any learning difficulties like her sister. If Rebecca were in a district school she would have never been afforded the opportunity to work a grade level ahead. She would have been forced to work at grade level and not be challenged academically.

This is one of the wonderful aspects of cyber schooling. They can allow for a gifted student like my daughter to work ahead and excel, even in the early grades.

While it isn't always easy talking about the private challenges my children face, there are many of us whose children have even greater challenges — physical and learning disabilities, at-risk school environments, and schools with limited curriculums.

As I've traveled across the state to meet with people regarding cyber schools, I've found most simply don't understand what it is our children do each day.

Many have this notion that children are stuck in a room in front of a computer and this is where they sit for four or five hours a day. It's actually quite the contrary. While the computer is a part of their schooling, it's far from the only part.

Each summer, as I'm shipping materials back to the school, I'm receiving five boxes of materials for each of my children for school in the fall. These boxes contain their many textbooks, plus science equipment and materials for language arts, history, art, and math studies. We even have paint, brushes, pastels and clay needed for the art projects.

When the school year begins we are not left to fend for ourselves or muddle through the material without any assistance. If we have questions or problems, our state-certified teacher is an email or a phone call away.

This curriculum is certified by the state Department of Education and the students are required to take the PSSA exams. We are required to log into the school each day. By the end of the year we need to have logged at least 900 hours for elementary level and 990 hours for the secondary level.

We have conferences with the teacher. During these conferences our teacher works with our children one-on-one and can evaluate how well and if they are learning. We also have to send in work samples to show the work our children are doing.

My children have accomplished these levels of excellence because of their own driven passions and desire to achieve. Our public cyber school has been an amazing experience and from my opinion the best use of Pennsylvania tax dollars. It is developing exceptional leaders who can operate under their own self control, passions and without walls which I would consider skills that are very necessary in a 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

There are so many misconceptions that the public, local district administrators and yes, even many legislators have regarding public cyber schools. Many have this notion that children are stuck in a room in front of a computer and this is where they sit for four or five hours a day. It's actually quite the contrary. While the computer is a part of their schooling, it's far from the only part.

Children who attend public cyber charter schools are no different than children who attend a traditional brick-and-mortar school. However, the current legislation that is being considered would treat public cyber school children very differently. If you're going to look at how public cyber schools are funded, look at all of our public schools and apply a standard that treats all students equally. Our children are not, and should not be treated as, second-class students.

This is why Senate Bill 335 is so harmful and completely unfair to public cyber school students. This bill will treat public cyber school students as second-class students by penalizing the student and the cyber school - just because the district has its own program. On average, district programs pale in comparison to our public cyber charter schools. They do not provide the hands-on education that children in the public cyber schools enjoy.

But Senate Bill 335 also raises a question that should be asked. If the district is failing the student, how can that same district be able to help the student in the district's cyber school? Moving the student from a classroom to a district cyber school will not help the student. Actually, they will continue to fail the student. This is the flaw with Senate Bill 335. PA Families strongly opposes Senate Bill 335 and any other similar bill that would limit choice and would cut the funding for our public cyber schools.

As a parent, I believe it's my obligation to give my children the best education possible. Thankfully, public cyber schooling is helping me to meet this obligation. These wonderful schools are making a difference in the lives of my children, and thousands of others.

Our public cyber schools also provide parity in education. Children from the largest urban areas of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia to those in rural areas, all have the same opportunity at the same education.

We really should be proud of what is taking place here in Pennsylvania. I truly believe my two daughters continue to be better off today for the opportunity you have helped create by establishing public cyber schools.

Finally, cyber charters expand the promise of public education. They give every child a choice. There are no caps, no lotteries; no children who have their hearts broken because they are stuck on a waiting list; no devastated parents who can't get their child into a safe school. Rich or poor kids, black, white, Latino, from rural, urban, suburban communities can all choose the same school with no barriers. These kids can be a part of the same school, collaborate together and work with excellent teachers. That makes public cyber charters the MOST PUBLIC of all public schools.

I thank you for your leadership on this issue and will be happy to answer any questions you have.

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