



Testimony Against HB 1921

Regarding Virtual Schools

April 16, 2019

The **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)** appreciates this opportunity to express our opposition to House Bill (HB) 1921 as filed.

HB 1921 by Rep. Jared Patterson removes the cap on funding for full-time virtual schools by eliminating a provision that states funding is limited to programs that were operating on January 1, 2013. This provision was a key addition to virtual school program law that ensured full-time virtual school programs, which had a troubling track record, would neither be completely shut down nor be allowed to replicate until more data was collected on their efficacy. Since that legislation was passed, a growing body of evidence has continued to indicate that virtual schools are a poor substitute for traditional, brick-and-mortar classrooms. Therefore, ATPE opposes any further expansion of virtual schools as contemplated by this bill.

Virtual school programs in Texas have been plagued by performance issues. About 88% of the state's total full-time virtual enrollment, roughly 8,400 students, are served by two providers: Texas Connections Academy, which has been labeled "improvement required" (IR) for three of the last six years, and Texas Virtual Academy, whose campuses have either not been rated or listed as meeting "alternative" standards. For comparison, just 5.1% of campuses statewide were rated IR in 2016, while the rate among virtual schools was 28.6%.

University research and government audits of programs across the nation tell similar stories of substandard performance by virtual schools. For example: In Wisconsin: "Virtual charter school pupils' **median scores on the mathematics** section of the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination were **almost always lower than statewide medians** during the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years." ([2015, Legislative Audit Bureau](#)); in Colorado, "**Half** of the online students **wind up leaving within a year**. When they do, they're **often further behind academically** then when they started." ([2015 I-News Network](#)); in Pennsylvania: "**100% of these online charter schools** performed **significantly worse** than feeder schools in both reading and math." ([2011, Stanford Center for Research on Education Outcomes](#)); nationally, "Across all tested students in online charters, the typical academic gains for math are -0.25 standard deviations (**equivalent to 180 fewer days of learning**) and -0.10 (**equivalent to 72 fewer days**) for reading." ([2015, Stanford CREDO](#)); and nationally, "Students at K12 Inc., the nation's largest virtual school company, are **falling further behind** in reading and math scores than students in brick-and-mortar schools." ([2012, National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado Boulder](#)).

Many of the concerns regarding virtual schools involve lack of vendor accountability. Until vendors that provide and manage full-time virtual programs can be held to account for substandard performance, limiting the number of potential district and charter school hosts is the only way to effectively track or control performance under the current system.

This testimony applies to the bill as filed. We look forward to working with Rep. Patterson to consider substitute or amendment language that would make positive changes to the current

virtual school system without expanding it. In particular, we would support tracking student performance at the vendor level and blocking access to Texas students from vendors who fail to provide an acceptable level of education under the state's accountability system. The elimination of bad actors might lead to a scenario where any remaining programs could be identified as high quality and potentially expanded.

For the above reasons, we respectfully ask you to **oppose HB 1921 as filed**. For additional information, contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or government@atpe.org.

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) has been a strong voice for Texas educators since 1980. It is the leading educators' association in Texas with 100,000 members statewide. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, future, retired and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for 5 million public schoolchildren. ATPE is the ally and the voice of Texas public school educators.