

“Those making policy should be clear on this key point: there exists no research from evidence that *full-time* virtual schooling at the K-12 level is an adequate replacement for traditional face-to-face teaching and learning. Yet to date, this lack of support appears to have exerted little or no influence on the proliferation of virtual K-12 schools.”

- [National Education Policy Center, Online K-12 Schooling in the U.S.](#)

Charter schools are tuition-free, independent public schools exempt from most of the rules, regulations, and statutes that apply to other public schools.

Online (or “virtual”) charters are a completely different matter.

In contrast to traditional “brick and mortar” classrooms, online charter schools offer full-time learning—in front of a computer—not necessarily in a space dedicated to learning, or with any adult supervision. Students attending online charter schools give up their classroom seats and face-to-face time with teachers and other learning resources.

As one educator noted, “The early development of children requires lots of interaction with other children for purposes of socialization, developing collaboration and teamwork, and self-definition.”

Online charter schools are a big business that mostly benefits for-profit companies that run and manage them. “Cyber education” is an industry anticipated to grow by 20 percent between 2012 and 2017 with revenues reaching \$13.4 billion.

As of the 2012-2013 school year, nearly 243,000 students were enrolled in 338 full-time online schools. Eighty percent of those students were enrolled in schools run by private EMOs (education management organizations). Sixty-one percent of full-time online schools are charter schools; these charters enroll 85% of all full-time virtual school students.

There is no uniform system of checks and balances to ensure online charter schools are well managed and serve the needs of students. And there is strong evidence that online charters are of limited value to students, local school districts and taxpayers—for the following reasons:

- Online charters have **dismal academic results**: low four-year graduation rates, poor test scores, and unusually high dropout rates. Only 27.4 percent of online schools met federal adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards in 2011-12. In 2012-13, only 33.76% of online charters that had received performance ratings were deemed academically acceptable. In 2014, Tennessee shuttered its K12, Inc.-affiliated online school and in Pennsylvania, ties with K12, Inc. were severed due to high dropout rates and poor academic results.
- **Limited interaction with teachers**—in many cases, the student and teacher are not even online at the same time.
- **Will cause taxpayers to foot the bill twice**, once to pay tuition to the for-profit corporation running the online charter, then to the local public school district when a student returns to a brick and mortar school to catch up on what they did not receive in their online course of study.

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- **Cause significant loss of revenue and resources to traditional public schools** when local districts are required to turn over funds to for-profit online charter corporations. A loss of funds poses significant challenges for traditional public schools, which are often forced to reduce staff, programs, and other basic expenditures.
- There are **no well-established best practices or state endorsements to prepare teachers to instruct** in a full-time online environment.

### History of Online Education in North Carolina:

- The state-led [NC Virtual Public School \(NCVPS\)](#) was established in 2007. It offers *supplemental* courses to public, private, and homeschooled secondary students. NCVPS currently serves 50,000 students and is the second largest virtual school in the U.S. With classes taught by educators with an NC professional teaching license, NCVPS is a cost effective way to educate students who need access to a course unavailable at their school; a year-long class costs \$438. NCVPS also offers its classes to home schooled and private school students.
- In [Section 8.48 of the Appropriations Act of 2013](#), the General Assembly directed that the State Board of Education conduct a study of online charter schools and prepare “recommendations in the form of draft rules and proposed statutory changes to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by February 1, 2014.”
- One of the findings of the [Virtual Charter School Study](#), April 15, 2014 was a recommendation for “three individual pilot schools” that “would provide an adequate basis from which to collect data.” Further, “each pilot will be allowed to enroll up to 1,000 students in the first year and expand by not more than 20% in each successive year until completion of the pilot, not to exceed 1,728 students. The law authorizing the charter pilot schools exceeds this maximum enrollment by more than 850 students.
- [Section 8.35 of the Appropriations Act of 2014](#) authorizes the creation of two pilot K-12 online charter schools. The length of the pilot will be four years. The maximum enrollment in each pilot is capped at 1,500 students in the first year, rising to 2,592 in year four. The law further states, “The school shall have a withdrawal rate below twenty-five percent (25%).” Two-thirds of students at industry-leading K12, Inc.’s online charter schools leave after less than two years.
- In October 2014, K12, Inc. and Connections Academy each submitted their applications to pilot full-time online education in North Carolina. The applications are being reviewed in December, with approval anticipated in January 2015 for schools that will open in August 2015.

*Source: Please see our website for more research, citations and information on this topic.  
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