

Bill Introduced to Limit Cyber-Charter Growth

by Howard Richman

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On April 24, 2006, PA Representative Karen Beyer (Republican from Lehigh County) introduced a bill (HB 2616) which would cut payments to cyber-charter schools, limit their independence, and retard their growth. Cyber-charters are public schools that provide education over the Internet. They receive their funding from the local school districts and from the state government. They have been growing rapidly, resulting in calls from public school districts to limit their growth.

The main provision of this bill would eliminate the local public school district share of cyber-charter funding. The state would pay the larger cyber-charters about half of the money per student that they are currently getting. Those cyber-charter schools with 1,000 or less students would get \$5,000 per student. Those with 1,001 to 4,999 students would get \$4,000 per student and those with 5,000 or more would get \$3,000 per student. The result would be that the popular cyber-charter schools would probably cap their enrollment at either 1,000 or 4,999 students. Cyber-charter schools, being much more efficient than brick and mortar schools, have been able to flourish on about \$6000 to \$8500 per student, about 78% of the amount required by the local school district to educate the same child.

Another provision of the bill would require that cyber-charters put an appointee of the Secretary of Education and two from the local Intermediate Unit on their Boards of Directors. The effect could be to make the independent cyber-charter schools more similar to those run by the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Intermediate Units.

Currently cyber-charters compete with each other to attract enrollees. As a result, the more attractive have been growing rapidly, while those run by the local Intermediate Units have been growing slowly. Specifically, from October 2004 to October 2005, the 6 independent cyber-charters grew by 42% (from 8,349 to 11,881 students) while the 5 cyber-charter schools associated with Intermediate Units grew by only 6% (from 1,238 to 1,318 students). Among the most rapidly growing independent cyber-charters were Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School (48% growth from 3021 to 4475) and Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School (302% growth from 335 to 1011). The exception among Intermediate Units was the Allegheny Intermediate Unit's popular PA Learners Online Regional Cyber Charter School (20% growth from 498 to 600 students).

Keep in mind, that this bill has not yet passed. It still would have to pass the House Education Committee, the PA House, the Senate Education Committee, the PA Senate, and be signed by the Governor. Along the way, it would likely be changed. If the independent cyber-charter schools decide to fight it, they could organize a very effective lobbying campaign with constituents contacting their legislators in almost every part of Pennsylvania.

[Click here for an earlier article on this subject, the source of the cyber-charter enrollment statistics cited here](#)

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