INDIANA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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COMMITTEE ON VIRTUAL CHARTER SCHOOLS
August 27, 2018
12:30 PM (ET)
Indiana Government Center South
Conference Room A
302 West Washington St.
Indianapolis, IN 46204.

Members Present: Mr. Gordon Hendry (Chair), Dr. Maryanne McMahon, and Ms. Cari Whicker.

   I. **Call to Order**
   a. Committee members recited the Pledge of Allegiance.
   II. **Approval of Agenda**
   a. The agenda was approved by a voice vote.
   III. **National Expert Testimony**
   a. National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA)
      i. Veronica Brooks, Policy Director for NACSA, shared information regarding NACSA and gave information surrounding the good and bad things occurring within virtual charter schools. Ms. Brooks also made policy recommendations specific to Indiana.
         1. Mr. Hendry asked if her recommendation involving assessing an authorizer's capacity was meant for charters that had already been granted or as part of the initial approval process. Ms. Brooks responded that it could be for both, but this specific recommendation was aimed towards the former.
         2. Ron Sandlin, Senior Director of School Performance and Transformation for the Board, asked if NACSA believed in applying the same principles to traditional schools who operate virtual programs as it did to authorizers who run virtual charter schools. Ms. Brooks responded that when it comes to virtual charter schools and virtual programming, many of the issues are the same, so most of these recommendations could apply at both levels.
         3. Mr. Hendry asked if any other state had ever unwound an authorizer. Ms. Brooks responded that there is one state that allows districts to authorize if the school is enrolling students from that district, but only allows state-wide entities to authorize state-wide virtual charters.
         4. Mr. Hendry asked if any other states have considered the idea of setting an administrative fee given to authorizers that is set based the actual costs of administration as opposed to a fixed fee that may not have an actual correlation to the actual costs. Ms. Brooks

responded that there are some states that start off with a slightly higher authorizer fee and then bring the number down over the years based on a number of factors.
5. Mr. Hendry asked Ms. Brooks if she had any thoughts on shared accountability as it relates to students who are credit deficient and join a virtual charter school. Ms. Brooks responded that personally she believed it was very important to think of accountability from a rigorous standpoint, but to not make it so inflexible that schools are punished for serving some of the highest needs students.
6. Dr. McMahon asked if there has been any pushback on holding parents to an accountability standard, which is one of the example accountability metrics, and how to measure this metric. Ms. Brooks responded that virtual charter schools often tell the management organizations that the most important element of being successful in a virtual charter is having a very involved parent.
7. Mr. Hendry asked if Ms. Brooks believed that there should be some types of students who are not allowed to attend virtual charters. Ms. Brooks responded that this is a very complicated question because charter schools were built on the foundation of open enrollment, so one possibility is considering virtual charters as something other than a charter school.
8. Mr. Hendry asked if student and/or parental feedback should be a factor in allowing enrollment to exceed a certain recommended level. Ms. Brooks responded that this factor could definitely be considered and some states are using this as a part of their overall accountability model.
9. Mr. Sandlin asked if Ms. Brooks had any thoughts about Indiana's new engagement policy and expanding authorizer's powers to be able to move students who are not successfully engaged into a traditional school. Ms. Brooks shared that this brings up a bigger conversation regarding a unified enrollment systems within and across authorizers.
10. Mr. Hendry asked for best practices regarding funding of students who attend virtual charters and tying that to accountability metrics. Ms. Brooks responded that it is important that the money follows students, but in terms of virtual charters, looking at how much it costs to teach these students as opposed to traditional brick and mortar students is important as well.
ii. Discussion starts at 3:14.
b. National Coalition for Public School Options (PSO)
i. Tillie Elvrum, President of PSO, gave a presentation regarding parent opinions and choices regarding virtual charter schools.
1. Mr. Hendry stated that the parent opinion is hugely important to the Board as they make decisions in this arena.

2. Dr. McMahon asked if Ms. Elvrum's point regarding incentivizing retention was actually occurring in states or if this was just an idea. Ms. Elvrum responded that she believed this was something to work towards and this was an important way to keep families at these schools.
3. Mr. Hendry asked how success should be measured for a student who is in the virtual charter for less than 6 months. Ms. Elvrum responded that states do this differently, but one way is based on student competencies.
4. Mr. Sandlin clarified that the data around mobility is across any school type and asked if there was potential to expand the solutions offered today across all school models which may experience a concentrated type of students. Ms. Elvrum responded that she has heard opinions from many types of parents who feel this way.

ii. Discussion starts at 53:19.

c. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute
   i. Chad Aldis, Vice President for Ohio Policy and Advocacy of the Thomas V. Fordham Institute, gave a presentation regarding challenges for virtual charter schools and the lessons Ohio has learned in their experience creating virtual charters. Mr. Aldis also highlighted opportunities and recommendations for success.
   ii. Mr. Hendry asked how a virtual charter school could be operated without tracking participation. Mr. Aldis responded that part of this comes from tracking computer strokes, but a lot of good learning in the virtual settings comes from having a book open, which can't necessarily be tracked.
   iii. Mr. Hendry asked what response there has been to the proposal of changing the adjusted cohort rate so that the denominator is based of the percent of time that student is at the school, which would be broken down into semesters. Mr. Aldis responded that his sense is that the virtual charters have been supportive of this, but there may be some pushback from the Department of Education. Mr. Hendry asked what the objection was to doing this. Mr. Aldis responded the only concern he has heard thus far is that it isn't allowable under the State of Indiana's ESSA plan.
   iv. Mr. Sandlin asked if Mr. Aldis believed the mobility study referenced effectively captured the mobility rate in their study. Mr. Aldis responded that he was personally a fan of this methodology because it uses student long-term longitudinal data and it attempts to look at students who have similar characteristics. Mr. Sandlin followed up by asking what the story thus far has been surrounding the information from mobility data. Mr. Aldis responded that there isn't much information yet, but in all schools students who stay at the school longer tend to do better.
   v. Dr. McMahon asked if the funding options Mr. Aldis suggested were used separately or if there was any conversation around using a blending of these methods. Mr. Aldis responded that Ohio is looking into using different methodologies for different types of schools based on a measure

of activity. He also mentioned that Ohio funds charter schools based on monthly student enrollment.

      vi. Mr. Sandlin asked if Mr. Aldis could highlight the top factors a state should consider when looking at exclusive policies on the front end as opposed to engagement policies on the back end. Mr. Aldis explained that the policy Mr. Sandlin was referring was regarding what should occur when an online charter school isn't a good fit for a student. He further explained that Ohio has decided that online chartering should be an option for everyone, but allow the school to unenroll that student if they aren't participating.

      vii. Discussion starts at 1:33:53.

   d. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (National Alliance)

      i. Russ Simnick, Senior Director for State Advocacy for the National Alliance, gave a presentation regarding the National Alliance and the policies that they believe can be adjusted to ensure virtual charters are a positive option for as many students as possible.

      ii. Mr. Sandlin shared that there have been many authorizers emerging regionally and nationally, and therefore asked Mr. Simnick to share more information about access in these situations and if there was anything that would prohibit any other entities to emerge in the virtual market. Mr. Simnick shared that he did not believe there was currently anything that would prevent them from entering, he did however believe that virtual charters needed to be held to a different standard.

      iii. Mr. Hendry asked why Mr. Simnick believed virtual charters have had such poor performance. Mr. Simnick shared that there are a number of reasons, including it is not a good fit for the student, or the organization of the school needs to be looked into.

      iv. Discussion starts at 2:20:42.

IV. Adjournment

   a. The meeting was adjourned.