

VIRTUAL CHARTER SCHOOLS

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Outline

- Introduction
- Challenges Facing Virtual Charters
- Lessons Learned
- Opportunities for State Improvement
- Recommendations

Who are we?



- Thomas B. Fordham Institute is a non-profit 501c3
- Founded in Dayton; current offices in Dayton, Columbus, and Washington, D.C.
- Started as a think tank focused on research and commentary
- Now Columbus office engages in policy advocacy and Dayton office is a charter authorizer
- Support charter schools but are critical at times
- Quality choices and improved student achievement drive our charter work

Ohio's experience

- More than 35,000 virtual charter students
- 13 statewide online charters
- As early as 2001, Ohio's state auditor raised concerns
- Efforts to improve sector included a virtual school moratorium, requirement to develop virtual school standards, and enrollment limits
- Sector continued to struggle
- In 2016, ODE changed the way it was verifying enrollment and funding schools
- Result—major funding changes
- ECOT—Ohio's largest online charter closed

Framing the Issue—Challenges Facing Virtual Charter Schools

- Academic performance
 - CREDO study
 - State report cards
- Serving challenged students
- Public relations issues

Lessons Learned

- Tremendous interest from families
 - Despite negative PR
 - Only choice in many communities
- Online education is only going to grow
- Some students struggle in online setting
 - Academic performance stubbornly low
- Level of student engagement varies widely
- Delivering instruction online poses special challenges

Opportunities for Improvement (States)

- Student orientation
- Disenrollment
 - Failure to participate
 - Excessive absences
- Measuring academic performance
 - Graduation rate
 - Mobile students
- Proper authorizing role
 - Statewide
 - Too big to fail, fee structure
- How to fund
 - Enrollment, participation, or competency/completion

Recommendations - Leverage

- Allow/Require a student orientation/disenrollment process
- Adopt a funding mechanism that works with your state context and provides clear incentives
 - What enrollment duration generates funding?
 - Does student achievement play a role in funding?
- Improve academic measures(applies to all schools)
 - Graduation rate
 - Mobility

For more information, visit:

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