

Questions legislators should ask about online charter schools

As public education authorities struggle with how best to reopen schools, one option may be to affiliate with a privately operated online or virtual charter school. Here are some questions designed to help legislators assist education authorities and local communities in making these difficult decisions as they evaluate online charter schools.

- Are taxpayers being charged more than those in other states for the same service?
- Can students receive an equal or superior education in district-run online schools, and at lower cost?
- Will online charter schools use local teachers and group students with others from their neighborhood in order to preserve student-community and teacher-student relationships?
- What percentage of teachers are certified in the specific subject matter that they will be teaching?
- Does this school equitably serve all students in the state?
- How does its share of English Learners, low-income students, homeless students, foster youth, unaccompanied minors, and other high-needs populations compare with that of the district or state as a whole?
- What is its share of students with special needs—and what is the share of each of the 14 specific types of need identified by IDEA—compared with the district or state as a whole?
- What are the salaries of the school's top highest-paid positions and the five top highest-paid positions of any parent corporation it is affiliated with?
- Has the school provided a detailed breakdown of exactly how much it plans to pay its parent corporation for curricular products, technology, teaching, teacher training, hiring and HR, or other instructional or administrative functions?
- Is there an independent school board that is elected by citizens or by school parents?