

Benchmarking and Best Practices

The following section summarizes the Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School Review benchmark results. In addition, this section highlights some of the best practices of both Pennsylvania Cyber Charter Schools and the peer schools benchmarked for this report.

Benchmarking

KPMG Consulting conducted a benchmarking study of the following six cyber charter schools²³ from around the nation to identify best practices in charter school governance, accountability structures, high quality distance learning models, and financial benchmarks:

- Basehor-Linwood Virtual Charter School – Kansas
- CHOICE 2000 Online Charter School – California
- The Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) – Ohio
- The Florida Virtual School - Florida
- Internet Academy - Washington
- Odyssey Charter School - Nevada

Overall, the benchmarking analysis identified the following information:

- Like Pennsylvania cyber charter schools, peer cyber schools generally serve the following type of K-12 students:
 - Seeking to accelerate or enrich their course work
 - Professional entertainers/athletes
 - In need of non-traditional setting due to medical conditions or other mental or physical health related circumstances
 - Employed
 - Receiving homebound instruction
 - Previously home schooled by parents
 - Enrollment numbers of peers vary by school (200-3,600 students).
- Five out of six peer schools accept students from across their respective states; three out of the six accept out-of-state students.
- Of the five peer schools serving high school students, only three schools are diploma granting institutions (one peer is K-8 only).

²³ The benchmarked schools were chosen because they were public charter schools that offered full time enrollment. Even though it does not currently offer a full time program for students, the Florida Virtual School was also selected because it has a high student enrollment and is widely recognized around the nation as being a successful program.

- Three of the six peer schools accept both full and part-time students. Three peers accept only full time students; one peer accepts only part-time students.
- The majority of students attending peer cyber schools previously attended a traditional public school.
- The number of special education students enrolled in peer cyber schools and the special education services/accommodations offered by peer schools vary by school. All schools accept special education students, however, not all schools provide accommodations.
- Only two peer schools provide technology services (i.e., computer, printer, ISP access) similar to PA cyber charter schools. The majority of schools require students to provide their own technology equipment. All schools provide students with supplemental materials (i.e., books, workbooks, lab material).
- The majority of peer schools utilize asynchronous delivery methods for instruction.
- The majority of peer schools either customize the curriculum used by their local school district or develop their own curriculum based on their state's standards. Only two peer schools contract the majority of their curriculum to third party providers.
- The amount of student education time spent on/off line varies by school and by course. Peers estimate that between 25% and 75% of student learning time is spent online.
- Assessment type (i.e., online, written project, oral) and frequency varies by school and by course.
- Most peers offer students opportunities for face-to-face communication either through organized on-site classes, student labs or planned outings.
- The method for tracking student attendance varies by school. Common methods for tracking attendance include: monitoring the number of assignments that are completed and submitted to the teacher, tracking time logged into the online system and accessing students' online progress.
- Only two of the six peer schools benchmarked require parent supervision during instruction. However, both schools recognize parent supervision is difficult to monitor and enforce.
- All full time and part-time teachers are certified in their respective states.

More detailed information on each benchmarked school is provided below.

Basehor-Linwood Virtual Charter School (VCS) – Kansas

The mission of the Basehor-Linwood Virtual Charter School (VCS) in Kansas is to create and develop alternative approaches to delivering educational processes through the use of current and emerging technologies. VCS is entering its fourth year of operation as a K-12 school and currently serves 356 full time students statewide, all but one of who is on track to receive their diploma; the school's enrollment has increased by 82% in four years.²⁴ The majority (66%) of VCS students previously were home schooled.

VCS has a close relationship with Basehor-Linwood School district, its chartering district. VCS has access to all the district's services as needed and utilizes the district's curriculum. VCS is in essence a school within the local school district; the Basehor-Linwood School Board also serves as VCS' governing board. It is important to note, however, that VCS does have its own "advisory group" comprised of teachers, parents, community members and representatives from the local school board.

VCS also seeks to establish partnerships with other local districts. VCS students are not required to be enrolled in one school. Three-hundred and fifty-six students are enrolled full time in VCS; 20 students are dually enrolled and completing course work offered by their local district. One of VCS' primary goals is to help students return to the traditional public school.

The VCS program is not designed to meet needs of special education students. As a result, VCS does not provide special education services. Rather, VCS requires parents of special education students to maintain a relationship with their local district so the local district can provide the special education services needed by the student. If VCS identifies a student that might have special needs, the administration contacts that student's local district. VCS and the local district will share the state allotment of funding for dual-enrolled students.

VCS has 35 certified teachers that each work five hours a week. In addition, VCS teachers teach full time at a Basehor-Linwood traditional school. VCS expects that parents will be the students' primary teachers; VCS teachers will serve in a support role. VCS teachers do however, design their own courses based on the curriculum used by Basehor-Linwood School District and develop a course website and online assessments. VCS teachers are accessible by email and estimate spending approximately one hour a day responding to VCS student/parent emails.

The majority of VCS students' time is spent offline. Students primarily go online to access their course assignments, take assessments and conduct research via the Internet. Students are evaluated via the online assessments developed by the teachers as well as through their performance on State standardized tests. All high school students are required to take proctored final exams. In addition, students are required to keep a portfolio of work that the teacher will use to assess them.

²⁴ Enrollment over a period of four years has been 63, 300, 363, 363.

VCS staff are assessed by their traditional school principal. The Director of VCS also will assess teachers based on the development of their website and their communication with students and families.

CHOICE 2000 Online Charter School – California

CHOICE 2000 Online Charter School in California is beginning its seventh year of operation. Choice 2000 is fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and serves seventh through twelfth grade students residing in Riverside, San Bernadino, San Diego, Imperial, and Orange Counties. California residents who live in other counties are not allowed to enroll. Choice 2000 does, however, serve out-of-state students for a tuition fee.²⁵

The instructional platform utilized by Choice is synchronous and interactive. Students attend teacher led online classes for a minimum of two hours a day, five days a week. Choice 2000 teachers customize the curriculum used by Perris Union High School District, the district that approved Choice’s charter, so it can be delivered over the Internet, usually via PowerPoint.

Teachers’ lessons are presented both visually and verbally. Students can see the teacher’s lesson on their computer screen. In addition, they can hear and talk to their teacher by using headphones and microphone (required for enrollment in the school). Therefore students and teachers are able to interact directly in this virtual environment, hearing and answering questions and participating in discussions of what appears on the screen. These interactive sessions are recorded and students can access archived lessons up to two weeks after the lesson was taught.

The synchronous model used by Choice for its core subject areas is similar to a traditional classroom.²⁶ Students are required to log into the system to attend class each day. Once a student is logged on, the teachers can see who is logged in and take attendance. Teachers can call on students during the lesson. In addition, students may ask the teacher questions. If a student has a question, he/she can click on a button to inform the teacher that he/she has a question. The student also has the ability to “whisper” a question to his/her teacher, where a student is able to email the question directly to the teacher without interrupting the class and without revealing his/her identity.

Choice 2000 students are tested weekly by their teachers. In addition, students are also required to complete written assignments on a regular basis. This allows teachers to get a feel for what is or is not a student's work. Choice 2000 students are required to attend state-mandated testing every spring and before they graduate. This also allows the staff to gauge a student's progress. All seniors must take an exam in the spring of their senior year as a requirement for graduation.

²⁵ Out-of-state tuition fee is estimated at \$175 per class, per 9 week semester (nine week semester equates to a half year of learning). There may be additional costs for mailing textbooks and materials depending on the where the students reside.

²⁶ Choice is looking to incorporate synchronous online curriculum for electives.

Choice 2000 staff is evaluated by the Chief Administrative Officer. As part of the evaluation process, the CAO reviews archived lessons to ensure that teachers are teaching to state standards, the material being taught is appropriate, the presentation style of the teacher is effective and students appear to be engaged in the learning process. In addition, the CAO will also evaluate teachers based on their participation in professional development activities.

The Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow – Ohio

The Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) was awarded its charter by Toledo County School District (Toledo County) in Ohio to operate as a K-12 Internet-based, distance-learning school. ECOT is currently in its second year of operation and serves 2,767 students from 85 out of the 88 counties in Ohio.

ECOT is managed by Altair Learning, a network management company that provides distance learning and technology management services. The educational component of the school is managed by the school's Superintendent/CAO. ECOT has a five member Board of Directors with diverse professional experience (i.e., education, human resources, CPA, parent, retired government worker) who represent four different counties in Ohio.

ECOT has a solid relationship with Toledo County. The Superintendent of Toledo County provides oversight and additional services (i.e., professional development and budgeting/finance support) in exchange for a fee of 2% of ECOT's operating budget. In addition, Toledo conducts monthly customer satisfaction surveys with ECOT parents (10 surveys a month).

ECOT buys its curriculum content from several third party provider. ECOT employs 66 FTE teachers who use the third party curriculum content as a "text book." ECOT teachers customize/supplement third party curriculum content in order to provide students with a more enriching educational experience. Similarly, ECOT teachers conduct student assessments, grade student performance and have contact with students via phone, email and regular mail.

ECOT students are assessed by their teachers. The majority of assessments are done online; some online assessments are monitored for time (a student will tell his/her teacher when he/she is ready to take the test, the teacher will send the student the test, the student will complete the test and submit it to the teacher within a predetermined time frame). Other assessments are mailed to the student's home and informal assessments are conducted over phone or via email communication. Teachers monitor the time students are logged into the system. If a student does not log on for a period of five days, ECOT's attendance teacher will contact the student.

ECOT's staff can be monitored on a daily basis. At any time the Superintendent can log in to the online system and access teacher lesson plans, notes and emails to monitor teacher/student interaction. ECOT's staff is monitored periodically by assistant directors (i.e., principals).

The Florida Virtual School – Florida

Resulting from an initial grant received by Orange and Alachua counties after proposing the concept to the Department of Education and Florida legislature, the Florida Virtual School (FVS) became the first state-funded online school when it opened in August 1997. This effort has grown into a 6.2 million dollar²⁷ state funded organization that offers a full online high school curriculum.

Operating under the belief that “a high school student is a high school student,” the school provides all public, private and home school students in Florida with the opportunity to have free online courses and complementary instruction. The school targets a student population from rural and low performing schools (those receiving a ‘D’ or ‘F’ on the state’s school performance report card). Accredited by the Commission on International Transregional Accreditation (CITA), the school does not currently offer a diploma but is considering doing so at the request of home schooled students and students who reside outside of the country. There are currently 3,634 students in 5,517 course enrollments. 2,598 students are from traditional public schools while 747 are home schooled. Most students who are not home schooled generally take one course at a time with FVS.

The school is currently operated by 95 employees. The instructional staff consists of 45 full time teachers and 26 part-time teachers who work 10 hours per week. FVS teachers, who are all certified by the state of Florida in the subject they teach, have developed the curriculum used to instruct the school’s students. The curriculum, which includes over 60 courses, is based upon the Florida curriculum framework, the Sunshine State Standards. Before being offered to students, a course must also pass a Peer Review. The FVS Peer Review team generally consists of subject matter experts, Department of Education personnel, high school students, business and community members. All courses are delivered via the Internet and may include a variety of web-based, technology based and traditional resources to supplement instruction. The initial cost of developing one online course ranged from \$30,000-\$60,000 as the school’s initial approach to curriculum development attached one full time teacher to each course. The current development method of the school is to pay teachers a stipend for course development. This approach lessens the development cost of a course to \$6,000-\$15,000. The FVS student experience is driven by the school’s motto “Any time, any place, any path, any pace.” Synchronous learning is not the primary method of instruction even though some courses may have a synchronous component.

Students in other states and countries also are served by the Florida Virtual School. Non-Florida students may enroll in courses taught by FVS teachers on a tuition basis and other schools or states may also license courses from the FVS curriculum. Courses are generally \$300 per semester, per course.

²⁷ State legislative line item appropriated to the Florida Department of Education in FY 2000. The state expects FVS to become a self-supporting agency in the near future.

The Internet Academy – Washington

The Internet Academy in Federal Way, Washington is a K-12 public school in the Federal Way School District. Entering its seventh year of operation, the Internet Academy serves students across the state of Washington and around the world.²⁸ Last year 93% of the school's population was from Washington, and seven percent was from out-of-state. The Internet Academy was originally founded to provide support to home schooled students and their families. However, the home schooled population only represents between 10% and 15% of the Internet Academy's current student population.

The Internet Academy is not a diploma granting institution and serves part and full time students. Students who are not using the Internet Academy's curriculum to facilitate their home school education maintain a relationship with their local school district. Local school districts will ultimately award Internet Academy students their diplomas. There are 430 students currently enrolled in the Internet Academy. The majority of these students attend the school on a part-time basis. Because students can attend the school part-time, the total enrollment for the Internet Academy can fluctuate between 415 and 700 students a year. The school is reimbursed by the State for every full time equivalent student. (Every five courses equates to a full time student). The Internet Academy currently has 305 full time equivalent students.

The Internet Academy has 12.5 full time teachers on staff (employees of the Federal Way School District). The school contracts with additional Federal Way School District teachers to teach part-time on an as-needed basis. These contracted teachers are compensated monthly according to the number of students they teach.

The Internet Academy both utilizes courses provided by third party curriculum providers (i.e., Academic Systems, Boxer math, ChildU, All the Right Type) and develops its own curriculum based on Washington State standards. All courses are 18 weeks in length and have assessments built into the curriculum. Some assessments are conducted online, where as others are done offline. Offline assessments can vary from written assessments to project assignments.

Internet Academy teachers and students interact at least once every other day via email or phone. In addition, Internet Academy teachers are accessible during defined office hours. If a student contacts a teacher with a question, problem or concern, the teacher is required to respond to the student within 24 hours. It is expected that all homework will be graded and returned to the student within two to three school days after submission. The Internet Academy also has a student lab where students can access teachers. The student lab is open Monday through Friday for three hours three days of the week and 6 hours the remaining two days. The Internet Academy estimates that teachers work from home approximately 60% of their required 40-hour week.

The Internet Academy tracks student attendance by monitoring the number of assignments completed and turned in by the student. In order to be in compliance with the school's attendance policy, a student must submit at least one assignment per class per week. If a student

²⁸ Out-of-state students are charged \$275 for one semester course or half credit.

does not hand in an assignment, he/she is contacted by his/her teacher. If a teacher does not hear from a student after 20 days, the student is withdrawn from the class.

Odyssey Charter School – Nevada

Odyssey Charter School is a technology-based public school serving students kindergarten through eighth grade who reside in Clark County, Nevada. State law and Odyssey's charter allow the school to accept students from other counties. However, school administrators choose not to because they feel their program requires face-to-face communication that could not occur if the school expanded its enrollment borders. Also, the State of Nevada requires that the Odyssey Charter School have organized, in person group classes twice per month. Statewide enrollment might limit the school's ability to conduct these group classes.

Odyssey contracts with Child U and American Education Corporation to provide the school's curriculum content. The online curriculum is very similar to an interactive textbook and many of the daily learning activities are assigned utilizing the computer. The teacher also may direct various assignments, lessons and activities to be completed when the student is not online using the computer. The actual time spent on the computer varies by student, according to the daily learning activities directed by the teacher. Teachers have access to their students' online work. Therefore, he/she can track the amount of time a student spends on a particular lesson, see his/her test results and monitor his/her overall progress.

Odyssey students are assessed during weekly teacher home visits. Teachers assign their students weekly grades based on their completed assignments, results from online assessments and progress made during the week. These grades are averaged at the end of the marking period to determine a student's final grade. In addition, Odyssey students also are given the Peabody Individual Assessment Test at the beginning and end of each year to measure student improvement. Last year's test results reveal that Odyssey students progressed 1.47 grade levels after one year.

Odyssey teachers will be evaluated by the school principal. The principal will attend home visits with the teachers and solicit parental feedback. In addition, the principal will evaluate the lesson plans prepared by the teacher to guide parent directed instruction of students.

Benchmark Comparisons

The following charts illustrate the number of years each school has been in operation, whether or not they are a diploma granting institution and general demographics of their student populations.

<i>School Name</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Number of Students</i>	<i>Number of Years in Operation</i>	<i>Diploma Granting Institution</i>
Basehor-Linwood	KA	K-12	376 ²⁹	4 years	Yes
Choice 2000	CA	7-12	203	7 years	Yes
ECOT	OH	K-12	2,848	2 years	Yes
FVS ³⁰	FL	9-12	3,634	4 years	No
Internet Academy	WA	K-12	430	6 years	No
Odyssey	NV	K-8	500	3 years	No

<i>School Name</i>	<i>Accept Students from across the State</i>	<i>Accept out-of-state students</i>	<i>Accepts full time students</i>	<i>Accepts part-time students</i>
Basehor-Linwood	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Choice 2000	Yes ³¹	Yes ³²	Yes	No
ECOT	Yes	No	Yes	No
FVS	Yes	Yes ³³	No	Yes
Internet Academy	Yes	Yes ³⁴	Yes	Yes
Odyssey	No	No	Yes	No

²⁹ 356 students are full time; 20 are part-time. For the purpose of this assessment, Basehor-Linwood provided student demographic information for full time students only.

³⁰ Florida Virtual High School students offers a full curriculum for a high school diploma, however, does not award diplomas. FVS is a supplement to public education in Florida. However, the majority of FVS students take one course. Home schooled students will usually take more than one course.

³¹ Choice 2000 is tuition free to students who reside in Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Imperial or Orange Counties in CA. Students residing in other counties in CA can attend the school, but they must pay tuition (\$175 per class, per nine week semester) and any additional costs for mailing textbooks.

³² Out-of-state students can attend the school, but they must pay tuition (\$175 per class, per nine week semester) and any additional costs for mailing textbooks

³³ Tuition for out-of-state students is roughly \$300 per course per semester.

³⁴ Tuition for out-of-state students is \$275 for a one semester course.

Peer schools' student demographics are further summarized by previous education experience in the chart below.

<i>School Name</i>	<i>Traditional Public School</i>	<i>Brick and Mortar Charter School</i>	<i>Private School</i>	<i>Home Schooled</i>	<i>Not Previously Schooled (Age 5-8)</i>
Basehor-Linwood ³⁵	28%	0	3%	66%	3%
Choice 2000 ³⁶	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
ECOT ³⁷	75-85%	5%	1%	10-15%	1%
FVS	71.5%	1.5%	6.5%	20.5%	0
Internet Academy	85%	0%	4%	10%	1%
Odyssey	60%	0	2%	30%	8%

Peer schools' student population is broken down by regular education students and special needs students in the chart below.

<i>School Name</i>	<i>Number of Students</i>	<i>Number of Special Education Students</i>	<i>Percentage of Special Education Students</i>
Basehor-Linwood ³⁸	356	3 ³⁹	.8%
Choice 2000	203	4 ⁴⁰	2%
ECOT	2,848	N/A	N/A
FVS ⁴¹	3,634	N/A	N/A
Internet Academy	430	N/A	N/A
Odyssey	500	77	15.5%

³⁵ For the purpose of this assessment, Basehor-Linwood provided student demographic information for full time students only.

³⁶ Choice 2000 does not track this information. Choice 2000's Chief Administrative Officer estimated that most students previously attended a traditional public school, a few attended private school and some were previously home schooled.

³⁷ Estimates only.

³⁸ For the purpose of this assessment, Basehor-Linwood provided student demographic information for full time students only.

³⁹ Students with special needs can enroll in Basehor-Linwood, but they must remain connected to their local school district to receive any specialized services.

⁴⁰ Choice does not provide special education services.

⁴¹ FVS does not collect special education information during their registration process. Teachers may learn of a student's special needs during a conversation with the student and parents and provisions will be made for any needs. Usually the special provision in FVS is additional time which the school's environment inherently allows.

Two of the peer schools provide technology services similar to PA cyber charter schools. Technology services provided by each peer district are identified in the chart below.

<i>School</i>	<i>Computer</i>	<i>Additional Technology (i.e., printer, scanner, fax)</i>	<i>Internet Service Provider</i>	<i>Additional Phone Line</i>	<i>Supplemental Material (i.e., workbooks, lab materials)</i>
Basehor-Linwood	Yes ⁴²	No	No	No	Yes ⁴³
Choice 2000 ⁴⁴	No	No	No	No	Yes
ECOT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes ⁴⁵
FVS ⁴⁶	No	No	No	No	Yes
Internet Academy	No	No	No	No	Yes
Odyssey ⁴⁷	No	No	No	No	Yes

Like Pennsylvania cyber charter schools, the majority of peer schools benchmarked utilize asynchronous delivery methods for instruction.

<i>School Name</i>	<i>Asynchronous Learning</i>	<i>Synchronous Learning</i>
Basehor-Linwood	Yes	
Choice 2000		Yes
ECOT	Yes	
FVS	Yes	Yes ⁴⁸
Internet Academy	Yes	
Odyssey	Yes	

⁴² There is a \$20 fee.

⁴³ There is a \$40 rental fee for text books.

⁴⁴ If students are financially challenged, Choice 2000 will lease students a computer at \$10 per month. (Choice does not request proof of financial distress). If a student stays in the program for three years, he/she is given the computer. Choice 2000 will repair and/or upgrade these computers as needed.

⁴⁵ There may be nominal fees associated with non-computer related curriculum such as science lab work.

⁴⁶ FVS students have the option to take their courses at home if they have the necessary technology or at their local school district if it will grant them access to a multi-media computer with Internet access.

⁴⁷ Odyssey will loan computers on an as needed basis. Financial information is collected in the initial application to Odyssey.

⁴⁸ May be used as a component for some courses.

Unlike PA cyber charter schools, only two peer schools contract the majority of their curriculum to third party providers. Three peers either customize the curriculum used by their local school district for online delivery or develop their own curriculum based on their state’s standards. One peer both contracts with third party providers and develops its own curriculum based on its local district’s curriculum.

<i>School Name</i>	<i>Customize Local District’s Curriculum</i>	<i>Develop Custom Curriculum</i>	<i>ChildU</i>	<i>American Education Corporation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Basehor-Linwood	X				
Choice 2000	X				
ECOT ⁴⁹			X		Learn.com Novanet
FVS		X ⁵⁰			
Internet Academy		X	X		Academic Systems Boxer Math All the Right Type
Odyssey			X	X	

Only two of the six peers benchmarked contracts its management services to a third party provider

<i>School Name</i>	<i>Managed by 3rd Party</i>
Basehor-Linwood	No
Choice 2000	No
ECOT	Yes
FVS	No
Internet Academy	No
Odyssey	Yes

⁴⁹ Vendors provide “online” textbooks for teachers to use.

⁵⁰ FVS teachers developed the school’s curriculum based on the Sunshine State Standards which is the curriculum framework within Florida.

Requiring parent and/or guardian supervision during student learning time varies by peers. Two of the six peers benchmarked require parent supervision during instruction. However, both schools recognize that parent supervision is difficult to monitor and enforce.

<i>School Name</i>	<i>Require parent supervision during instruction</i>	<i>Grade Level</i>
Basehor-Linwood	Yes	K-12
Choice 2000	No	7-12
ECOT	No	K-12
FVS	No	9-12
Internet Academy	No	K-12
Odyssey	Yes	K-8

The following tables summarize the administrative, education and support staff of the six peer districts benchmarked.

Note: FTE indicates a full time employee. PTE indicates part-time/hourly employee.

Administrative Staff

<i>School Name</i>	<i>Total Student Enrollment</i>	<i>Chief Administrative Officer</i>	<i>Assistant Head of Schools</i>	<i>Business Manager</i>	<i>Director of Instruction</i>	<i>Director of Special Education</i>	<i>Director of Technology</i>	<i>Clerical</i>	<i>Other</i>
Basehor-Linwood ⁵¹	376	1 FTE	1 FTE						
Choice 2000	203	1 PTE (16 hours a week)							
ECOT	2,848	1 FTE	3 FTE (principals)	4 FTE	1 FTE	1 FTE	3 FTE		1 PTE Attorney
FVS	3,634	1 FTE		1 PTE	1 FTE		1 FTE	7 FTE	
Internet Academy	430	1 FTE					1 FTE		
Odyssey ⁵²	500	1 FTE	1 FTE	1 FTE		1 FTE	1 FTE		

⁵¹ Basehor-Linwood has access to all local district services as needed.

⁵² With the exception of the Director of Special Education, all administrative positions are contracted to Odyssey's management company.

Educational Staff

<i>School</i>	<i>Total Student Enrollment</i>	<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Elementary Teacher (K-6)</i>	<i>Secondary Teacher (7-12)</i>	<i>Special Education Teacher</i>
Basehor-Linwood ⁵³	376	K-12	7 PTE (5 hours a week)	28 PTE (5 hours a week)	
Choice 2000	203	7-12		4 PTE (20 hours per week) 11 FTE ⁵⁴ (40 hours per week, paid hourly)	
ECOT	2,848	K-12	44 FTE	22 FTE	9 FTE
FVS	3,634	9-12		45 FTE 26 PTE (10 hours per week)	
Internet ⁵⁵ Academy	430	K-12	2 FTE	10.5 FTE	
Odyssey	500	K-8	19 FTE ⁵⁶ 14 PTE ⁵⁷	3 FTE ⁵⁸	1 PTE (12 hours per week)

⁵³ Basehor-Linwood has access to all local district services as needed.

⁵⁴ Employees are contracted and paid hourly.

⁵⁵ In addition to its full time staff, the Internet Academy also contracts with Federal Way School District teachers on a part-time, as needed bases.

⁵⁶ Some elementary teachers are contract to Odyssey's management company.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Secondary teachers are employed by the Odyssey's management company.

Support Staff

<i>School Name</i>	<i>Total Student Enrollment</i>	<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Guidance Counselor</i>	<i>Nurse</i>	<i>School Psychologist</i>	<i>Technology Support</i>	<i>Clerical</i>	<i>Other</i>
Basehor-Linwood ⁵⁹	376	K-12				3 FTE	1 FTE	
Choice 2000	203	7-12				2FTE	3 FTE	
ECOT	2,848	K-12	4 FTE	1 FTE	1 PTE (contracted)	1 FTE	12 FTE	
FVS	3,634	9-12	2 FTE			6 FTE 2 PTE (14 hours a week) 1 PTE ⁶⁰ (10 hours per week)	7 FTE	7 Other
Internet Academy	430	K-12				1 PTE (30 hours per week)	1 FTE 1 PTEPTE (32.5 hours per week)	
Odyssey	500	K-8		1 PTE (4 hours per week)	1 PTE (16 hours per week)	1 PTE ⁶¹ (20 hours per week)	2 FTE ⁶² 1 PTE ⁶³ (10 hours per week)	

⁵⁹ Basehor-Linwood has access to all local district services as needed.

⁶⁰ Employee is contracted.

⁶¹ Contracted to management company.

⁶² Ibid.

With the exception of one part-time substitute, all benchmarked schools' teachers are certified in their respective states. The education level of each school's teachers is summarized in the table below.

<i>School Name</i>	<i>Total # of Teachers</i>	<i>Not Certified</i>	<i>State Certified</i>	<i>Bachelors</i>	<i>Masters</i>	<i>Doctorate</i>
Basehor-Linwood	35	0	35	25	10	0
Choice 2000	15	0	15	10	3	2
ECOT ⁶⁴	66	0	66	N/A	N/A	N/A
FVS	71	0	71	25	43	3
Internet Academy	12.5	0	12.5	5	7.5	
Odyssey ⁶⁵	32	1 part-time substitute	32	20	12	0

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ ECOT did not have teacher educational background data available at the time of this study.

⁶¹ The three Odyssey secondary teachers are working with middle school students, but are teaching all subject areas.

⁶⁵ The three Odyssey secondary teachers are working with middle school students, but are teaching all subject areas.

Four of the six peer districts provided budget information. Following is the estimated per pupil expenditure for those four schools for school year 2001-2002.

<i>School Name</i>	<i>Number of Students</i>	<i>Full time Students only</i>	<i>Full and part-time students</i>	<i>Total Operating Budget</i>	<i>Estimated per pupil expenditure</i>
Odyssey	500	Yes		\$2,298,965	\$4,598
Choice 2000	225 ⁶⁶	Yes		\$943,571	\$4,194
Basehor-Linwood	376 ⁶⁷		Yes	\$1,139,656	\$3,031
Internet Academy	430		Yes	\$1,255,000	\$2,919

All peers benchmarked have per pupil expenditures lower than Pennsylvania's lowest per pupil expenditure (PA's per pupil expenditures range from \$4,989 - \$7,015). Potential explanations for lower peer per pupil expenditures are summarized in the table below.

⁶⁶ Budgeted figure. Currently Choice 2000 has 203 students enrolled.

⁶⁷ 356 students are full time; 20 are part-time. For the purpose of this assessment, Basehor-Linwood provided student demographic information for full-time students only.

Cost Drivers⁶⁸

	<i>PA Cyber Charter Schools</i>	<i>Benchmarked Schools</i>
Full/Part-time enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Full time enrollment only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Full and part-time (two schools) enrollment ▪ Full time only (two schools)
Years of Operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Average = one year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Average=five years.
Provision of Student Services and Special Education Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All provide student support services. ▪ Type of services vary by school. ▪ Support services personnel on staff or contract with local IU's and districts. ▪ All accommodate special education students. ▪ Provide and/or contract special education services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most do not provide student support services. ▪ Utilize services provided by local district. ▪ One peer has part-time nurse and school psychologist. ▪ Not all provide special education accommodations.
Provision of Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All schools provide at least a computer. ▪ Some provide an internet service provider and additional technology (i.e., printer, scanner, fax). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One peer school provides students with a computer. ▪ Two peers provide computers to economically disadvantaged students.

An explanation of the potential cost drivers is provided below.

It is important to note that peer schools have been in operation for an average of five years. Odyssey, the newest peer school is entering its third year of operation; the oldest school, Choice 2000, is in its seventh. As a result, peer schools do not have the start-up costs that PA cyber charter schools currently have. The majority of PA schools are in their first year of operation and have not yet had time to reduce their learning curve and streamline their operations.

Lower per pupil expenditures can also be related to the type of students served and the service levels provided by peer schools. Choice 2000 and Odyssey serve full time students only, where as Basehor-Linwood and the Internet Academy serve both full and part-time students. The per pupil expenditure for schools serving both full and part-time students can not be directly compared to the per pupil expenditure of schools serving only full time students.

⁶⁸ Only addresses peer schools who provided budget information.

Odyssey is the only peer school that either contracts with or has student support personnel other than technology and clerical support on staff (part time nurse and school psychologist). Basehor-Linwood and Choice 2000 do not provide special education accommodations (special education information for the Internet Academy was not provided). Basehor-Linwood and the Internet Academy recommend that students maintain a relationship with their local district for support services not provided by their school. Thus these additional costs related to the services provided by their local school are not included in their budget.

Unlike PA cyber schools, only one of the four peer schools (Basehor-Linwood) provides its students with a computer.⁶⁹ However, Basehor-Linwood does not provide its students with additional technology (i.e., printer), an internet service provider or an additional phone line like most PA cyber charter schools. All peer schools provide their students with supplemental materials (i.e., workbooks, lab materials).

⁶⁹ Two peer schools will provide financially challenged students with the necessary technology.

Best Practices

KPMG Consulting also documented some of the best practices of both Pennsylvania cyber charter schools and the peer districts benchmarked for this report to enable the current cyber schools to benefit from each other and better serve Pennsylvania students.

Assessment and Accountability

- Cyber school teachers are arranged regionally to facilitate face-to-face interaction with their students.
- Cyber school teachers have at least one face-to-face meeting with their students per month (planned outing, lab hours, home visit). These meetings could serve as a method of socialization for students and as an additional accountability method for schools.
- In order to ensure student authenticity of work, cyber charter schools require students to take proctored mid-term and final exams.
- Cyber schools participate in pre and post testing to track student progress.
- In addition to online and proctored assessments, cyber schools utilize project based assessments that can be physically sent to the teacher.
- Upon enrolling a student, the cyber school requires the parent/guardian to sign an agreement stating a parent/guardian will be available to the student while working on the school's curriculum. Signing this agreement also signifies that a parent will be available to speak with the child's teacher once a week. Parents who do not communicate with the school on a weekly basis may be subject to the state truancy fine of \$300.
- Cyber schools require weekly conference calls between the cyber charter staff and student so the staff member can discuss the student's assignments and note the degree to which learning is taking place.
- Cyber schools are not required to enroll students full time, but are able to also offer supplemental instruction to students and local districts.
- Cyber schools prepare an adaptation of the Federal IDEA as it pertains to the cyber learning environment. Specific areas that require clarification may include the appropriateness of cyber education for special needs students and accommodation requirements for cyber charter schools.
- Some cyber schools require planning time for new cyber charter applicants before enrolling students to ensure that a quality educational program and staff have been put in place.

Governance and Oversight

- Founding coalition members conduct a needs assessment prior to establishing a virtual school to determine what education needs are not being met by traditional public schools across the state that may be able to be met by the cyber school.
- Cyber charter school governing boards are geographically diverse to better represent the school's student population.
- Governing boards include parent representation.

Communication and Customer Relations

- Cyber schools provide students and families with toll free access to curriculum and technology support.
- In order to improve customer responsiveness and satisfaction, cyber schools require teachers to respond to student inquiries, questions and problems within 24 hours of initial contact.
- Cyber school teachers establish weekly office hours so students and families are aware of and can make use of teacher availability.
- In order to better manage parent/student expectations, cyber schools clearly identify and communicate the target population of their schools as well as the schools' capabilities. In addition, schools clearly define their expectation of the role of the parent in the child's education.
- Cyber teachers clearly define expectations for coursework completion in order to help students better manage their time and education (i.e., provide each student with a course completion schedule).
- Internal and external surveys are used to gauge the adequacy of the school's instructional program and administrative operations.

Partnerships

- Cyber schools pursue federal, state and philanthropic grant opportunities to complement state and local funding and expand the opportunities they offer their students.
- Cyber schools seek to establish corporate partnerships to gain technical and educational benefits (e.g., World Book Encyclopedia, IBM).
- Cyber schools seek to establish partnerships with local community organizations to compliment their students' physical education, fine arts and humanities coursework.
- When enrolling new students and notifying local districts of student enrollment, cyber charter schools do the following in order to eliminate confusion and improve relationships with local school districts:

1. Require new students to withdraw from their home school district prior to enrolling in the cyber school.
 2. Once enrolled, the school sends the home school superintendent a letter explaining that one or more of his/her students has enrolled in cyber charter school. The letter also should explain the school's billing process.
 3. The cyber school sends the home school district a bill as well as the following supporting information: proof of residency, copy of withdraw form, validated attendance record and IEP cover letter, if applicable.
- In order to improve relations with local school districts, cyber schools to establish partnerships with them. For example, cyber schools offer local districts a discounted fixed price if the local district agrees to provide services to cyber students (i.e., physical education, special education). In addition, these partnerships are expanded to include shared professional development activities, resources and technology training.

Curriculum and Staff Development

- Cyber charter schools establish a "Peer Review Team" to evaluate online courses for vigor, content and quality. Specific criteria with which to evaluate third party curriculum providers are established to guide the review process.
- Cyber schools create an in-house training and mentoring program for new teachers to get acquainted with the existing curriculum before they are expected to teach students and/or develop courses themselves.
- A comprehensive teacher evaluation plan is created to help ensure teacher accountability. Teachers are evaluated based upon an individually created growth plan that is aligned with the overall mission of the school. The growth plan, which is collaboratively developed by the teacher and principal, should include specific action steps, benchmarks and timelines. This plan is also used to guide the teacher's individual professional development goals.