Virtual Schools in Five Key States Show Growth but Poor Performance

Key Takeaway: Case studies from the Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute suggest that policymakers should prioritize understanding and improving virtual school performance before permitting further growth.

Find Documents:
Press Release: http://nepc.info/node/8721

Contact:
NEPC: William J. Mathis: (802) 383-0058, wmathis@sover.net
MVLRI Report – Research: Michael K. Barbour: (203) 997-6330, mkbarbour@gmail.com
MVLRI Report – Performance: Gary Miron: (269) 599-7965, gary.miron@wmich.edu
MVLRI Report – Policy: Luis Huerta: (212) 678-4199, huerta@tc.columbia.edu

BOULDER, CO (June 27, 2017) – Over the past five years, the National Education Policy Center (NEPC) has produced an annual report called *Virtual Schools in the U.S.: Politics, Performance, Policy, and Research Evidence*. These reports provide an impartial analysis of the evolution of full-time, publicly funded K-12 virtual and blended schools by examining the policy issues raised by available evidence. They also assess the research evidence that bears on K-12 virtual teaching and learning, and they analyze the growth and performance of such virtual and blended schools.

Building on the April release of the *Virtual Schools in the U.S. 2017* report, the lead researchers have engaged with the Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute (MVLRI) to use the data set to undertake a more in-depth analysis of five states: Ohio, Wisconsin, Idaho, Washington, and Michigan. The MVLRI published that work today.

These case studies describe the enrollment, characteristics, and performance of virtual and blended schools in each state over the previous year. They also examine the research related to the virtual and blended school characteristics and outcomes, as well as the legislative activities. And they consider the legislation and policies that have been introduced (and enacted) over the past two years.

Based on a national data set, the April NEPC *Virtual Schools in the U.S. 2017* report included two key findings: (1) that the growth of full-time virtual schools was fueled, in part, by policies expanding school choice, and (2) that this growth is seen most among the for-profit education management organizations (EMOs) that dominate this sector. All five states follow these national trends. Also, and again consistent

with national trends, students that attend the virtual schools in these five states tended to perform quite poorly compared to their brick-and-mortar counterparts.

At the same time, these case studies revealed that the enrollment demographics in each of these states did vary from the national trends. For example, Ohio and Michigan brick-and-mortar schools and virtual schools enrolled similar proportions of White students and students of color (bucking the national trend which found that the majority of students attending virtual charter schools were White), while Idaho and Michigan enrolled higher proportions of free and reduced lunch students (which was the opposite to the national average). Another distinction highlighted by the case studies is that one of the states – Michigan – has seen considerable research into the actual practice of K-12 online learning, and this evidence-based approach appears to be paying off for the Michigan Virtual School.

Find *Virtual Schools in the U.S.: Case Studies of Policy, Performance, and Research Evidence*, by Michael K. Barbour, Luis Huerta, and Gary Miron, at:
http://media.mivu.org/institute/pdf/VSCase-17.pdf

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https://mvlri.org/

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