

## ASKED & ANSWERED

# Why should you support full-time virtual charter school accountability?

*Full-time virtual charter schools provide many families with the choice and freedom to pursue an alternative educational environment that meets their unique needs. Unfortunately, not all full-time virtual charter schools perform well and more and more advocates in the school choice community are calling for increased accountability to ensure these schools set students on the path to a bright future. Here are some common questions and concerns raised about full-time virtual charter school accountability and explanations for why reform is needed:*

**Q** Isn't parental choice all we need?

**A** Parent perception matters greatly, but it is not sufficient, and could be dangerously misleading. Ninety percent of parents believe that their children are reading at or above grade level, in reality only 34 percent actually are. Should we not insist on stronger reading requirements because parents think their child is fine? Of course not. Good accountability systems take into account a number of factors, including data on student growth and performance, and give parents the freedom to choose a school that excels and meets their student's needs.

It is important that schools are not over-regulated and are given the freedom to be responsive to the needs of their students, but that doesn't mean there should be no regulation whatsoever — government-funded schools have an obligation to be accountable to taxpayers. Full-time virtual charter schools are opened and operate under existing charter school laws that are based on the charter school bargain: greater freedom for greater accountability.

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**Q** What about individual students who do well in full-time virtual charter schools? Will more accountability harm them?

**A** Full-time virtual charter schools are a great fit for some students and those students should continue to have the option to attend school online full-time. The accountability measures we are proposing are aimed at strengthening the schools so that students who are a great fit continue to thrive and that the schools have an incentive to make sure that students who aren't thriving get the help they need to be successful.

**Q** Why should full-time virtual charter schools be subject to accountability requirements above and beyond that of brick-and-mortar charter schools? That's not fair.

**A** What's fair is what's right for children. Though there are success stories among full-time virtual charter schools, the data show that these schools do not perform as well as their brick and mortar counterparts, and many perform much worse. The accountability provisions we propose are in direct response to the reports and studies that highlight these specific performance challenges in full-time virtual charter schools. These provisions will help strengthen these schools and provide better results for students. Full-time virtual charter schools have unique challenges and call for special requirements that take their model into account. We want students to continue to have full-time virtual charter schools as an option, but we want to make sure students—and taxpayers—are well-served.

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- Q** Aren't accountability measures that rely on aggregate data and test-based accountability limited?
- A** Yes. There are many factors that should be considered when crafting an accountability system that makes sense for students, families, and taxpayers. We suggest that full-time virtual charters should be held accountable for metrics that take into account the unique nature of their models.
- Q** Full-time virtual charter schools take some of the hardest to teach students. Why would we "punish" them with more accountability?
- A** Because full-time virtual charter schools sometimes serve unique student populations – including those who have been bullied, were on the verge of dropping out, or had previously struggled academically – it is even more important that these students are in an environment that sets them up for success. Full-time virtual charter schools must be willing to provide the necessary support and assistance these student populations need and updated accountability standards will help make sure these schools are prepared to meet those challenges.
- Q** Aren't the groups advocating for more accountability just progressive groups?
- A** This is not a liberal or conservative issue. Furthermore, it is not "conservative" to allow taxpayer money to be sent to public schools that are not preparing their students for a successful future, no matter what kind of public school that is. When a full-time virtual charter school applies to the government for permission to receive taxpayer funds, the school agrees to meet minimum government standards aimed at ensuring taxpayers are getting their money's worth and that public school students are well-served. Allowing schools that cannot meet that basic standard to remain open is something we complain that "liberals" support. You cannot be for closure of bad schools in one situation and not the other.

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