

# **SUMMARY OF VIRTUAL SCHOOLS SURVEY TO DIVISION SUPERINTENDENTS**

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*House Appropriations Committee*

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# Recent Legislative Action for Virtual Schools

General Assembly has been working on this initiative for several years with on-going discussions and various legislation toward developing state policy for Virtual Schools

- **2010 Session:** Adopted legislation required the state superintendent to establish standards and an approval process to develop virtual school programs around the Commonwealth
  - Virtual schools would use approved Board of Education (BOE) online educational providers that are contracted with a school division
  - Virtual schools would use teachers licensed by the BOE
  - Department of Education (DOE) would have to provide information for online learning options for parents on its website
  - By FY 2012, school divisions would have to post information about their online courses and programs on their websites

# Adopted Legislative Action

- **2012 Session:**

- Legislation was adopted that required the BOE to distribute the regulations that established standards for accreditation of public virtual schools that enroll students on a full time basis

# Overview & Purpose of the Virtual School Survey

- In preparation for the 2014 Session, an Appropriations staff survey was sent to all school division superintendents to request their input and comments on Virtual Schools and on-line learning
  - Given the differences between the school divisions, having an overall prospective from the superintendents' viewpoint on virtual learning could be useful if legislation is proposed
- Out of the 132 superintendents, 70 (53%), responded to the survey – those that did respond represented a good cross section
  - Divisions from rural and urban areas
  - Student membership sizes – (range in ADM)
  - Local composite index or relative ability to pay for education

# Conducted a Short Survey to Ask Superintendents the Following Questions

- Does your division offer a virtual school option?

No	Yes
32	38

10 use school staff to administer program

13 use an outside vendor

15 use a combination of both school personnel and vendor

- What types of virtual courses are offered?
  - Wide range of options: all core classes, electives, AP, foreign languages such as Chinese, Arabic & Latin, and credit recovery courses
  - Although courses were available, not all classes had students enrolled on an on-going basis
- Virtual school student data:
  - Reported enrollment range from a few as 2 students to as many as 1,400
  - There was no relationship between a division's ADM compared to the number of students enrolled in a virtual course – on average the virtual enrollment was about 2% (ranged from <1% up to 10%)
  - 6 divisions reported home-schooled students – only 1 or 2 per grade
  - 4 divisions enrolled non-resident students from surrounding localities

# Virtual School Options

- For the 32 divisions not providing a virtual option, is there any interest in the future?
  - 18 indicated that they may pursue
  - 14 had no interest

Other virtual option questions included:

<u>Should the State:</u>	Yes	No	Un-decided	No Answer
Require every division to offer a local virtual school option?	23	45	0	2
Create a single state-wide Virtual School for divisions to participate?	38	25	4	3
Make it mandatory that divisions participate in a state-wide Virtual School?	4	50	1	15

# Virtual Courses – Standards of Quality:

- Should there be a maximum number of students enrolled in a virtual course? If yes – what would you recommend as a maximum?
  - Majority, 69% agreed with setting a maximum cap
  - For those that agreed with having a maximum class size – the results were somewhat evenly divided into:
    - 27% suggested using the current SOQ ratios
    - 25% indicated either +/- 5 students relative to SOQ
    - 23% suggested a range between 35-150 students per course
    - Remaining 'yes' responses were undecided on a specific maximum

# Responsibility for Student Testing and Grading

- For a division offering a virtual option, where should the virtual student's SOL test results be counted?
  - Include with all other students: 15 (21%)
  - Separate virtual school category: 49 (70%)
  - Undecided / no answer: 6 (8%)

Other testing related questions:

Should virtual students be required to take:	Yes	No	Un-decided	No Answer
Same SOL tests that students enrolled in regular education curriculum take?	67	3	-	-
Be tested in proctored / supervised setting similar to regular education test environment?	62	4	-	4

# Responsibility for Student Testing and Grading: Other testing related questions

What Locality should be responsible or held accountable for:	Hosting Division	Resident Division	Other	Un-decided	No Answer
Providing a testing site for virtual students?	44	12	3	2	9
Non-resident virtual student test scores?	48	13	3	2	4
Reporting a virtual student that drops out of school?	41	19	5	1	4
Issuing a virtual student's high school diploma?	44	16	2	4	4

# Virtual School Funding Options

- Should state funding be allocated to participating divisions for tuition-based payments similar to the way used to calculate funding for Governor's Schools?
  - Just over half, 56% said 'yes' and 34% disagreed with the proposed funding option
- Should each division be permitted to establish their own funding option(s)?
  - Another potentially favorable funding option – with 56% reporting that their division should be given latitude to determine their own funding methodology for a virtual program
  - About 26% of the responses did not support a local funding choice
  - Just under 20% were either undecided or gave no answer
- Should a division be able to include a non-resident student in ADM in lieu of any tuition payments?
  - 49% reported that they would support that as funding model
  - 46% didn't think that would be a viable method

# Virtual School Funding Option

## Suggestions from Divisions

- While the submitted comments and suggestions were diverse, they basically fell into some major categories:
  - Virtual students should be counted in resident division's ADM and the state should provide an additional supplement for those enrolled students
    - Suggested examples were the Virtual Virginia, Governor's School tuition and CTE course funding
  - State funding based on partial ADM – split between regular and virtual course work
  - Hosting division should contract with DOE approved vendor
  - Non-resident student's division would pay tuition for enrollment in courses in another division
  - DOE could offer a single statewide program for optional participation but not establish a separate virtual school division

# Summary of Comments from Divisions Regarding the Development of State Policy

- Lastly, division superintendents were asked to briefly describe how virtual learning has been incorporated into the classroom curriculum
  - 59% of responses described their virtual program as a blended or personalized learning approach and is used to supplement the regular education curriculum courses and gives students another option to fulfill graduation requirements
  - Some use virtual courses primarily for alternative education to provide courses for credit or unit recovery and suspended or expelled students
  - Many use Virtual Virginia courses for AP, world languages, economics and personal finance, other types of classes that are not offered in the student's school
  - Several divisions have students enrolled in virtual classes taught at community colleges, Linwood Holton and Blue Ridge Virtual Governor's Schools

# Final Thoughts for Virtual Learning

- In summary, the reoccurring message conveyed by the divisions seemed to be that virtual learning provides the schools with another way to help students be academically successful regardless of the pathway they may choose to graduate from high school
- It would be beneficial if the state provided a general framework that reflected the different levels/categories for virtual learning:
  - Blended approach – majority regular classroom environment with 1 or 2 virtual courses
  - Virtual scheduling – more evenly split towards a 50%/50% between regular & virtual
  - Virtual School – all courses taken on-line and no brick-and-mortar classroom time
- State funding could reflect the different virtual learning options and allocate based on student enrollments and number of courses offered



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