Charter Schools vs. Cyber-Charter Schools

What is the difference?

Charter School

An independent public school established and operated under a charter from the local school board. These schools focus on teacher-led discussion imparted to students through face-to-face interaction at the schools' physical facilities.

Cyber-Charter School

An independent public school established and operated under a charter from PDE in which the school uses technology to deliver a significant portion of instruction to its students. Instruction is handled virtually, without a requirement that students be present at a supervised physical facility, except on a very limited basis, such as for standardized testing.

Key Points:

1. **Tuition is not free! It is paid for by tax dollars** being sent from public school districts to the charter and cyber-charter schools.

2. Under the charter school law, tuition payments are calculated based on the budgeted expenditures of the student's school district of residence, rather than on the charter and cyber-charter school's cost to educate a student.

3. Charter and cyber-charter schools accept students from all 500 school districts. Since the tuition rates are based on each student's school district of residence (versus the actual charter and cyber-charter costs), there are typically 500 different basic education tuition rates and 500 different special education tuition rates.

4. In 2018-19, PA charter and cyber-charter schools received, on average, $11,858 per regular education student and $25,899 per special education student from Lancaster and Lebanon county school districts.

5. School districts in Lancaster and Lebanon counties can **provide in-house cyber education at a cost that is approximately 60% less** than what they are paying to outside cyber-charter schools.

6. **In 2017-18, Lancaster and Lebanon county schools spent $21.7M on charter and cyber-charter education costs.**

7. A school district pays a charter and cyber-charter school the same rate for each child with special needs, based on the school district's prior year expenditures, regardless of student differences in educational need, cost, or services provided. (PSBA)

8. Special education tuition payments paid by the public school districts do not have to be spent entirely on special education expenses by charter and cyber-charter schools.

9. In almost all cases, school district costs are not reduced when students attend charter and cyber-charter schools.

10. **The average fund balance for Pennsylvania cyber-charter schools is currently 22.31%.**

"It is time that we seriously consider ending the way charter schools are funded in Pennsylvania."
~ *Pennsylvania Auditor General*

A Closer Look at the Data:

Chart 1: Academic Performance
According to the Future Ready PA Index, only one cyber-charter school met/exceeded the statewide averages on the 2018 PA State Assessments. The remaining cyber-charter schools were below the statewide averages.

Chart 2: School Performance Profile (SPP)
The SPP provides a school-level academic score for public schools, charter and cyber-charter schools, and full-time comprehensive career and technical centers. According to PDE, a score of 70 is considered passing. None of the cyber-charters obtained this score.

Chart 3: ESSA School Designations
Pennsylvania's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) examines multiple years of academic and non-academic evidence to provide stakeholders with information on progress for schools and student groups. Based on this data, schools may be designated as needing Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) or Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI).

Schools designated as CSI are facing the most significant challenges in academic achievement and considered among Pennsylvania's lowest performing schools.

1. Academic Performance
(Cyber-Charter Schools)

Cyber-Charter School 2018 PA State Assessments - Percentage Advanced/Proficient (All Students)	English Language Arts/ Literature	Math/ Algebra	Science/ Biology
21st Century Cyber	66.7	45.1	56.8
Achievement House	44.9	21.6	28.9
ACT Academy Cyber	13.6	4.6	4.6
Agora Cyber	37.5	12.8	34.4
ASPIRA Bilingual Cyber Charter School	21.1	7.8	11.8
Central PA Digital Learning Foundation	20.0	9.3	20.0
Commonwealth Charter Academy	43.1	16.8	38.6
Esperanza Cyber	24.0	5.3	27.5
Insight PA Cyber	35.8	7.3	29.6
Pennsylvania Cyber	45.3	22.8	45.3
Pennsylvania Distance Learning	28.7	8.9	32.5
Pennsylvania Leadership	54.6	31.1	55.2
Pennsylvania Virtual	50.4	22.4	45.2
Reach Cyber	36.0	11.3	32.5
Susq-Cyber	IS	IS	IS
PA Statewide Average (All schools)	**61.4**	**42.1**	**64.8**

IS: Insufficient Sample

2. School Performance Profile Scores
(Cyber-Charter Schools)

A score of 70 is considered passing.

Cyber-Charter School	2017	2018
21st Century Cyber	61.1	65.6
Achievement House	52.7	51.4
ACT Academy Cyber	36.5	22.0
Agora Cyber	47.9	53.2
ASPIRA Bilingual Cyber Charter School	37.4	50.4
Central PA Digital Learning Foundation	46.4	36.6
Commonwealth Charter Academy	45.5	56.0
Esperanza Cyber	35.5	46.8
Insight PA Cyber	NA	50.2
Pennsylvania Cyber	49.9	50.3
Pennsylvania Distance Learning	39.4	43.3
Pennsylvania Leadership	57.0	58.4
Pennsylvania Virtual	54.2	66.4
Reach Cyber	44.8	41.1
Susq-Cyber	46.0	28.8

3. ESSA School Designations
(Cyber-Charter Schools)

CSI: Schools facing the most significant challenges in academic achievement.
ATSI: Schools in which performance by one or more student groups is at or below the level of the CSI schools.

School	Designation
21st Century Cyber	ATSI
Achievement House	CSI
ACT Academy Cyber	CSI
Agora Cyber	CSI
ASPIRA Bilingual Cyber Charter School	CSI
Central PA Digital Learning Foundation	CSI
Commonwealth Charter Academy	CSI
Esperanza Cyber	CSI
Insight PA Cyber	NA
Pennsylvania Cyber	CSI
Pennsylvania Distance Learning	CSI
Pennsylvania Leadership	ATSI
Pennsylvania Virtual	NA
Reach Cyber	CSI
Susq-Cyber	CSI