



K12 Inc. Response to Online Charter School Report

October 2015

K12 Inc. respects the work of CREDO, Mathematica, and CRPE. The online charter school study they issued affirmed much of what K12 has known about the demographics of students who transfer to full-time online schools. These students are generally more at-risk, more economically disadvantaged, and more likely to enter online charters after having struggled or failed in traditional schools. The study also made it clear that tens of thousands of students in online charter schools are succeeding. The study relies on older state standardized test data from before 2012.

However, the “virtual twin” methodology in the study, which attempts to compare performance of students who transferred to online charter schools to that of students in traditional schools, does not control or account for several key factors unique to typical full-time, statewide online public charter schools, including: persistence and performance over time, date of enrollment, the effect of mobility, and the reasons why children leave their local school.

Because the study does not include those important factors, it cannot accurately match or “twin” students who transfer to online charter schools with those who stay in traditional schools. They are very different students.

Nevertheless, we understand the academic challenges that face online charter schools, and we have taken vigorous actions over the past two years to meet these challenges with results not reflected in this study. We have invested millions of dollars into new academic initiatives, instructional and assessment programs, teacher hiring and training, and student support services, all for one purpose: improving students’ academic outcomes. We are making progress, as noted in our annual [Academic Report](#) and multiple [published reports](#) on individual school progress and the effectiveness of new instructional programs. State test results have recently stabilized or improved in key areas. Several K12-managed schools have improved performance and outcomes, and perform well compared to demographically similar school districts. Students are achieving significantly better results over time, demonstrating the positive impact of persistence.

Our operations have also dramatically changed over the past two years to focus on student success. We have worked with our nonprofit school partners, who set the enrollment policies, to improve outreach and enrollment processes to reach students who are likely to succeed in an online learning instructional model, and to help all parents make well-informed choices. These changes were made in careful compliance with state and federal laws that prohibit public schools from restricting access to students based on academic or socio-economic status. The result is K12 has measured its overall student

enrollment growth. Additionally, we are investing in programs to assist new students as they transition to the online school setting, and especially in resources to support students identified as at-risk.

Statewide online charter schools are very different kind of schools with distinctive characteristics. **Their academic performance expectations should be put into context.** They will not have the same test scores as schools in high-funded districts with favorable demographics, or self-selecting schools, or boutique charters. Many families choose online schools because they are fleeing a school or situation that wasn't working for their child, often in distress, or because of other reasons – bullying, special needs, medical issues, social or emotional challenges, safety concerns, academic problems, etc. For many families, online schools are schools of last resort, the *only* available public school alternative, thus fulfilling a critical need within the public education system.

Public policy involving online charter schools must reflect this reality. Policy recommendations, however well-intended, that create more regulations and arbitrary new mandates, or (even worse) restrict parent choice and discriminate against students based on academic history or “at-risk” status should be rejected.

We are proud of where we are today and where we are going. Our company has created new jobs and opportunities for thousands of teachers, graduated more than 15,000 students since 2007, and provided high-quality curriculum, technology, academic programs and services to more than 2,000 school districts and charter schools nationwide. We respect parent choice and believe that all children should have access to school options that meet their need. Our mission remains to provide every child an exceptional education regardless of academic, geographic, or socio-economic circumstance. We are a company of educators dedicated and committed to putting students first.