



ATPE input on Virtual Schools

SB 380, SB 947, SB 1455, SB 2244

April 4, 2019



The **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)** appreciates this opportunity to express our opposition to SB 380, SB 947, SB 1455, and SB 2244 as filed.

Each of these bills would have the effect of expanding full-time virtual school programs, which a growing body of evidence indicates are a poor substitute for brick-and-mortar classrooms. The data show that students enrolled in full-time virtual schools regularly underperform their peers enrolled in traditional classroom settings. For these reasons, ATPE opposes any further expansion at this time.

Full-time virtual school programs in Texas have been consistently plagued by performance issues. About 88 percent of the state’s total full-time virtual enrollment, roughly 8,400 students, are served by two providers: Texas Connections Academy, which has been labeled “improvement required” (IR) for three of the last six years, and Texas Virtual Academy, whose campuses have been either not rated or listed as meeting “alternative” standards. The table below shows a failure rate for virtual schools far above their brick-and-mortar counterparts. By comparison, just 5.1 percent of campuses statewide were rated improvement required in 2016.

	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
iUniversity Prep Campus ID 220906007	87/100 Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	No Data
Responsive Education Virtual Learning Campus ID 221801022	55/100 Improve- ment Required	Improve- ment Required	Improve- ment Required	Met Standard	Improve- ment Required	Improve- ment Required
Texas Connections Academy at Houston Campus ID 101912100	68/100 Met Standard	Improve- ment Required	Improve- ment Required	Improve- ment Required	Met Standard	Met Standard
Texas Online Preparatory School Elementary Campus ID 236902108	59/100 Improve- ment Required	Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	No Data
Texas Online Preparatory Middle School Campus ID 236902048	75/100 Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	Improve- ment Required	No Data
Texas Online Preparatory School High School	76/100 Met	Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	No Data

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Campus ID 236902008	Standard					
Texas Virtual Academy Campus ID 072801145	85/100 Met Alternative Standard	Met Alternative Standard	Met Alternative Standard	No Data	No Data	No Data
Texas Virtual Academy at Hallsville ID 102904010	No Data	No Data	Not Rated	Not Rated	No Data	No Data

University research and government audits of programs in other states tell similar stories:

- Wisconsin: “Virtual charter school pupils’ **median scores on the mathematics** section of the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination were **almost always lower than statewide medians** during the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years.” ([2015, Legislative Audit Bureau](#))
- Colorado: “**Half** of the online students **wind up leaving within a year**. When they do, they’re **often further behind academically** than when they started.” ([2015 I-News Network](#))
- National: “Across all tested students in online charters, the typical academic gains for math are -0.25 standard deviations (**equivalent to 180 fewer days of learning**) and -0.10 (**equivalent to 72 fewer days**) for reading.” ([2015, Stanford CREDO](#))
- National: “Students at K12 Inc., the nation’s largest virtual school company, are **falling further behind** in reading and math scores than students in brick-and-mortar schools.” ([2012, National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado Boulder](#))

Many of the concerns regarding virtual schools involve lack of vendor accountability. Until vendors that provide and manage full-time virtual programs can be held to account for substandard performance, limiting the number of potential district and charter school hosts is the only way to effectively track or control performance under the current system.

This testimony applies to the bills as filed, and ATPE understands that one or more committee substitutes are under consideration – including changes that may seek to track student performance at the vendor level and block vendors who fail to provide an acceptable level of education under the state’s accountability system from continued access to Texas students. Such a provision would be a welcome addition to the state’s virtual education framework. The elimination of bad actors might lead to a scenario where any remaining programs could be identified as high quality and potentially expanded.

Furthermore, a study as proposed under SB 2244 by Sen. Paxton could be a good first step as a standalone provision, provided that it incorporate educator input and eliminate subsection (c) under Section 5 of the bill, which would require the commissioner to increase virtual network participation. This provision threatens to bias the otherwise neutral aim of the study. We look forward to working with Chairman Taylor and any authors considering substitute or amendment language that would make positive changes to the current virtual school system without expanding it.

For the above reasons, we respectfully ask you to **oppose SB 380, SB 947, SB 1455, and SB 2244 as filed**. For additional information, contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or government@atpe.org.

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