

Today the National Education Policy Center released its annual review of research on virtual charter schools. The bottom line was not good.

The title of the report is “Virtual Schools in the U.S. 2019.” It was double blind peer-reviewed.

The authors write:

The number of virtual schools in the

U.S. continues to grow.

In 2017-18, 501 full-time virtual schools enrolled 297,712 students, and 300 blended schools enrolled 132,960. Enrollments in virtual schools increased by more than 2,000 students between 2016-17 and 2017-18, and enrollments in blended learning schools increased by over 16,000 during this same time period. Virtual schools enrolled substantially fewer minority students and fewer low-income students compared to national public school enrollment.

Virtual schools operated by for-profit EMOs were more than four times as large as other virtual schools, enrolling an average of 1,345 students. In contrast, those operated by nonprofit EMOs enrolled an average of 344 students, and independent virtual schools (not affiliated with an EMO) enrolled an average of 320 students.

Among virtual schools, far more district-operated schools achieved acceptable state school performance ratings (56.7% acceptable) than charter-operated schools (40.8%). More schools without EMO involvement (i.e., independent) performed well (59.3% acceptable ratings), compared with 50% acceptable ratings for schools operated by nonprofit EMOs, and only 29.8% acceptable ratings for schools operated by for-profit EMOs. The pattern among blended learning schools was similar with highest performance by district schools and lowest performance by the subgroup of schools operated by for-profit EMOs.

Given the overwhelming evidence of poor performance by full-time virtual and blended learning schools it is recommended that policymakers:

- Slow or stop the growth in the number of virtual and blended schools and the size of

their enrollments until the reasons for their relatively poor performance have been identified and addressed.

- Implement measures that require virtual and blended schools to reduce their student-to-teacher ratios.
- Enforce sanctions for virtual and blended schools that perform inadequately.
- Sponsor research on virtual and blended learning “programs” and classroom innovations within traditional public schools and districts.

There is much more in the report that deserves your attention, especially regarding the current infatuation with blended learning.

I suggest you read it for yourself.

Here is the citation:

Molnar, A. (Ed.), Miron, G., Elgeberi, N., Barbour, M.K., Huerta, L., Shafer, S.R., Rice, J.K. (2019). Virtual Schools in the U.S. 2019. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved [date] from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/virtual-schools-annual-2019> .