

# Virtual Schools: A Lifeboat, Not a Cruise Ship



The loss of learning that students are experiencing isn't entirely the fault of the digital divide, it has something very much to do with the fact that full-time virtual learning is a lesser model. There is an important place for the responsible use of technology in the classroom, but technology should not be the classroom.

**Students enrolled in full-time virtual schools perform at levels well below their brick-and-mortar counterparts, and it has mattered little by whom the research was conducted. Legislative audit divisions, investigative journalists, policy think tanks, and academic researchers all have consistent results.**

- Although district-operated virtual schools achieve acceptable state performance ratings at rates (56%) higher than either charter-operated (40%) or for-profit (29%) virtual schools, they still perform far below acceptable
- Just 50% of students enrolled in full-time virtual schools have graduated from high school, compared with the national average of 84%
- Across all grades and subjects, students who attend online schools perform worse on state tests than otherwise similar students
- Across all tested students in online charters, the typical academic gains are equivalent to 180 fewer days of learning in math and 72 fewer in reading
- Teachers in virtual schools have nearly three times as many students as the national average

**International organizations that work to shape policies that foster prosperity and opportunity for all have argued that excessive time on a computer is not in the best interest of students.**

*We're at a point where computers are actually hurting learning. Students who use computers very frequently at school do a lot worse in most learning outcomes, even after controlling for student demographics. Anything beyond more than a few hours a week of classroom screen time drops off to diminishing, or even negative returns.*

—The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2015)

**Texas leadership have argued that virtual schools are not in the best interest of students.**

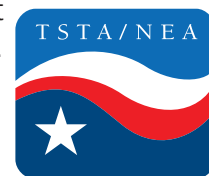
*There is no substitute for in-person learning, both for [students'] educational needs and their mental health.*

—Texas Senate Finance Chair Jane Nelson

*60% of students learning virtually have had a materially worse experience.*

—Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath

Both research and the actual experiences of students during the pandemic resoundingly show that virtual schools are a bad idea. This is an emergency, and we do things differently in an emergency, but beyond a declared state of disaster full-time virtual learning is not in the best interest of students.



**TEXAS STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION • [www.tsta.org](http://www.tsta.org) • 877-ASK-TSTA**