Technology and Innovation Play an Important Role for Texas Students

The effective use of technology has the potential to fundamentally transform the way education is delivered in Texas. Districts across the state are working to better integrate technology and innovative practices in the classroom by utilizing blended learning techniques to effectively train teachers and educate students.

Current Law Promotes Access and Accountability

All Texas students are currently able to access supplemental online courses through the Texas Virtual School Network (TxVSN). These courses provide value for students seeking classes that are not available at their district, or if they have special scheduling needs.

Full-Time Virtual Schools Aren't Academically Proven

In 2013-14, well over half (58.9%) of full-time online schools students were enrolled in a virtual school that did not meet state standards. By comparison, 7.1% of students in traditional public schools were enrolled in a school that did not meet state standards. (See chart on reverse for academic performance of full-time virtual schools over time.)

Policy Considerations for the Future of Virtual Education

- **Retain Local Control for School Districts.** Texas school districts should not be forced to pay for a virtual course that is already offered at the district in the traditional classroom setting with a staffed teacher, nor should they be required to pay a higher premium for a course than current law allows.

- **Virtual Vouchers Are a Bad Idea.** Our focus must remain on adequately and equitably funding all Texas public schools, which educate 94% of school-age children statewide, while providing accountability and transparency for parents and taxpayers. Allowing funds to be siphoned from public schools to for-profit virtual providers would be an inappropriate and ineffective use of taxpayer funds.

- **Limit Full-Time Virtual Schools to Appropriate Grade Levels.** Currently, an important element of quality oversight and accountability lies in requirements tying a provider's payment for the course to successful course completion, including passing required state assessments. If expanded below grade three, there would not be transparency and accountability for student performance in virtual schools since there are no required standardized statewide assessments for those grades.

- **Proceed with Caution on Virtual School Expansion.** Research on the effectiveness of full-time virtual programs is limited, and their track record of performance in Texas is spotty at best. Expansion should be based on consistently meeting state standards. If virtual schools are to succeed in Texas, the state must move decisively to identify and disqualify the providers that do not serve the students well.

- **Shift Focus to Blended Learning.** At its best, blended learning is student-centered learning, both personalized and competency-based. Blended learning occurs in part within a supervised brick-and-mortar location. A student learns in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path and/or pace. Blended learning provides an innovative alternative for students and families, while maintaining a structure for accountability and transparency for the use of public funds.

Full-Time Virtual School Enrollment and Accountability Ratings by School Year

STATEWIDE STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Enrollment by year: 171 (2006–07), 262 (2007–08), 1,440 (2008–09), 3,317 (2009–10), 3,829 (2010–11), 6,209 (2011–12), 8,441 (2012–13), 10,273 (2013–14)

	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	PROVIDER
TEXAS CONNECTIONS ACADEMY (Houston ISD)	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated	Academically Unacceptable	*	Met Standard	Met Standard	PEARSON
TEXAS VIRTUAL ACADEMY (Southwest Charter)	Academically Acceptable	Academically Acceptable	Academically Unacceptable	Academically Acceptable	Academically Unacceptable	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	K-12, INC
IQ ACADEMY / TEXAS VIRTUAL ACADEMY (Responsive Ed Charter)			IQ ACADEMY / TEXAS VIRTUAL ACADEMY**	Not Rated	Academically Acceptable	*	Improvement Required	Improvement Required	K-12, INC
TEXARKANA VIRTUAL ACADEMY (Texarkana ISD)					TEXARKANA VIRTUAL ACADEMY	*	Improvement Required	Met Standard	CALVERT
iUNIVERSITY PREP (Grapevine–Colleyville ISD)							iUNIVERSITY PREP	Met Standard	PEARSON
TX ONLINE PREP EL (Huntsville ISD)							TX ONLINE PREP EL	Met Standard	K-12, INC
TX ONLINE PREP MID (Huntsville ISD)							TX ONLINE PREP MID	Improvement Required	K-12, INC
TX ONLINE PREP HS (Huntsville ISD)							TX ONLINE PREP HS	Met Standard	K-12, INC
iSCHOLARS MAGNET ACADEMY (Red Oaks ISD)							iSCHOLARS MAGNET ACADEMY	Improvement Required	DISTRICT-DEVELOPED

* TEA did not assign ratings for any Texas schools in 2011-12

** IQ Academy was renamed Texas Virtual Academy in 2011-12