



Testimony offered on behalf of:
DR. PETER SANCHIONI
TEC Connections Academy Virtual School

IN SUPPORT OF:
SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations

Senate Education, Health & Economic Affairs Committee

Hearing: 3/18/2021 at 1:00 PM

Good afternoon members of the Senate Education, Health & Economic Affairs Committee. **My name is Peter Sanchioni, Ph.D.** I am the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the TEC Connections Academy (TECCA), Commonwealth Virtual School. I am offering my written testimony today in **SUPPORT** of **SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations** and urge your favorable consideration of this very important legislation that will establish a Statewide virtual public school for students in Maryland.

For background, in 2014 following Massachusetts legislation for virtual schools, my colleagues (public school superintendents) and I established TEC Connections Academy Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual School (TECCA), Massachusetts' premier virtual school. Since its inception, I have served as Chairman of the Board. Thus, I write to you with experience as a virtual school leader and a public-school superintendent.

A few years prior to 2014, Massachusetts had enacted legislation to establish virtual schools. At the onset, Massachusetts had one virtual school and that school failed to produce high-quality results. Acknowledging that as a superintendent who had students from my district attend that school, we set out to establish a second virtual school (TECCA) one that would serve the students of the Commonwealth with great success. Our rationale and belief in virtual schools was based upon:

- Not all students are equipped to attend public schools on our traditional schedule / calendar. Students who suffer from medical issues, pregnancy, athletes who need to train during the day, students who have been bullied and are afraid to come to school, students who are anti-authority, students who simply prefer online learning, all these types of learners needed an alternative setting. TECCA provides an outstanding learning opportunity for these types of students.
- As a public-school superintendent, I witnessed students leave our district (along with the funding) yet I witnessed these students move towards graduation via

TECCA. These were students who were going to end up potentially not graduating and thus negatively impact our graduation rate and/or were going to need extensive and expensive compensatory services like special education. In the end our district benefitted, and these students succeeded.

As you are probably experiencing with distance learning because of COVID, some students thrive in a virtual environment. In a true virtual school, teachers are trained to instruct both synchronously and asynchronously using well developed learning management systems. Thus, a virtual school will provide the students of Maryland, who need or desire this type of learning a school of well-trained educators in virtual learning. Strong consideration should be given to providing that option.

Through our journey as a virtual school in Massachusetts, we have learned many lessons that have helped improve the school annually. We extend an invitation to you to visit or meet with us at any time so that you may benefit from our experiences. For example, two critical areas come to mind that you may want to consider at inception:

1. For assessment purposes (state testing), find a way to allow your students to take that test in their home environment. We have found that asking a virtual student to take a high-stakes test in a new environment does not produce reliable and valid results.
2. Funding: in Massachusetts we started with a flat per pupil fee and quickly realized that the school would fall into a deficit. Legislation was amended to provide the school a per-pupil cost that increases annually based upon inflation.

In closing, I have witnessed first-hand the impact TECCA has brought to the students of Massachusetts. Every year I attend our high school graduation and have watched from a first year of 43 students graduate to grow last year when over 300 students walked the stage. It always strikes me as to how many of these students would never have been there without a virtual education provided through TECCA. I believe you will achieve similar results in Maryland and I therefore urge the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE Report on SB0941.**

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Peter Sanchioni
Chairman of the Board
TEC Connections Academy
Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual School
141 Mansion Drive, Suite 300
East Walpole, MA 02032
(774) 315-5123
petersanchioni@tecca.connectionsacademy.org