



Testimony offered on behalf of:
PEARSON ONLINE & BLENDED LEARNING

IN SUPPORT OF:
HB 1170 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations

House Ways and Means Committee
Hearing 3/3/2021 at 1:30 PM

Good day and thank you Madam Chair and the members of the House Ways and Means Committee for this opportunity to testify on behalf of **House Bill 1170**. My name is **Mickey Revenaugh**. I appear before you today as the **Co-Founder of Connections Academy**, a leading provider of high-quality K-12 online learning home-based right here in Maryland and currently serving nearly 110,000 students across the United States and around the world. Based on my experience over the past two decades in bringing personalized performance learning opportunities to students elsewhere through outstanding virtual public schools, I am profoundly honored to explore with you how to finally make this same opportunity available to children in Maryland. That is why Pearson Online & Blended Learning **HIGHLY SUPPORTS HB 1170 - Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations.**

When my co-founders and I gathered in Baltimore’s Inner Harbor back in 2001 in the wake of 9/11 to conceptualize what would become Connections Academy, we were responding to an emerging desire by American families for public school options that fit their children’s individual learning needs. Twenty years ago, what is now blindingly obvious was just becoming clear: That technology could allow the familiar idea of school as a one-size-fits-all place to be transformed into an anytime, anywhere, personalized experience for a new generation of students. No more would the accident of one’s ZIP code determine the quality of your child’s schooling. No more would bricks and bells limit the where and when of learning. No more would the aspiring Olympian or the budding Broadway star have to choose between their life’s passion and an excellent public-school education.

What we did not know then was how essential online public school would become for thousands of especially vulnerable kids – the bullied, the struggling, the ill – all over America. In State after State, year after year, parents seeking a better fit for their child than the local brick and mortar school came together to start a Connections Academy of their own, always thrilled to learn how an online school can bring the best teachers and richest curriculum and warmest friendships right into one’s home. A carefully designed combination of real-time, live interaction and at-your-best-time asynchronous instruction made these online schools flexible, safe, and effective. Recent research, such as the independent study conducted on Connections Academy schools, shows there is no statistical difference in performance on State math and reading tests between brick-and-mortar schools and Connections virtual schools, when matched for student mobility and other demographic factors.

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And when COVID hit? Connections Academy families kept right on learning, without a hitch. In communities all over America, these virtual school veterans offered encouragement and practical strategies to their neighbors who suddenly found themselves in a kind of “emergency remote schooling.” When they saw the structure and support available at purpose-built online schools, tens of thousands of parents made the switch, swelling enrollment at the Connections Academy schools by 40% over the prior academic year. Students in this new pandemic wave are enjoying a consistent school experience with carefully designed academics, a well thought out online extracurricular program, and smart, sustainable roles for parents as Learning Coaches.

But not in Maryland!

In Maryland, families in some districts can choose to have their kids in a school building every other day, with a teacher behind a laptop frantically trying to instruct students simultaneously online and in person, friends on the other side of plexiglass and lunch alone at one’s desk. In other districts, it is six hours of Zoom a day. Thousands of families have left the Maryland public system altogether for private school, either clicks or bricks. But nowhere is there the option of choosing a purpose-built online public school for students in Maryland.

You now can change that!

HB 1170 provides a common-sense and thoughtful way for Maryland to join the two-thirds of American states that offer an online public-school option. It provides a vehicle for parents and educators across the state to come together with a higher ed institution, a school district, or the State itself to launch an online public school, and to manage its growth for best quality and outcomes. This bill reflects the latest thinking about what makes a great online public-school experience, creating a launchpad for Maryland to leapfrog into the forefront of K-12 virtual learning. And it answers the persistent call from families all over the state for an online option that lets their children learn how they learn best, not just during this pandemic period, but deep into the 21st century.

Please answer that call. **Please move HB1170** forward for kids and families across Maryland. On behalf of myself and Pearson Online & Blended Learning, we recommend a **Favorable Committee report on HB 1170.**

Respectfully submitted,

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