By: Dr. James Hanak, President of Public Cyber Charter School Association and CEO of PA Leadership (cyber) Charter School

Those who oppose Pennsylvania Public Cyber Charter Schools have been quoting the recent Stanford University CREDO Report that states that Public Cyber Charter Schools in Pennsylvania are a dismal failure. Why is it then that 36,000 students have chosen to leave their traditional home district to attend one of these 15 schools and why is that number is growing daily?

The answer is that their home public school is failing them – so much so that these students are on average 1 ½ years behind when they enter a typical PA Cyber Charter School. Once the student is enrolled in a Cyber Charter School, the test scores for that student are attributed to the Cyber School no matter how much the previous school has failed that student.

The CREDO Report compares standardized testing scores only. These scores cannot assess at what point in time or why the student failed – whether in their previous home school setting or in the present Cyber Charter School. Therefore, other criteria should be used to evaluate the true value and successes of a PA Cyber Charter School. This same CREDO study reports that the first year a student is in a PA Charter School, their "learning gains" can be as low as a minus 70 days of learning (p.32). By the third year, however, these "learning gains" grow to a plus 15 days – an increase of 85 days of learning over three years! Only three years were analyzed. If these trends continued, however, Charter Schools would dramatically outpace traditional schools in learning gains.

When measured by multiple standards, Public Cyber Charter Schools do quite well according to Niche.com.

According to Niche's website, their 2019 rankings are "based on rigorous analysis of academic and student life data from the U.S. Department of Education, along with test scores, college data, and ratings collected from millions of Niche users." You can view a full list of the factors that they take into account when collecting their data on niche.com.

In this analysis, Public Cyber Charter Schools in Pennsylvania, when evaluated only by the raw scores of their students standardized tests can score below "proficient" (70% out of 100%).

When schools are compared utilizing other criteria, however, Public Cyber Charter Schools score in the 74-79 percentile. Cybers are at the top of all Pennsylvania public schools in SAT scores and at the top of all Charter Schools overall when ranked in multiple areas or areas such as "College Readiness".

Openpa.gov reports that Public Cyber Charter Schools rank in the top 38% of all public schools when rated on the percentage of income spent on direct instruction. The five top Public Cyber Charter Schools (1/3 of the total) rank in the top 20% of all public schools.

The bottom line is that Public Cyber Charter Schools are meeting unique and specialized needs of their students. Depending on how they are rated, Public Cyber Charter Schools can stand out as academically strong schools. Students and parents alike rave about their Public Cyber Charter Schools. There are 100's of such testimonies on the Niche.com website. The real question is – do we really believe in public parental choice or do we believe in the old system that determines where a public school student goes to school based only on his or her zip code?