

House Education Committee

February 1st, 2012

Chairman and members of the committee:

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify this morning concerning Virtual learning options as presented in Senate Bill 619. I will be brief, and hopefully to the point.

My name is Lynn Johnson, and I am the principal and Community Education Director for Bangor Public Schools. Bangor is a rural school district located in southwestern Van Buren County. In the fall of 2011, the Career Academy launched a new program based on Virtual learning. Bangor does not partner with either of the current virtual charters schools in the state. Instead, we have designed a virtual learning environment utilizing a combination of the seat time waiver application, blended learning and a reduced hours waiver.

I wholeheartedly agree that parents and students need more choices when it comes to education. The days of school running from 8:00am until 3:00 pm, five days a week are obsolete. I applaud the families who have testified in support of bill 619 and the interest they have taken in their children's education. Any Educator will tell you strong parental involvement is a key to student's success.

With that being said, I would like to state that I, and I speak for my Superintendent and local School Board when I say we strongly oppose Senate Bill 619 the way it is phrased right now. Reform, options and change are fine. Lifting restrictions and allowing for additional for profit organizations, though seems pre-mature. Consider the impact on local communities that this could present. For example, visit any rural community and you will find the bond that keeps the community together is a strong public school system. The school is the hub of education, entertainment and employment. Senate bill 619 jeopardizes that hub.

Before approving this bill, I would ask you to consider other viable options for local districts to provide the options that parents and children so desperately want.

Things to consider and challenge school districts could include:

- Become innovators and design programs to meet all families, step outside the traditional box
- Change the current pupil accounting rules and allow local school districts to offer home schooled families a full curriculum (core and non core subjects) not just electives as now is the case. I would believe this is one of the attractive points that the current for profit programs are able to do now. This opens many options in itself
- Regulate public schools and for profits alike that run virtual learning programs to utilize the foundation allowance to be put right back into improving the program, professional

development, technology upgrades supplies materials and curriculum improvements rather than improving fund balances and profit margins

- Reward districts who demonstrate success and innovation to meet the needs of all families, encourage districts to change from the same old methods

I believe that there are programs currently available such as the Gen net program, Gull Lake home school partnership, the home school partnership at Berrien Springs Public schools and what we at Bangor are currently doing that other districts could do also to meet the parents needs if only some of these adjustments were tried first before opening the doors for anyone.

In closing, I would like to thank you for your time and would like to share any additional information you may like that pertains to our program.