Commonwealth of Virginia
September 2015

Report to the Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia

Efficiency and Effectiveness of K-12 Spending

2015

Commission Draft

JLARC
JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT AND REVIEW COMMISSION

Directed by two mandates:

1. Passed by the 2013 General Assembly, directs JLARC to “study the efficiency and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school spending in Virginia”.

2. 2014 Appropriation Act (Item 30), directs JLARC to examine virtual instruction.

- Six chapters; Chapter 6 covers “Role of Online Learning Programs in Virginia”

- Nine recommendations; recommendations 7 – 9 cover online learning

1. Online learning has the potential

   a. improve the efficiency of K-12 education:

      i. reducing costs

   b. improve the effectiveness of K-12 education:

      i. providing access to broader array of educational opportunities

      ii. higher quality teachers

      iii. richer course content

2. The online learning environment

    a. Broad array of courses

    b. Variety of communication methods (synchronous and asynchronous course delivery, messaging, live video, etc.)

2. The online learning environment

c. Use of LMS and other instructional resources (documents, videos, audio, etc.)

d. Role and importance of “learning coach” stressed; greater use of coach at elementary level and less reliance on LMS at lower levels, but that usage reverses at higher levels

3. Most online students in Virginia are enrolled in supplemental online programs

a. Agreements with MOPs and free access to Virtual Virginia

b. Number of online students remains small relative to total K-12 population

    i. An average of 3% of an LEA's students enrolled in at least one online course during '13-14 SY

    ii. No more than 3% of high school students enrolled in at least one Virtual Virginia course during '13-14 SY

iii. Comparable enrollment compared to other states with state-supported online programs

iv. Virginia among top 10 states enrolling high school students in a state-operated online program

v. Enrollment in MOP programs have more than doubled since start in ’11-12 SY

vi. Enrollment in Virtual Virginia increased by 27% between ’12-13 and ’13-14 SY’s

1. Increase likely due to graduation requirement of at least one online course

4. Few students enrolled in fully online programs in Virginia

    a. MOPs partner with LEAs; LEA's can limit out-of-division enrollment

    b. Thirty-one states offer fully online schools for K-12 students; some states limit enrollment based upon certain circumstances

    c. Neighboring states do not offer fully online schools for K-12 students or offer them with restrictions

d. About 4% of online students in Virginia were in fully online programs during ’13-14 SY;

Equates to about 1% of state total K-12 population; nationwide no state has more than 3% of its state total K-12 population enrolled in a fully online school

e. Two initiatives seek to expand access to fully online learning

i. HB324: creation of a policy board to oversee a fully online school

ii. Virtual Virginia fully online high school pilot program

5. Online learning programs increase educational opportunities, but effectiveness varies

a. Research shows that online learning programs provide three primary benefits:

i. **Reduced scheduling conflicts** allowing students to take courses at preferred times

ii. For students who **struggle academically** in physical schools; remedial or credit recovery

iii. may be the only feasible educational setting for students **unable to attend** physical schools due to illness, alternative athletic/professional pursuits, bullying, behavioral issues, etc.

b. Insufficient research to determine if online learning is more or less effective than physical schools

i. Two recent studies (FLVS and online learning in state of Kansas) suggest that online instruction may be as effective as in-person instruction.

ii. Studies could not determine if differences in student achievement online vs. in-person instruction were due to characteristics of the online population (such as socio-economic status) or the online program itself; additional research needed.

iii. Additional analysis needed in Virginia to compare online (MOP/VV/LEA) vs in-person outcomes; covered during recommendations.

c. Success of online learning depends on student and program characteristics

i. LEAs reported two factors affecting student success in online learning

- Motivation to learn
- Time management skills

ii. Research adds a third factor

- Ability to set goals

iii. Sixty-four percent of LEAs reported “not completing course” as the greatest challenge with online learning

iv. Experts and practitioners recommend

- Learning coaches to monitor progress, provide technical assistance, and serve as intermediary between student and teacher
- More support for students with poor motivation or time management skills, or students struggling academically
- Physical drop-in centers to work with a tutor
- Computer labs where teachers are available

6. Cost of online programs **should be** less than cost of physical schools

a. According to industry group representing online providers

b. According to actual funding provided by other states for fully online schools (2/3 of funding provided for physical schools)

c. Costs depend upon level of services provided; supplemental program costs less than fully online program

d. § 22.1-215 of the Code of Va. requires the host LEA of a fully online program to provide full education services to online students (including guidance counselors, school psychologists, special education services)

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 7

The Virginia Department of Education should collaborate with the board and/or staff for any statewide fully online school created in Virginia to develop (or obtain) and distribute informational materials that help families and guidance counselors to make informed decisions about enrolling children in fully online schools.

- List of expectations for the online environment
- Self-assessment about time management, problem solving, and technical capabilities
- Provide orientation opportunity (meet and discuss)
- Offer an online qualifier course like WHRO

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Virginia Department of Education should develop a methodology for estimating the cost of fully online learning programs.

- Develop cost estimates for different tiers of service for different students (including students with special needs or living in poverty)
- Collaborate with all publicly funded statewide fully online schools created in Va.
- Work with private providers to estimate their fully online costs
- Periodically re-benchmark the cost estimation methodology to account for inflation (additional one-time funding needed to develop cost estimation methodology)

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Virginia Department of Education should annually compare the achievement of students enrolled in Virtual Virginia courses to students of the same characteristics in physical schools, and report these findings to the Board of Education annually.

- Use info from full-time pilot program to better understand what types of students can perform well or better in a fully online school

- Examine past academic performance of students and their characteristics (disability, LEP, eligibility for free/reduced lunch, race, and gender)

VDOE analysis of full-time pilot students should examine:

Do certain types of students perform better or worse in an online setting?

Do online students perform better or worse in certain types of courses?

Do additional support services for lower performing online students improve their performance? What services?

VDOE analysis of full-time pilot students should:

Use SOL scores, graduation rates, and college aptitude tests to measure student academic achievement (control for disability, LEP status, race, and gender for useful comparisons);

Note: Info from MOP students currently available; STI's of Virtual Virginia students will assist DOE in determining student academic achievement of students taking Virtual Virginia courses

Ensure enrollment in full-time pilot is available to students with higher and lower levels of academic achievement;

LEA guidance counselors should be advised that students should not be screened out of the pilot due to poor academic performance; VDOE should consider the use of a lottery to randomly select students