

ARE ONLINE CHARTER SCHOOLS BENEFITING STUDENTS OR LEGISLATORS' CAMPAIGNS?

The *New York Times* wrote an enlightening article about how Online Charter schools are enriching their affiliated companies if not its students. The article examines ECOT the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow, based in Columbus, Ohio. They graduated 2371 students last spring however, more students dropped-out or failed to finish high school than any other school in the country, according to federal data. For every 100 students who graduated on time, 80 did not. One in five spent less than a year there and returned to their previous school or found another charter.

Ohio spends nearly \$1 billion on charter schools, with \$267 million and 38,000 Ohio children going to online charter schools with the lowest academic growth scores. Few states have as many students in e-schools as Ohio. Ohio's online charters are educating one out of every 26 high school students, yet their graduation rates are worse than those in the state's most impoverished cities, including Cleveland and Youngstown. The two largest in Ohio are ECOT and Ohio Virtual Academy and sadly students' highest grade was a C, and mostly F's and D's in the most recent report cards. These two Online Charters are owned by Bill Lager (ECOT) and David Brennan of (White Hat Management). These owners have repeatedly been among the largest political campaign funders to the GOP legislative caucuses.

Ohio's online charter schools have come under scrutiny lately for questions about their attendance. Some smaller online schools have been found to have significantly overstated their enrollment numbers, resulting in a significant amount of state tax dollars being over-billed by the schools' operators requiring a large return of money to the state.

Senate Minority Leader Joe Schiavoni's statement in response was that "online schools must become more accountable for accurate attendance records. Without strong oversight, these schools could be collecting millions of dollars while failing to educate Ohio's school children."

Republican Sen. Peggy Lehner of Kettering is the Chair- person of the Senate Education Committee who was looking forward to working on the bill introduced by Democrat Schiavoni, but Senate President Keith Faber decided instead to send the bill to the Finance Committee.

It is important to understand that Pres. Faber and Speaker Rosenberg are the two leaders who receive most of the political contributions for their two caucuses. According to the Sec. of State, Brennan and Lager

"Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life."

(John 5:24 NRSV)

**40,000 OHIO FAMILY'S
HAVE LOST
\$294 PER WEEK
UNEMPLOYMENT
COMPENSATION
ON JANUARY 1
240,000 JOBS WOULD
BE LOST NATIONALLY
IF CONGRESS DOES NOT
RESTORE
U. COMPENSATION!**

IDENTIFICATION STATEMENT

Date Jan. 13, 2016

Frequency: Monthly

Published By:

Ohio Council of Churches (OCC)

6230 Busch Blvd. Suite 100

Columbus, OH 43229-2553

Phone: 614/885-9590

Fax: 614/885-6097

E-mail: mail@ohcouncilchs.org

Issue:#9-2016

You are welcome to copy or quote
from the Legislative Brief.
Tom Smith, Editor

have given more than \$1.4 million to state lawmakers' campaigns since 2009.

Why has Ohio become a major embarrassment across America for our establishment of for-profit online charter schools?

The Ohio Department of Education was in a rush to approve charter schools for those parents who were upset about the quality of education that their children were receiving in their traditional local schools. Also after several years for-profit Online Charter Schools were allowed to open their doors to disgruntled parents. However, since the original funding contract had no provision requiring that they keep in and out attendance records, State Auditor Dave Yost said that the agreement effectively tied his hands so that his auditors could only ask ECOT teachers if they had provided the necessary "learning opportunities". So auditors were only able to have the teachers certify the amount of total hours offered not the hours that students actually attended. This was the meaningless accounting that allowed ECOT to receive \$100 million a year. This was money that was diverted from the school districts that the students had previously attended.

Since that time there have been several court cases by the Ohio Dept. of Education trying to get records of attendance from ECOT that ECOT lawyers claim breaks the law identifying students and their records.

It appears that the legislature needs to pass a law that requires from here after that On-line charter schools must provide attendance records to the Dept. of Education enabling them to calculate actual funding that should be given to the charter school and if students are receiving the 920 hours of learning opportunities that they are required to participate in.

A preliminary attendance review last March found out that most ECOT students were logging in for about one hour per day.

If students fall far short of the 920 hours, it would cost the school and owner Wm. Lager tens of millions of dollars.

Brent Larkin, a columnist for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, wrote an article entitled "Notorious On-line Ohio Charter School Tries To Protect Reimbursement for Phantom Students." His article pointed- out that for- profit owners aimed to purchase lax regulations of Ohio Charters with political donations to Ohio Legislators. "Few human beings are more worthless than morally bankrupt politicians who consciously game the system in ways that make learning even more difficult for struggling young students"

Led by State Senator Peggy Lehner R-Kettering, who chairs the Ohio Senate's Education committee, the Ohio legislature performed a service for kids by strengthening the oversight of the state's much ridiculed kindergarten through 12th grade charter school system. However, there is still too little accountability for E- Online-Schools.

Online schools should be required to submit their student's attendance records monthly and to call their parents or guardians if the child has not logged in 10 days. Online schools should be closed if students are repeatedly receiving F grades. Shrinking the size of online schools for example ECOT is 15,000 and Virtual Academy is 11,000. Research shows that smaller online schools do a better job reaching students.

Amazingly ECOT has now proposed that online charter schools be required to offer 920 hours of instruction, but would not be held responsible for ensuring that students actually spent time studying the material on-line. *Columbus Dispatch Board said, "Certainly, their provisons would make it possible for online charters to collect millions of taxpayer money with no guarantee that students actually are receiving an education."*