



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

May 12, 2025

Dr. Debra Heath-Thornton
Chief Executive Officer
Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School
630 Park Avenue
King of Prussia, PA 19406

Dear Dr. Heath-Thornton,

Based on a thorough review of Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School's (PA Virtual) renewal application and other documentation, and a mutual agreement concerning enrollment parameters, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (Department) is renewing PA Virtual's charter, subject to the information contained in this letter and any areas for correction noted within the Decision to Renew Charter and Appendix A. The renewed charter shall be effective for a term of five years, beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2030.

The Department will continue to monitor and examine PA Virtual's operations throughout this term to determine whether PA Virtual is meeting the terms of its charter, the requirements of the Charter School Law, and other applicable state and federal mandates. By granting a renewed charter, the Department does not waive and expressly reserves the right to notify PA Virtual of any violation of the terms and conditions of its charter and to seek correction of such violation. In addition, the Department does not waive and expressly reserves the right to take action against PA Virtual in the form of charter revocation or nonrenewal for reasons including, but not limited to, those discussed in this letter or the attached Decision to Renew Charter and Appendix A.

Please note that the Department will continue to monitor the progress of PA Virtual's students by reviewing various data points (e.g., students' academic achievement, assessment participation rate, academic growth, and adjusted cohort graduation rates). And, based on standards for annual meaningful differentiation as identified by Pennsylvania's ESSA State Plan, each year, the Department will calculate and evaluate Pa Virtual's progress toward meeting or exceeding its long-term goals.

The Department will require any cyber charter school that is designated for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) or Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (A-TSI) to take specific corrective actions. Through regional improvement teams, the Department will provide technical assistance and support in developing, implementing, and monitoring evidence-based strategies aligned to each school's most pressing needs. Cyber charter schools designated for CSI or A-TSI will be required to partner with regional improvement teams for the duration of their designation. Failure to exit CSI status may serve as a basis for revocation or nonrenewal of the cyber school's charter.

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Randy Seely, Division Chief, Division of Charter Schools by email at rseely@pa.gov or by telephone at (717) 705-0353.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "C. Rowe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a stylized "Rowe".

Carrie Rowe, Ed.D.
Acting Secretary of Education

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School : **Charter Renewal Effective:**
Renewal Application : **July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2030**

Decision to Renew Charter

Pursuant to the Charter School Law (CSL), 24 P.S. §§ 17-1701-A – 17-1751-A, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (Department) has the authority and responsibility to renew or not renew the charter of a cyber charter school. 24 P.S. § 17-1741-A(a)(3). The Department may decide not to renew a charter based on the criteria set forth in section 1729-A of the CSL, 24 P.S. § 17-1729-A. A cyber charter school must be in compliance with the material conditions, standards, and procedures contained in the written charter; meet the requirements for student performance set forth in 22 Pa. Code Chapter 4; meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management and audit requirements; be in compliance with the CSL and all other applicable law; provide all material components of each student's education; and maintain the financial ability to provide services.

The Department granted a charter to Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School (PA Virtual) for the term of July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2024. PA Virtual submitted a renewal application to continue operating a cyber charter school and has continued to operate its cyber charter school by extension of the previous charter term until such time as the Department finalized a renewal decision.

Based on a comprehensive review of PA Virtual's operation during the charter term beginning July 1, 2019, including the information submitted with its renewal application; information gathered by the Department's representatives; and other sources of data, the Department is renewing PA Virtual's charter to operate a cyber charter school, subject to this Decision to Renew Charter, the areas for correction noted within Appendix A, and the mutually agreed-upon enrollment parameters outlined herein and in the charter should PA Virtual become designated for Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI).

The baseline enrollment number from which any enrollment parameter would be calculated is PA Virtual's highest enrollment in the three years immediately preceding the designation of PA Virtual for CSI unless the actual enrollment at the time of the CSI designation is higher than the calculation of the parameter enrollment number, then the actual enrollment number shall be the parameter number. The baseline number would be used to calculate a one-time 10% enrollment increase that may not be surpassed during any time period PA Virtual is designated for CSI. As an example, if PA Virtual is designated for CSI in the 2025-26 school year and its highest enrollment, using the October 1 snapshot data as verified by PIMS, was the 2023-24 school year, then the Department would use the 2023-24 enrollment data as the baseline unless the actual enrollment at the time of the CSI designation is higher than the calculation of the parameter enrollment number, then the actual enrollment number shall be the parameter number. However, the Department will not require PA Virtual to disenroll students if their current enrollment exceeds a necessary enrollment parameter or actual enrollment upon imposition of the parameter.

The enrollment parameter would remain in effect at any time PA Virtual is designated CSI and would be lifted if PA Virtual exited CSI. In the event the funding formula for cyber charter

schools changes, or if another pandemic is declared, this enrollment parameter as defined above may be revisited.

The renewed charter shall be effective for a term of five (5) years beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2030.

The Department reserves the right to continue to assess and review PA Virtual's operation and to take action to revoke PA Virtual's charter based on any information that was or could have been reviewed prior to this charter renewal or discovered during future or ongoing assessments or reviews. The Department does not waive and expressly reserves the right to notify PA Virtual of any violation and to take action against PA Virtual, if necessary, including revocation or nonrenewal of the charter.

The Department is also providing written notice to PA Virtual of areas of the operation of its cyber charter school that require attention and correction. This notice is provided to allow PA Virtual the opportunity to address areas that may not be in compliance with applicable requirements. Failure to address areas identified by the Department may result in additional action by the Department, including revocation of the charter.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "C. Rowe".

Carrie Rowe, Ed.,D.
Acting Secretary of Education

Date Mailed: May 12, 2025

APPENDIX A

Pursuant to section 1742-A of the Charter School Law (CSL), 24 P.S. § 17-1742-A, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (Department) has conducted an assessment and review of Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School (PA Virtual). Based on this assessment and review, the Department has identified areas of operation which PA Virtual must further examine and address.

PA Virtual must be prepared to provide information and documentary evidence to the Department during any future Department review of the cyber charter school's operations that demonstrates that the cyber charter school operates in compliance with all applicable requirements. Additionally, as described below, PA Virtual must be prepared to provide the Department with information and documentary evidence as to how it addressed or is working to address each of the areas identified below:

- Assessment Participation
- Academic Proficiency
- Governance and Operations

PA Virtual Charter School must improve its assessment and accountability program.

A cyber charter school must meet the requirements for student performance set forth in 22 Pa. Code Chapter 4, including state student assessment requirements in Chapter 4. 22 Pa. Code §§ 4.51-4.52. The Department expects all schools, including cyber charter schools, to improve academically from the prior year, as demonstrated by various indicators, individually, collectively, or in any combination.

The Department examined various indicators related to PA Virtual's academic performance over its charter term, including, but not limited to, assessment participation and academic achievement.

In 2018-19, PA Virtual's assessment participation rate was at 81%. With the onset of the pandemic, PA Virtual's participation rate, along with all other cyber charter schools' participation rates, dropped substantially. Although the participation rate is recovering, in 2021-22 the participation rate was 63%, and in 2022-23, the rate was 68%. This is substantially lower than the 95% assessment participation rate that schools are to attain annually.

Additionally, PA Virtual's assessment proficiency lags well behind the average of traditional school districts. In 2021-22, the percentage of students achieving proficient and advanced on the math and ELA combined PSSA and Keystone tests was at 27.3%, and in 2022-23, this percentage dropped to 24.3%. However, the average for school districts in 2021-22 was at 47.7%, and in 2022-23 that percentage rose to 48.7%. This difference is also evident in the economically disadvantaged subgroup, where the 2021-22 percentage of PA Virtual students proficient and advanced on the math and ELA combined was at 20.6% and dropped to 18.4% in 2022-23. For school districts, the percentage in 2021-22 was 30.2%, increasing to 32.3% in 2022-23. We see similar numbers in the percentage of proficient and advanced in all areas of the Keystone assessment. PA Virtual, while outperforming the cyber charter school average and brick-and-mortar charter average, still lags behind traditional school districts.

Therefore, notwithstanding that the Department has renewed PA Virtual's charter, the Department may require corrective action and/or use designation as a CSI school or failure to exit CSI status as a basis for nonrenewal or revocation of PA Virtual's charter; if PA Virtual is designated as a school needing improvement (CSI, TSI, or A-TSI), PA Virtual must be prepared to provide to the Department the following:

- A comprehensive needs analysis that identifies the root causes of inconsistent student achievement results;
- A comprehensive data analysis that examines PSSA, Keystone, and PASA data;
- An assessment participation plan, submitted through the Future Ready Comprehensive Planning Portal (FRCPP) each year, the school fails to attain a 95% participation rate on state assessments¹; and
- An explanation of remedial programs that PA Virtual will use to ensure progress from year to year.

PA Virtual must take certain action related to finance and operations.

Responsibility for PA Virtual's finance and accounting functions falls on PA Virtual's Board of Trustees and administration and staff. The Department has observed that, overall, PA Virtual's approach to managing its finance and accounting functions appears to be straight forward and reasonable. However, it appears that PA Virtual has no formal policy as to how its fund balance should be used. Accordingly, PA Virtual must refine its policies and procedures to adopt a new policy or clarify an existing policy related to fund balance that is in alignment with financial best practices.

¹ A school that does not meet the 95% participation rate on state assessments may be required to submit an assessment participation plan through the FRCCP, regardless of designated school improvement status.