

**Michigan K12 Subcommittee Meeting
March 11, 2025**

K12 subcommittee

Thank you, committee members, for allowing me an opportunity to provide testimony related to funding Michigan's virtual school community.

My name is Teresa Woods, and I am the Superintendent of Lighthouse Connections Academy (LCA). LCA currently serves more than 2,000 students in grades Kindergarten through 12th grade.

Before you read the remainder of my testimony, I ask that you consider your own children, grandchildren, or even siblings. I'm sure you will note the personality and learning differences among them. Some probably learn by reading, while others must touch and interact to retain information.

The same is true for Michigan students. They don't all learn in the same way or in the physical classroom with strict bell schedules. We have found that some students learn better in their own homes, interacting with their teachers and classmates virtually. Students who are medically fragile, bullied, autistic, or have severe anxiety are some of the students served in a virtual school. Traditional education is not the best fit for them.

I ask you to consider that regardless of the learning environment, each student is equally valuable to the future of Michigan's economy and workforce.

Right now, students in Michigan's virtual schools receive less funding than their traditional school peers. Why are these students worth less than students who learn in a traditional way?

It is time that we stop penalizing students because they learn differently.

While we have heard over the years that virtual schools "don't cost as much as their brick-and-mortar counterparts," that is simply not true. We serve the same students, with the same unique needs as any other public school. Approximately half of our students are free and reduced lunch eligible, 20 percent of our students receive special education or 504 services.

Our building is our Education Management System (EMS). This high-tech, one-stop, secure online network for our students is expensive but necessary. In this EMS students access their lessons, interact daily in face-to-face classes with teachers and other students, email and communicate in a safe and secure environment.

Parents can see what their students are learning in real time, access their grades, review lessons, communicate with teachers and provide valuable feedback to curriculum developers.

Teachers use the EMS to deliver instruction and communicate with students and families. In addition, our EMS is using student data for real-time evaluations of the curriculum and learning. Teachers can see, by content standard, whether students are achieving understanding. Teachers use this data to make decisions about whether they should move on in a subject or remediate (either class wide, or in small groups).

As you work on the state budget, I ask that you consider online education and virtual participation in academics and the workforce because these students are part of the future in the American economy and of Michigan.