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# Final Report

## Ohio Community E-Schools Cost Study

Prepared for the  
Ohio Department of Education

By

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## Executive Summary

Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA), in partnership with WestEd, was awarded a contract by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to study the resources needed for Ohio community e-schools to provide a quality education. The work built on Ohio's Fair School Funding Plan that was passed into law in 2021 for implementation in fiscal years 2022 and 2023. This study is intended to examine the costs associated with successfully serving community e-school students, both in general education (GenEd) and dropout prevention and recovery (DOPR) e-school settings.

### ***Community E-School Landscape***

In Ohio, public charter schools are referred to as community schools, with community e-schools being a subset of these schools operated entirely online. Two types of community e-schools exist in Ohio: those that serve a general student population (GenEd) and those that are focused on dropout prevention and recovery (DOPR). There are currently 15 community e-schools in the state, serving student populations from around 100 students to well over 15,000 students. These community e-schools are distinct from online schools run by districts (referred to by the state as "School District Online Learning Schools"). For this report, we use "community e-school" and "e-school" interchangeably, referring only to these specific 15 community e-schools, and not district-run online schools.

**Funding for community e-schools.** While e-schools are a type of community school in Ohio, they are treated differently than site-based (brick-and-mortar) community schools for funding purposes, in a number of ways including: (1) brick-and-mortar community schools are funded based on an annualized full time equivalency (FTE) using student enrollment, community e-schools are funded based on an annualized FTE using student enrollment and student participation in online and offline learning opportunities, and (2) community e-schools are eligible for the base state formula amount, a small facilities allowance, career-technical education funding and special education funding but are not eligible for additional funding brick-and-mortar community schools receive for certain student populations, including economically disadvantaged students, and English learners.

### ***Study Overview***

To understand the costs faced by community e-schools to serve students, the study undertook four elements: (1) a literature review, (2) a survey of e-schools, (3) focus groups, and (4) professional judgment panels.

### ***Literature Review***

To understand Ohio's approach to funding community e-schools the study team sought to examine where there are cost differences and differences in state funding approaches between online schools and traditional brick-and-mortar schools by examining available research and completing a 50-state policy review. This work built on the 2019 Ohio Department of Education *Study of Internet- or Computer-Based Community School Funding Models* report but expanded on that report's by highlighting funding models used in a set of comparison states with a particular focus on examining competency- and completion-based online school funding models.

## Survey

As part of this study, an online survey was administered to community e-school leaders in charge of operations and/or who have knowledge of program budgets and spending from June 8<sup>th</sup> to August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022. The survey was intended to allow the study team to better understand program operations, current resource use, and challenges faced by e-schools. Thirteen of the 15 community e-schools participated in the survey, including five GenEd e-schools and eight DOPR e-schools. The number of students enrolled in the e-schools that participated in the survey account for over 99 percent of total student enrollment in Ohio e-schools.

## Focus Groups

The study team convened focus groups to gain a better understanding of issues raised in the survey, provide stakeholders an opportunity to highlight any other topics they felt important to understand for the study, and to set the final professional judgment panel representative school sizes. Three focus groups were held, one each for GenEd community e-schools, DOPR community e-schools, and community e-school sponsors. There were eight participants in the GenEd focus group representing six schools, seven participants from seven DOPR e-schools, and three sponsor participants representing eight sponsored e-schools.

## Professional Judgment Panels

The study team hosted three professional judgment panels in late September through early October 2022 to identify the resources (personnel and non-personnel) needed to successfully serve community e-school students in Ohio. One panel focused on the resource needs for GenEd community e-schools, another focused on the resource needs for dropout prevention and recovery community e-schools, and the final review panel reviewed the work of the previous panels and discussed other policy implications for funding of e-schools. A total of 22 panelists, from 13 of the state's 15 community e-schools, participated in the professional judgment panels. Panelists included community e-school teachers, counselors, principals, academic directors, special education directors, treasurers, and school administrators/directors. Once resources were identified by panels, the study team used that information to create per student cost estimates to successfully serve students in e-school settings.

## *Key Findings and Recommendations*

### Base Funding

**Findings:** Current funding levels are similar to the funding amounts identified for base level resource needs for GenEd and DOPR community e-school students. The professional judgment panel base cost figures for 2,600 and 9,750 student schools were \$7,142 and \$7,042 respectively. These figures are slightly lower than the FY22 base cost figure of \$7,352.

The study did not build a DOPR e-school with only base cost resources and then separately consider the resources needed for at-risk students; instead, a representative e-school was created where nearly all students are considered at-risk of academic failure, as is the reality for DOPR e-schools. This means resources associated with additional instructional and support needs for at-risk students are included in the identified per pupil cost figures. The study team examined the information from the panels and the

current DPIA funding to estimate what portion of the DOPR's overall costs might represent a base figure. Looking at the GenEd panels, when 50 percent of the 2,600-student e-school were assumed to be at-risk students, it resulted in a cost increase of around \$700 per pupil. Taking a linear analysis, this would mean an additional \$1,400 at 100 percent concentration. Reducing the DOPR 2,600 per pupil figure by the 100 percent concentration (\$1,400) would leave a base figure of \$7,141, nearly identical to the GenEd figure at this size. Similarly, the current DPIA formula would provide about \$1,400 at the 85 percent economically disadvantaged concentration. This analysis appears to show base costs similar to Ohio's current base funding for schools in FY22 of \$7,352.

**Recommendation:** Community e-school base cost estimates using the professional judgment approach are very similar to the base cost of \$7,352 in FY22 and should be funded utilizing a similar methodology to sites receiving this base amount. However, it should be noted that this figure would be sufficient only if the additional recommendations are addressed below.

### Student Count

**Findings:** E-schools face significant challenges due to the differential approach to both counting student participation and maintaining a student in attendance. Focus group members and professional judgment panelists repeatedly identified student count as one of the greatest challenges to providing the resources needed for students. They highlighted that per pupil costs from this study will only be valid if provided for the students served by the community e-schools and not the current count of students funded.

National research mentions the additional time on task and engagement efforts needed for many online students. Students often come to online settings after having difficulty in traditional schools. The students attending these schools often have a higher risk of attendance issues already and e-schools require a significant amount of staffing to monitor and engage students to ensure their participation. Further, the count process requires resources to ensure community e-schools can get as many students counted for funding as possible.

The community e-schools understand the history behind and reasoning for the differential count for the schools. Still the count leads to schools serving more students, sometimes far more students, than they were funded for in a year. Comparing FY22 headcount data to enrollment data for funding, e-schools ranged from being funded for just 21 percent of headcount up to 110 percent. The majority of e-schools were funded below head count with the average e-school receiving 85 percent of their headcount. This differential has impacts on staffing ratios across positions, salary levels, and the academic and support opportunities that schools can provide students. Additional staff are also needed to track the data needed for the student count, resources not likely needed in traditional community schools or for online schools in traditional districts.

**Recommendation:** With the large variation in headcount versus funded enrollment the study team would recommend a workgroup be created to identify approaches to student count that allow for recognition of the efforts community e-schools must make to enroll, provide orientation to, and work to

continue to engage students in the education process, while balancing the concerns about ensuring funding only for students engaged in the education process.

### DPIA and EL Funding

**Findings:** Both GenEd and DOPR community e-schools provide services for at-risk and English learner students. At-risk students make up a large share of many of the GenEd e-schools and DOPR e-schools. Funding report data from May of 2022 shows e-schools ranged from 26 to 70 percent of at-risk students. The survey discussed that the lack of funding for these students was a barrier to providing the instructional and student supports needed for student academic success. These resources include adequate instructional staff, counselors, social workers, and attendance staff. Focus groups also highlighted the lack of funding for these students as a misalignment with the needs of most community e-school settings. They also highlighted that e-schools housed in traditional districts receive additional funding for these students.

As discussed above in the base funding recommendation, the professional judgment results showed that both the GenEd and DOPR community e-schools need additional resources to serve their at-risk students. The funding needed to provide the staffing recommended by panelists is similar to the current DPIA funding levels.

Focus group members and professional judgment panelists also discussed the need to provide service to English learners when they enroll in the school. Though not a high percentage of students, the resources needed to adequately serve the students can be high.

**Recommendation:** Community e-schools should receive DPIA and EL funding to be consistent with how other settings in the state, including e-schools in traditional districts, are funded. This funding will allow districts to more successfully serve their student populations.

### Size Adjustment

**Finding:** Though there are only 15 community e-schools, they vary greatly in size ranging from less than 100 students to over 16,000 students, with two-thirds of sites under 1,000 students. The professional judgment results indicate that the smallest settings face higher costs to serve students. Using the 2,600-student district as the baseline figure in both GenEd and DOPR community e-schools shows that in the small settings, 650 and 700 students respectively, costs were 17 percent or 15 percent higher. The 200 student DOPR setting had 26 percent higher costs.

**Recommendation:** The state could consider providing a size adjustment for smaller, independent community e-school settings. It is important that such an adjustment does not provide a perverse incentive for new or current community e-schools to simply create a number of smaller sites to increase funding, so provisions should be made to consider which sites would be eligible for this type of funding. This could include not providing size adjustment funding for sites that utilize a common management organization or are closely aligned with a school district.

## Introduction/Background

Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA), in partnership with WestEd, was awarded a contract by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to study the resources needed for Ohio community e-schools to provide a quality education. The work builds on Ohio's Fair School Funding Plan that was passed into law in 2021 for implementation in fiscal years 2022 and 2023. This study is intended to examine the costs associated with successfully serving community e-school students, both in general education (GenEd) and dropout prevention and recovery (DOPR) e-school settings.

### ***Community E-School Landscape***

In Ohio, public charter schools are referred to as community schools, with community e-schools being a subset of these schools operated entirely online. Two types of community e-schools exist in Ohio: those that serve a general student population and those that are focused on dropout prevention and recovery (DOPR). There are currently fifteen community e-schools in the state. These community e-schools are distinct from online schools run by districts (referred to by the state as "School District Online Learning Schools"). For this report, we use "community e-school" and "e-school" interchangeably, referring only to these specific 15 community e-schools, and not district-run online schools.

The 15 e-schools serve student populations from around 100 students to well over 15,000 students. Some community e-schools serve students statewide, while others serve students from a specific geographic area. GenEd e-schools tend to serve students from kindergarten through twelfth grade, while DOPR e-schools often focus on high school students. Though all the e-schools are "online" schools, many have sites where students are served in person, providing a blended learning approach, and all the e-schools must undertake large scale student testing each spring.

**Legal requirements for community e-schools.** Ohio law requires that when a student enrolls in an Ohio community e-school, they:

- Are provided instruction by a licensed Ohio teacher,
- Receive a computer, and
- Receive online access to the school.

Each student is assigned a teacher of record, and each teacher of record must have primary responsibility for no more than 125 students. Just as brick-and-mortar community schools in Ohio are overseen by their specific community school sponsors, community e-schools' sponsors provide oversight of the schools, ensuring the e-school is compliant with the state's Standards for K-12 Online Learning. Sponsors have a contract with the Ohio Department of Education and are regularly evaluated on their performance as sponsors.

**Funding for community e-schools.** While e-schools are a type of community school in Ohio, they are treated differently than site-based (brick-and-mortar) community schools for funding purposes. Brick-and-mortar community schools are funded based on an annualized full time equivalency using student enrollment, community e-schools are funded based on an annualized full time equivalency using student

enrollment and student participation in online and offline learning opportunities. Students in e-schools must be removed from the school's enrollment if they have 72 hours of consecutive unexcused absences.

Community e-schools are eligible for the base state formula amount, plus a small facilities allowance. E-schools are eligible for career-technical education funding and special education funding but are not eligible for additional funding brick-and-mortar community schools receive for certain student populations, including economically disadvantaged students, and English learners<sup>1</sup>.

**Recent legal changes.** While not the specific focus of this study, it is important to highlight recent changes to Ohio law<sup>2</sup> that allow district-run, online schools. These "School District Online Learning Schools" are distinct from remote learning plans that were allowed during the pandemic, as district-sponsored online learning schools in Ohio are intended to be permanent schools in which students can enroll. Further, these district online programs and schools are separate from community e-schools. They are authorized by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, are funded based documented learning like community e-schools but receive all state categorical funding that traditional students receive.

### **Study Overview**

To understand the costs faced by community e-schools to serve students, the study undertook four elements:

1. A literature review,
2. A survey of e-schools,
3. Focus groups, and
4. Professional judgment panels.

The literature review focused on differences in funding between e-schools and traditional schools across the country. Survey participants were asked to identify current resource usage and barriers faced in successfully serving students. The focus groups dug deeper into the results of the survey with a focus on barriers to successfully serving students and helped the study team identify the appropriate representative schools to use in the professional judgment work. Professional judgment panelists identified the resources needed to successfully serve community e-school students in both GenEd and DOPR e-schools and at different size settings.

The remainder of this report first walks through the implementation of each of the study's four elements, discussing the process and findings in each. It then provides a set of recommendations for how to improve the provision of funding for community e-school students in Ohio.

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<sup>1</sup> Ohio Revised Code 3314.08, 3317.022, and 3317.026

<sup>2</sup> Ohio Revised Code 3302.42, <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3302.42>; Ohio Revised Code 3301.079, <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3301.079>

## Literature and Policy Review

### Overview

To understand Ohio’s approach to funding community e-schools the study team sought to examine where there are cost differences and differences in state funding approaches between online schools and traditional brick-and-mortar schools. This work built on the 2019 Ohio Department of Education *Study of Internet- or Computer-Based Community School Funding Models* report but expanded on that report’s by highlighting funding models used in a set of comparison states with a particular focus on examining competency- and completion-based online school funding models.

To examine the cost differences, the study team first conducted a literature review and found that limited research exists on the costs to provide online schools and on the topic of providing additional funding to online schools based on specific student or school characteristics, as many traditional school funding formulas do. The limited research conducted to date has shown the overall costs of online schools to be lower than traditional brick-and-mortar schools.

The study team next conducted a review of state policies to understand differences in funding practices that currently exist in states across the country. The study team found that many states fund online schools in the same or nearly the same manner as traditional schools. However, that examination also led the study team to recognize that in addition to each state’s unique funding system, the way states authorize online schools can have an impact on such schools receiving a different level of state funding than traditional schools. As such, the policy review was organized around the varying methods of authorizing online schools, and the corresponding variety of funding methods within each authorization method.

### ***Literature Review of the Costs Associated with Online Schools***

The study team conducted a literature review to examine the existing body of knowledge about the typical costs associated with online schools and the types of demographic factors that might result in increased costs for online schools. While student enrollment in online schools has grown in recent years (a recent report estimates in 2019-20, 477 full-time online schools enrolled 332,379 students in the U.S.<sup>3</sup>), there is still a limited body of research on the costs associated with online schools.

The U.S. Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) lists a total of nine studies it reviewed under the broad topic of “distance learning,” two of which did not meet WWC standards. None of the remaining seven studies directly address full time online learning, rather most studies focus on evaluating specific online interventions or other supplemental online education programs. However, a body of evidence exists around school funding generally and factors that may result in cost differences to serve students with varying characteristics that could inform the funding of Online schools.

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<sup>3</sup> Molnar, A. (Ed.), Miron, G., Barbour, M.K., Huerta, L., Shafer, S.R., Rice, J.K., Glover, A., Browning, N., Hagle, S., & Boninger, F. (2021). *Virtual schools in the U.S. 2021*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved 3/21/22 from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/virtual-schools-annual-2021>

## Costs Associated with Online Schools

Little research exists examining the costs of full-time online learning compared to costs of traditional brick-and-mortar schools. The policy review, described later in this report, shows that states fund online schools in different ways – from full state formula funding to funding equivalent to charter schools (whether or not that amount varies from the full state formula amount) to a separate funding allocation specific to full-time online schools.

The 2021 National Education Policy Center (NEPC) publication *Virtual Schools Annual Report 2021*<sup>4</sup> noted “no state has implemented a comprehensive formula that ties funding allocation directly to virtual schools’ actual costs and operating expenditures.” NEPC has issued this report annually since 2013, which looks broadly at online schooling in the U.S., including enrollment patterns, reviews of the literature regarding online schools, and recent state legislation on the subject. The 2021 report confirms that limited studies have examined the difference in costs between online schools and traditional brick-and-mortar schools, but that those studies have generally found actual costs of online schools are less than traditional schools.

An adequacy cost study conducted in 2015<sup>5</sup> for iNACOL utilized the professional judgment approach to identify the resources needed for online schools to ensure all students met standards. Researchers then created a cost model to compare those identified online school resources with those previously identified for traditional schools in two states through a similar professional judgment process. This process did not evaluate actual costs of existing online schools and traditional schools, rather it identified the resources needed to ensure all students in both settings met state standards and performance expectations.

To provide effective online instruction, panelists sought to increase the engagement of students in online schools, so they built a model that closely mirrored traditional schools in terms of class size ratios to allow for synchronous, real-time instruction (in this case, the model assumed classes of 25 students allowing elementary teachers to provide synchronous, real-time instruction and secondary teachers to provide a high level of student contact and differentiated instruction by limiting their total caseload to 125 students across five classes) and other support personnel such as counselors and social workers. Structuring online schools in this manner resulted in similar costs for online and traditional schools – the differences in costs were mainly attributable to decreased facilities and maintenance and operations costs for online schools.

The professional judgment process identified both a “base” funding amount that would apply to all online students and additional resources needed to serve at-risk, English Learner, and gifted students, as well as students with disabilities. The study found that the base cost of full-time online schools (resourced to ensure all students meet state standards) ranged from 93 percent to 98 percent of the traditional school cost. With this adequate base amount in place, the study noted the “surprising” finding that online schools may require fewer resources to serve those additional student populations

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<sup>4</sup> Molnar, A. (Ed.), et al. 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick, S., Myers, J., Silverstein, J., Brown, A., Watson, J., *Performance-based Funding & Online Learning: Maximizing Resources for Student Success*, International Association for K–12 Online Learning, 2015.

than traditional school settings, assuming the full level of base resources are available. For example, the additional cost to serve at-risk students was around half the level seen in traditional costing out studies. The weight for students with disabilities (at 0.73) was also lower than traditional costing out studies, but that may have been related to the fact that the highest need special education students were being served by entities other than the online school.

The 2012 meta-analysis *Understanding the Implications of Online Learning for Educational Productivity*<sup>6</sup> noted that “underserved, at-risk students and students with special needs deserve special attention. There is emerging evidence that prevalent online learning models do not meet the needs of all students.” Potential barriers to success identified for these students in online schooling included access to technology, independent learning skills and the need for adult support to engage in online learning.

An earlier report on the costs of online learning was published in 2011 by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. *Creating Sound Policy for Digital Literacy: The Costs of Online Learning* estimated average cost ranges for online schools compared to brick-and-mortar schools. The report noted the limited data available on both costs and student outcomes. However, it found a cost range for online schools to be approximately half to three-quarters the national average cost of brick-and-mortar schools. It identified five primary cost driver categories in its online school funding model and estimated the variation of each between its online school model and the traditional model:

- Labor (teachers and administrators),
- Content Acquisition,
- Technology and Infrastructure,
- School Operations, and
- Student Support.

In the school finance field, a generally accepted belief is that school funding systems should, to the extent possible, provide a predictable level of funding to allow districts and schools the ability to plan in advance how resources will be deployed. A 2016 study<sup>7</sup> examined this notion of funding stability for online charter schools, looking at four mechanisms of state funding for online charter schools and the funding certainty those schools experience as result. The study did not explore or identify best practices of the four funding approaches (funding based on: 1. student count; 2. average daily membership or average daily attendance; 3. low-stakes completion-based funding; or 4. high-stakes completion-based funding), rather it focused on the funding certainty online schools experience under each type of funding approach. It found those systems based on a student count (single count or double count) system and those based on average daily membership or average daily attendance provide the most funding certainty for online charter schools, while those with low-stakes and high-stakes completion-based funding provide the least funding certainty, as funding is tied to student results.

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology, *Understanding the Implications of Online Learning for Educational Productivity*, Washington, D.C., 2012 (p35).

<sup>7</sup> Miller, L., Just, M., & Cho, J. (2016). *Low-stakes completion-based funding: What can we learn from the school that invented it?* Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Center for Innovation in Education.

### Dropout Prevention/Credit Recovery Online Courses

Dropout prevention and credit recovery courses are tailored to students already struggling to meet expectations and who are not on track to graduate on time. A descriptive study of Montana Digital Academy's (MTDA) 2013-14 online credit recovery course enrollment and passing rates by REL Northwest<sup>8</sup> showed an overall passing rate of 57 percent of student enrollments in online credit recovery courses. MTDA is the statewide supplemental program provider for online credit recovery courses; it is not a full-time online school. The study found that passing rates were lower for students taking one online credit recovery course per semester (60 percent ultimately failed or dropped the course) than for those taking multiple courses per semester (68 percent passing for those enrolled in two courses, 82 percent for those in three, and 85 percent for those in four). While a descriptive study cannot establish causation, the study did note recent changes to the program limited which students were eligible to take multiple courses simultaneously and required districts to provide students enrolled in multiple courses with "sufficient time and support to complete the courses."

While not specific to the online environment, the WWC's 2017 practice guide *Preventing Dropout in Secondary Schools*<sup>9</sup>, provides four evidence-based recommendations to support educators and administrators in serving students at risk of dropping out. Three of the four recommendations were based on moderate or strong evidence:

- Provide intensive, individualized support to students who have fallen off track and face significant challenges to success.
- Engage students by offering curricula and programs that connect schoolwork with college and career success and that improve students' capacity to manage challenges in and out of school.
- For schools with many at-risk students, create small, personalized communities to facilitate monitoring and support.

### Online Learning for Students with Disabilities

Again, the research base specific to serving students with disabilities in online schools is limited. However, the provisions of the federal special education law (IDEA) apply to all public education settings, whether in person or online. As such, ensuring appropriate support for students with disabilities is a factor that should be considered.

The 2015 report *Equity Matters: Digital & Online Learning for Students with Disabilities*<sup>10</sup> identified five "critical domains" in online learning for students with disabilities:

- Appropriateness of Learning Environment,
- Identification of Learners with Disabilities,

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<sup>8</sup> Stevens, D., & Frazelle, S. (2016). Online credit recovery: Enrollment and passing patterns in Montana Digital Academy courses (REL 2016-139). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

<sup>9</sup> Institute for Education Sciences, *Preventing Dropout in Secondary Schools, Practice Guide Summary* 2017. [https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/practiceguide/wwc\\_dp\\_summary\\_101717.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/practiceguide/wwc_dp_summary_101717.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Basham, J.D., Stahl, S., Ortiz, K., Rice, M.F., & Smith, S. (2015). *Equity Matters: Digital & Online Learning for Students with Disabilities*. Lawrence, KS: Center on Online Learning and Students with Disabilities.

- Provision of Disability Support Services,
- Accessibility Issues, and
- Parental Involvement.

The study does not examine the costs associated with the implementation of these critical domains for students with disabilities in online schools, rather it focuses on procedural and policy questions to consider for each domain. It can be inferred that implementation of these five domains would likely have cost considerations in practice for both state education agencies (state guidance on and documentation of the IEP process for online environments, for example) and online learning providers, even though costs were not specifically identified.

### ***Policy Review: State Governance Systems for Online Schools***

Ohio’s approach to community e-school governance and funding was described in the introduction. This section of the policy review examines other state government approaches. Since each state’s funding mechanism for online schools is closely tied to its governance and authorization structure for online schools, the study team organized this state policy review around the governance structures and examined the impact on funding for online schools. The study team focused on state funding approaches to provide *full-time online schooling* for students, as this allows a more relevant policy comparison for Ohio’s e-school funding. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many states have approved temporary full-time online options through local school districts that would not traditionally be authorized – the study team did not include these types of pandemic-related, and likely temporary, online options in its review. Likewise, private online schools operate in many states, where families pay tuition to the schools, the study team also excluded those from our review.

Through its review of e-school governance structures in the state, the study team identified four primary e-school governance structures:

- State-run, statewide online schools
- Fully online schools or programs offered by existing school districts
- Online schools authorized through the state charter school authorization process
- Other approaches to online schools

Within each governance approach, the study team has distinguished states that differentiate funding for online schools, and those that provide the same funding as other traditional brick-and-mortar schools or charter schools authorized through the same process. Some states allow authorization of full-time online schools through multiple types of governance structures, similar to Ohio.

The following table summarizes the study team’s classification of publicly funded online school approaches. The study team acknowledges the nuances related to categorizing states in any policy review and has done its best to consistently categorize approaches but recognizes others might make different choices or distinctions when classifying the approaches.

Table 1.1: Summary of Approaches to Authorizing and Funding Online Schools

Governance Structure	Differentiated Funding	
	Yes	No
<b>State-run, statewide online schools and programs</b>	24 states AL, AR, CO, FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, IA, MA, MS, MR, MT, NH, NM, NC, ND, OR, SC, TX, UT, VA, WV, WI	
<b>Online district schools or programs</b>	7 states AZ, FL, IN, KS, RI, SD, TX	15 states AK, AL, CA, CO, ID, MI, NV, <b>OH</b> , SD, TN, VT, VA, WV, WY
<b>Online charter schools</b>	8 states AZ, CA, FL, GA, IN, <b>OH</b> , MN, NH	13 states AL, AR, CO, ID, LA, MI, NV, NM, OK, OR, PA, UT, WI
<b>Other approaches</b>	2 states CO, WA	2 states MI, OK

Note, seven states (Connecticut, Delaware, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey and New York) do not currently have any publicly funded online schools or have policies that prohibit online schools.

### State-run, Statewide Online Schools and Programs

Ohio's 2019 report on e-schools includes a look at statewide, state-run online schools. The study team reviewed these types of programs and found that, in general, state-run online schools provide supplemental online courses that can be accessed by students across the state, so the schools are not diploma-granting institutions. Of the states with statewide online schools, Florida's program is the only one that allows students to enroll full-time.

**How funded:** *In some cases, these offerings are completely state-funded, typically outside of the state school finance system through a legislative appropriation, in other cases they offer courses based on a fee for service, paid by districts, schools, or home school families.*

The following brief summaries highlight the varying types of state-run, statewide online schools across the country.

- **Arkansas** – The state school, Virtual Arkansas<sup>11</sup>, provides supplemental virtual coursework to students enrolled in local school districts, or to home school and private school students who enroll in these courses through the local district. The state charges a base district membership fee and a per-student, per half unit fee. Course formats include teacher-led, flex paced, and content-only courses. Course offerings include credit recovery and Advanced Placement.
- **Florida** – The Florida Virtual School (FVS) provides both supplemental and full-time enrollment options. FVS is funded through full time equivalent (FTE) fractional funding<sup>12</sup>, which is course-

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.virtualarkansas.org/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/5606/urlt/Virtual-Sept.pdfNew>

based and performance-based funding. Students must successfully complete their courses for schools to receive the full funding amount.

- **Hawaii** – The Hawaii Department of Education operates the Hawaii Virtual Learning Network Hawaii Online Courses (HVLN HOC)<sup>13</sup>. This program of supplemental courses is available to all public school students, including charter school students, where students can take up to two online courses in addition to their regular classes. For courses offered during the regular school year, enrollment is done through the student’s school and there is no charge for courses. Courses offered during the summer are typically fee-based, and parents must register their children directly.
- **North Carolina** – The North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS) was established through legislation in 2005<sup>14</sup>. The school charges districts per class and the amount charged is determined by a statistical formula which is finalized each June.<sup>15</sup> Classes include summer, single semester, or year-long courses.
- **North Dakota** – North Dakota provides supplementary course offerings to students, including to students out of state, through the state-sanctioned North Dakota Center for Distance Education<sup>16</sup> (NDCDE). Pricing is based on the type and length of a course. Districts retain full state funding for students enrolled in NDCDE courses but pay NDCDE per course taken.

### Fully Online Programs or Schools Offered by Existing School Districts

Some states allow traditional school districts to operate fully online options. The study team differentiated from the remote learning opportunities created during the pandemic and these longer-term policies. This option was in place prior to the pandemic when more remote learning was offered during school closures.

**How Funded:** *Many of the states that allow traditional districts to operate full-time, online programing do not have different funding or student count policies in place for these students, while a few do fund differentially from traditional district funding. As noted previously, Ohio allows school districts to create online schools and funding does differ for district-run online schools than for Ohio community e-schools.*

Examples of district-operated fully online programs that provide the same funding as to other students in the district include:

- **Alabama** – All school districts in Alabama are required to provide virtual learning options for high school students, as a result of a 2015 state law<sup>15</sup>. While many districts utilize the statewide ACCESS supplemental virtual learning program to comply with this requirement, several districts have created their own online schools or contracted with private providers to manage their virtual offering. Districts operating full time virtual learning receive the same per pupil state funding as traditional students.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/EducationInnovation/VirtualLearningNetwork/Pages/home.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/SessionLaws/HTML/2011-2012/SL2011-145.html>

<sup>15</sup> <https://ncvps.org/funding-formula-and-financial-information/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.cde.nd.gov/information/policies-resources>

- **Tennessee** – Tennessee has 28 multi-district fully online schools and a significant number of district programs. Online schools are funded in the same manner as traditional public schools per specific state legislation. State funding allocations for the basic education program (BEP) are district-based and not based on individual schools. School districts can use BEP funds from both state and local sources to implement and operate their online schools<sup>16</sup>.

However, in other states there are different funding parameters for how to fund online schools. For example:

- **Texas** – Much of the state-level online learning activity in Texas is handled through the Texas Virtual School Network<sup>17</sup> (TXVSN), which is administered by the Texas Education Agency. While TXVSN does provide supplemental courses, it also includes the full-time TXVSN Online Schools (OLS) program for grades 3–12. The TXVSN OLS includes seven multi-district fully online schools. Grades 3–8 students enrolled in full-time TXVSN online schools generate state FSP funding based on successful program completion. Successful completion is defined as completion of the TXVSN education program and demonstrated academic proficiency with passing grades sufficient for promotion to the next grade level. If a student successfully completes their grade-level instructional program, the school receives full funding; if the student does not, the school receives no funding.

### Online Schools Authorized through the Charter School Process

Many states authorize online schools through their charter process, similar to Ohio’s community school authorization process. States take varying approaches even within that charter authorization process. Some states treat online charter schools the same as brick-and-mortar charters in terms of the authorization process and charter funding mechanisms. Other states, like Ohio, differentiate between online and in-person charter schools, with a different authorization process, a different online charter school funding approach, or both.

**How funded:** *The study team found when online schools are authorized through a state’s charter school process, in many states online charters are funded the same as brick-and mortar charters. However, in some states, online charters are funded differently than brick-and-mortar charters. It is important to note that authorizers of online charter schools can vary, and this variation can have impacts not just on how a school is funded, but on who provides funding for the school. For example, in most states, if a school is authorized by the state, then funding for those schools comes directly from the state, often outside the school funding formula.*

Examples of states that do not distinguish between virtual charters and brick-and-mortar charters:

- **Oklahoma** – All of the state’s online charter schools are authorized through its Virtual Charter School Board<sup>17</sup>. Funding does rely on the state’s charter school funding approach, though ADM counts are more closely scrutinized and prior year counts are not used if they have fallen too drastically.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://svcsb.ok.gov/>

- **Oregon** – Oregon’s virtual charter schools<sup>18</sup> can be authorized by either the state or a school district. Oregon’s charter school funding is utilized with the *virtual charters receiving the average funding per weighted ADM as the authorizing district*. This means that virtual charters receive some funding for targeted populations but not for their specific demographics, they are assumed to have the same demographics as the district for funding purposes.
- **Pennsylvania** – Pennsylvania also has a number of online charter schools, called cyber charters, throughout the state. The charters are authorized by local districts and *the charter funding program is used to fund cyber charters*. Each charter receives the same average per pupil funding amount as the sponsoring district, with some additional revenues available for special education students.

Other states take a more similar approach to Ohio, where online schools are authorized through the state’s charter school process but are funded at a different level than in-person charter schools.

Examples include:

- **Arizona** – Online education can be provided through district or virtual charters. The State Board of Education approves district Arizona Online Instructional (AOI) programs, while the State Board for Charter Schools approves charter AOI programs. Funding for virtual instruction is provided through the AOI formula<sup>19</sup>. AOI funding is based on the *student's actual instructional time*. Full time virtual students are funded at 95% of base support, while part time students at 85% of base state support.
- **New Hampshire** – Online education in New Hampshire is provided through the only state-approved virtual charter school, the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School<sup>20</sup> (VLCAS). It offers both supplemental and full-time enrollment and is a diploma granting institution. Through a memorandum of understanding with the state, VLCAS is funded based on *student completion of coursework* (per every half credit course completed).
- **California** – In California, online charters are authorized as any other charter (by a school district, county office of education, or the State Board of Education). However, online charters are considered "non-classroom based" and receive different funding than traditional schools. NCBs receive 85% of the state’s Local Control Funding Formula<sup>21</sup>, based on attendance. The charter or state Department of Education can request a higher or lower funding figure from the State Board of Education, based on school-specific factors.

### Other Approaches to Online Schools

In some states, online schools are addressed outside of the traditional or charter school processes. A number of states allow multiple authorizers of online schools, including district, private providers, regional education service providers and/or state entities. Another state treats online schools as alternative learning environments.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/learning-options/schooltypes/charter/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>19</sup> <https://azsbe.az.gov/resources/arizona-online-instruction>

<sup>20</sup> <https://vlacs.org/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ch/fs.asp>

**How funded:** *Since online schools in these circumstances are addressed outside of the traditional or charter school processes, the funding for online schools may also be distinct from traditional or charter schools, such as funding online schools at a lower per pupil amount than other schools in the state.*

Examples include:

- **Colorado** – Colorado’s online schools can be authorized by a school district, a group of two or more school districts, the state Charter School Institute, or a Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), and provide full-time online programs, not supplemental coursework. They might also be charter schools, but many online schools in Colorado are not charter schools. Colorado makes a distinction between multi-district and single district online schools<sup>22</sup>. For a single district school, the student must live in that district to enroll in the school, while multi-district online schools can serve students outside their geographic boundary. While both types are funded based on enrollment, single district online schools are funded at the district’s per pupil rate in the traditional school funding formula, while multi district online schools are funded at the online funding rate established in state law, for the 2021-22 school year funding was \$8,712. In most cases, the district’s per pupil rate for a single district online school is greater than the online funding rate for multi-district online schools.
- **Oklahoma** – As noted earlier, online charter schools in Oklahoma are funded in much the same manner as the state’s brick-and-mortar charter schools. However, Oklahoma’s approach to authorization is also unique in that online charter schools are authorized by the Statewide Virtual Charter School Board<sup>23</sup> (SVCB). The SVCB was created through state law and is the only entity permitted to authorize online charter schools in the state.
- **Washington** – Online programs are operated by a mix of districts, private providers, and consortia, some of which offer both part- and full-time online options. Online programs are considered alternative learning environments (ALE)<sup>24</sup>, and ALE is funded based on the Running Start (RS) nonvocational rate. The RS nonvocational rate is the statewide average rate for students in grades 9-12. This funding rate is the same regardless of the ALE course type. Student enrollment can be claimed up to 1.0 FTE, which equates to 27 hours and 45 minutes (27.75 hours) or 1,665 minutes per week. The RS nonvocational rate may be more (or less) than the district’s prototypical funding for their non-ALE enrollment. ALE courses are not eligible for enhanced CTE funds.

### ***Funding for Additional Student Populations***

The study team investigated whether online schools are eligible for additional targeted funding that is often provided through state funding formulas based on student characteristics, such as special education, English Learners, and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

First, whether an online school receives targeted funding for student or school needs is dependent on whether their state provides funding for certain student populations or school circumstances in any

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.cde.state.co.us/onlinelearning/schools>

<sup>23</sup> <https://svcsb.ok.gov/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/learning-alternatives/alternative-learning-experience>

school setting. The following table summarizes general state approaches to funding student and district needs.

**Table 1.2: Summary of Student and School District Adjustments**

Student Adjustments	
Special Education	50 States
At-Risk	47 States, excluding AK, DE, and SD
English Learners	48 States, excluding MS and MT
Gifted	35 States AK, AR, AZ, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, HI, IA, ID, IN, KY, LA, ME, MN, MS, MT, NC, ND, NE, NM, NV, OH, OK, OR, PA, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA, WI, WY
School Adjustments	
Small Size	11 States AK, CO, KA, LA, MO, NE, NM, NC, SD, VT, WY
Remote/Isolation	10 States AR, CA, FL, GA, MA, MN, MT, OR, UT, WI
Funding for Both Isolated & Small	8 States AZ, ID, MI, NY, OK, TX, WA, WV

Second, whether a state provides these additional targeted funds to online schools is also related to the governance structure of online schools, as was the case with base funding. Statewide programs that focus on providing supplemental online courses do not tend to have any additional funding associated with targeted student populations. In states that have fully online schools operating within existing school districts, students in those settings generally receive both the same base funding, and any additional funding or adjustments for student needs or school/district characteristics, as any other student in that district would.

Within the 21 states that authorize online schools through the charter school process, 13 states treat online charter schools the same as brick-and-mortar charter schools and provide adjustments for student need. Often however, those schools do not receive any adjustments for school characteristics, so as not to incentivize creating a small online school in an isolated setting, or within a district that typically receives additional funding for being small or remote.

Of the states that treat online schools separately, authorized either through the charter school process or a separate process, some states also choose to provide additional funding for student need, such as in the examples below.

- Arizona** – Arizona’s online schools can be authorized as charter schools. Its state law<sup>25</sup> requires that "charter additional assistance and district additional assistance shall be calculated in the same manner they would be calculated if the student were enrolled in a district or charter school that does not participate in Arizona online instruction."

<sup>25</sup> [https://education.alaska.gov/alaskan\\_schools/corres/pdf/Regulations.pdf](https://education.alaska.gov/alaskan_schools/corres/pdf/Regulations.pdf)

- **Minnesota** – Funding<sup>26</sup> for students enrolled in full-time online school is based on enrollment, with part-time online students funded based on course completion. Full-time online students also generate additional state support for economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities (part time online students do not generate these additional funds).
- **Nevada** – The state funds virtual students and schools the same as traditional schools<sup>27</sup>. Both virtual charter schools and virtual students in traditional districts exist in Nevada. Funding is run through the state’s current funding system, regardless of setting, so virtual students and schools would receive the same funding as students with similar needs.
- **New Mexico** – In New Mexico, online schools are authorized as charter schools<sup>28</sup>, and are generally funded through the traditional state funding formula. The state’s funding formula includes allocations for special education, at-risk and English Learner students.

### **Conclusion**

The literature review revealed that limited studies have been conducted on the costs of online schools compared to traditional brick-and-mortar schools. Studies in recent years that have estimated costs or evaluated actual costs have found that online schools cost less to operate than brick-and-mortar schools, to varying degrees. While there is a body of evidence within the general school finance research on the additional resources needed to serve students in traditional settings based on specific student or school characteristics (such as economically disadvantaged students, special education students, or English learners), the research focused on online school costs does not generally address what level of adjustment is appropriate in a full-time online setting.

The policy review found that a majority of states have some form of full-time online school option for students, and that the different governance and authorization structures in each state can influence how online schools are funded. Most often, full-time online schools are authorized in one of three ways: state-run, statewide online schools, online schools run by traditional school districts, and through the state’s charter school process. A few states have distinct approaches to online schools from their traditional district or charter process. Ohio has authorized community e-schools (online charter schools) and allows district-run online schools. Most states leverage their existing K-12 funding system as the basis of funding for online schools, but some states provide a lower level of funding for authorized online schools than their brick-and-mortar counterparts. Generally, if an online school is within an existing school district or is treated the same as a brick-and-mortar charter, then it receives the same adjustments for student need.

The information from the literature and policy reviews was used as part of the study team’s focus group and professional panel discussions and to inform the study’s final recommendations.

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<sup>26</sup> Minnesota Statutes 124D.095, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/2015/cite/124D.095>

<sup>27</sup> Nevada Department of Education, *Understanding the Pupil Centered Funding Plan*. 2021  
[https://doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Boards\\_Commissions\\_Councils/Commission\\_on\\_School\\_Funding/FinalPupil-CenteredFundingPlanSummaryDocument2021.pdf](https://doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Boards_Commissions_Councils/Commission_on_School_Funding/FinalPupil-CenteredFundingPlanSummaryDocument2021.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/public-education-commission/policies-and-processes/>

## Survey

### Overview

As part of this study, an online survey was administered to community e-school leaders in charge of operations and/or who have knowledge of program budgets and spending from June 8<sup>th</sup> to August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022. The survey was intended to allow the study team to better understand program operations, current resource use, and challenges faced by e-schools.

Thirteen of the 15 community e-schools participated in the survey, including five GenEd e-schools and eight DOPR e-schools. The number of students enrolled in the e-schools that participated in the survey account for over 99 percent of total student enrollment in Ohio e-schools. Table 2.1 presents the demographic information for the participating e-schools compared to the total e-school populations.

**Table 2.1 E-School Demographic Summary**

Demographic information	General Education		Dropout Prevention and Recovery	
	Total Average (n = 6)	Surveyed Average (n = 5)	Total Average (n = 9)	Surveyed Average (n = 8)
Total Enrollment (unit: students)	30,085	29,953	4,045	3,924
Migrant Students (unit: percent)	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.04
Students identified for Special Education Services (unit: percent)	14.85	14.88	20.08	20.04
Economically disadvantaged Students (unit: percent)	53.77	53.73	57.76	57.65
Gifted Students (unit: percent)	4.84	4.86	0.28	0.26
Homeless Students (unit: percent)	0.57	0.57	1.91	1.91
American Indian or Alaskan Native Students (unit: percent)	0.36	0.35	0.00	0.00
Asian Students (unit: percent)	1.04	1.03	0.00	0.00
Black, Non-Hispanic Students (unit: percent)	15.64	15.69	7.93	8.17
Hispanic Students (unit: percent)	7.31	7.33	5.46	5.63
Multiracial Students (unit: percent)	7.85	7.87	5.88	5.75
White, Non-Hispanic Students (unit: percent)	67.94	67.83	78.14	78.21

The table above shows demographic comparison between GenEd e-schools and DOPR e-schools including comparing the averages across all e-schools to the averages within the survey sample. Across all measures the analysis sample is very similar to the overall averages.

When comparing the two types of community e-schools the table shows that there are higher concentrations of historically underserved students in DOPR. Specifically, we see DOPR e-schools have higher numbers of students who identify as Migrants, Special Education, economically disadvantaged, and homeless. The differences in the student population of GenEd and DOPR e-schools likely impacts how each e-school designs their program offerings and manage their cost structures. Given this context, findings for the survey will be separately presented for the two types of community e-schools.

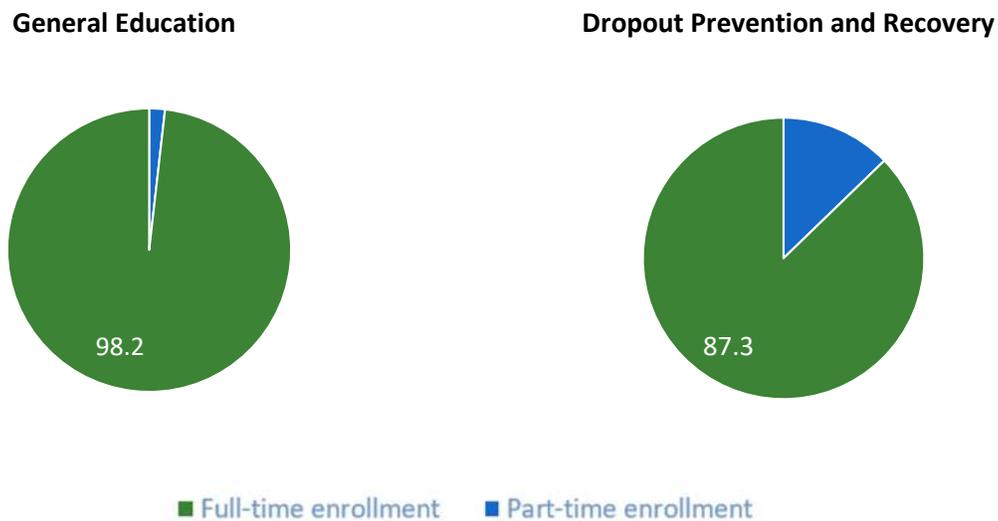
## Findings

### E-School Programs and Operation

The survey asked respondents a series of questions to understand program operations in GenEd and DOPR e-schools, including understanding student participation, how programming is offered (synchronous or asynchronous), class sizes and caseloads, and student services provided. Survey responses indicated there were specific programmatic differences between GenEd and DOPR e-schools.

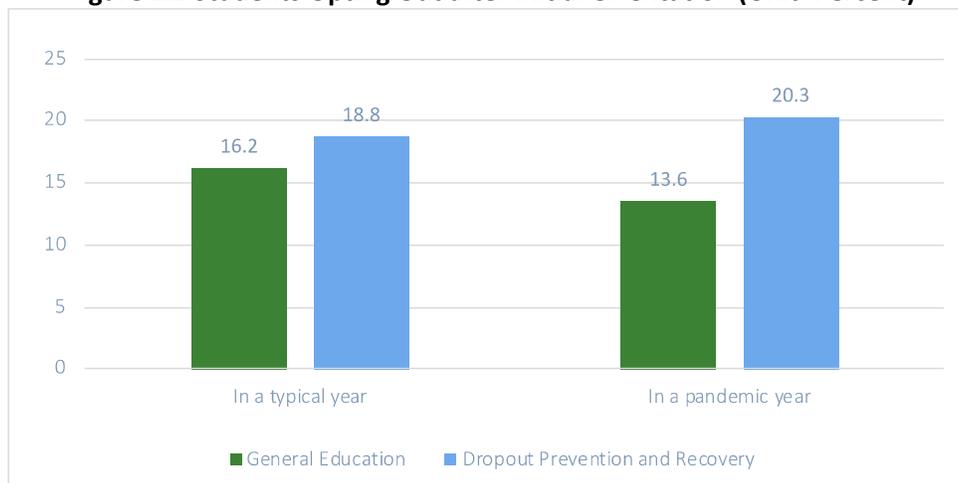
First, survey participants were asked about the percentage of students that were full-time vs. part-time (Figure 2.1), as well as the percentage of students that opt out after a required orientation (Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.1 Student enrollment in E-Schools Full-time versus Part-time basis (Unit: Percent)**



DOPR e-schools reported a notably higher percentage of part-time students than GenEd e-schools, with nearly all students in GenEd e-schools being full-time.

**Figure 2.2 Students Opting Out after Initial Orientation (Unit: Percent)**



All community e-schools reported around one-sixth of students dropping out after initial orientation. This can have a particular impact on costs for e-schools as the allocation of resources and staffing in the beginning of year for conducting orientation activities for students opting out can be considered to some extent sunk costs. DOPR e-schools reported a slightly higher percentage of students opting out after initial orientation relative to GenEd e-schools, especially in a pandemic year.

Respondents were then asked about class sizes and caseloads, or how many students are assigned to a teacher of record, to understand how this varied by grade bands, and by type of community e-school. As has been noted, in e-schools, students are assigned a teacher of record, and each teacher of record must have primary responsibility for no more than 125 students.

**Table 2.2 Typical Class Size and Caseload in E-Schools (Unit: Number of students)**

Grade levels	Typical Class Size		Caseload	
	General Education	Dropout	General Education	Dropout
		Prevention and Recovery		Prevention and Recovery
Kindergarten	35.2	18.3	39.4	18.3
Elementary (Grade 1-5)	35.4	25.7	65.0	27.3
Middle (Grade 6-8)	39.6	45.0	131.6	57.2
High School (Grade 9-12)	68.0	78.4	145.6	61.8

As displayed in Table 2.2, the average class size in e-schools reported by survey respondents is highest in high schools. Specifically, on average, there are 68 students in a class in GenEd e-schools and 78.38 students in DOPR e-schools. For elementary grades, GenEd e-schools have bigger class sizes than DOPR e-schools, whereas DOPR e-schools has a higher average class size in middle school grades than GenEd e-schools. Notably, there were also significantly lower average caseloads in DOPR e-schools than GenEd e-schools. As with class size, caseloads vary based on grade levels served.

Survey participants were also asked about the support services they provide to students. All GenEd and DOPR e-schools reported they offer:

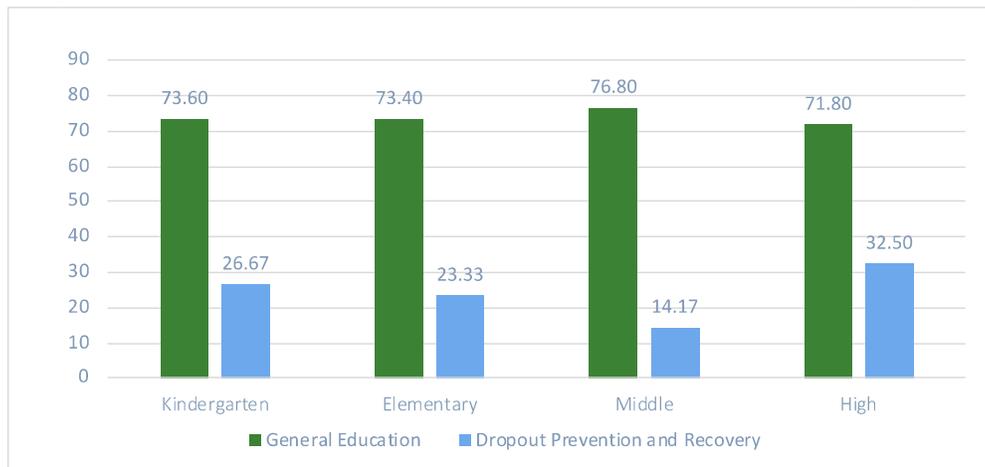
- Academic tutoring
- Administrative support
- Advisement/mentoring/progress check ins
- Attendance monitoring/student engagement
- IT help desk support
- Mental health support
- Onboarding orientation
- Tailored supports and services for special education and English Learners

Additionally, all DOPR and 83 percent of GenEd e-schools said they offered: (1) career orientation/vocational support, and (2) family engagement support. All GenEd e-schools and nearly all DOPR e-schools (89 percent) said they provided varied electives. The largest difference was related to offering synchronous instruction.

Synchronous instruction refers to when students engaged with a teacher in real time (i.e., some e-schools offer bell schedules like in-person school), whereas asynchronous learning refers to students who move along at a self-guided pace by being assigned content and having flexibility to schedule times for check-in or work with teachers. One hundred percent of GenEd e-schools said they offer synchronous instruction, while 67 percent of DOPR e-schools said the same. One DOPR e-school indicated that they do not offer synchronous instruction currently but would like to, mentioned that lack of funding, staff's expertise, scheduling challenges and parent's refusal were their reasons for not being able to offer this service.

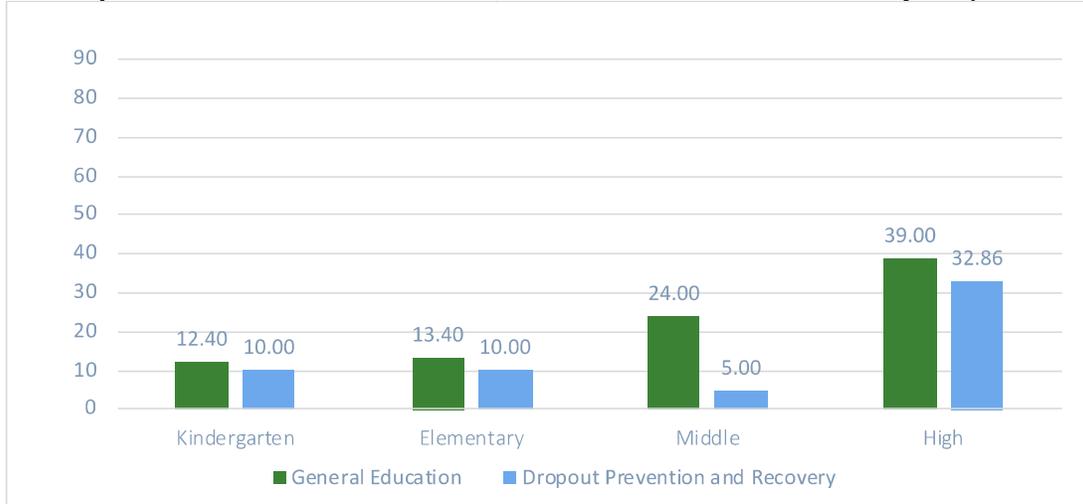
Figures 2.3 and 2.4 go into greater detail on the topic of synchronous or asynchronous instruction, displaying information on how much synchronous real-time instruction/activities are offered by grade level in each type of e-school first in core instruction classes and then in elective courses.

**Figure 2.3 Synchronous Real-Time Instruction/Activities Offered for Core Subjects (Unit: Percent)**



On average, GenEd e-schools reported offering a higher percentage of real time, synchronous instruction/activities than DOPR e-schools for all grade levels and subjects, with the most significant differences in core subjects.

**Figure 2.4 Synchronous real-time instruction/activities offered for elective subjects (Unit: Percent)**



Generally, the percentage of synchronous instruction offered for elective subjects was lower in both settings than in core subjects, though the percentage offering synchronous instruction in elective subjects was higher in high school grades compared to earlier grades.

### Personnel and Non-personnel Resources

Survey respondents were asked specifically about personnel resources, including staff time, students per FTE by position category, and how staff used their time, and non-personnel resources, like technology and facilities.

Table 2.3 first presents current staffing in each position category as reported in the survey, including the number of e-schools that reported having staff in that category (n), then the average number of students per FTE (avg.) and the range of students per FTE in that category (range) for all e-schools that reported having staff in that position.

**Table 2.3 Current Staffing in Each Position Category, Number of Students per FTE**

	General Education			Dropout Prevention and Recovery		
	n	Avg.	Range	n	Avg.	Range
			20-38	7	47	18-160
			66-146	7	58	27-98
			258-394	7	64	33-111
			109-359	7	110	64-253
			131- 805	6	236	25-489
			66-4,730	7	117	49-197
			NA	7	245	136-442
			NA	3	542	100-885
			526-5,391	5	624	85-1,700
Other Positions (Written in by survey respondent)						
				2	307	293-320
				1	160	NA
				1	293	NA

Generally, DOPR e-schools have on average lower numbers of students per staff FTE than GenEd, except for teachers and instructional aides. For these positions, DOPR e-schools have nearly doubled the number of students per teacher relative to GenEd e-schools.

Two tables in Appendix A provide additional detail on how staff time is used. Staff time allocation in both e-school types span across different responsibilities beyond their main scope of work. In particular, assessment is a work component that consumes time from many staff positions.

### Technology

As noted earlier, Ohio law requires that when a student enrolls in an Ohio community e-school, in addition to receiving instruction from a licensed Ohio teacher, they must: (1) receive a computer, and (2) receive online access to the school.

Table 2.4 looks at the technology equipment that community e-schools provide to their students, including what they currently provide and what they feel is needed but not currently provided.

**Table 2.4 Technology Equipment for Students (Unit: Number of Schools Reporting)**

Equipment Support for Students	Provided by Schools		Needed but not Provided by Schools	
	General Education	Dropout Prevention and Recovery	General Education	Dropout Prevention and Recovery
Laptop computer	5 (all)	8 (all)		
Desktop computer	1	2		1
Tablet	1	1		1
Video Recording System	3	2	1	1
Microphone/ Headset	5	7		

Table 2.4 shows that all responding community e-schools provide laptop computers to students, fulfilling their requirement by law. Additionally, microphones and headsets are also provided to nearly all students, and video recording systems are also commonly provided in GenEd community e-schools. Most community e-schools did not report any other technology as needed but not provided.

Further, all community e-schools offer internet support to their students. However, only around 58 percent of students/families in General Schools and 73 percent of students/ families in DOPR e-schools receive those supports, either due to challenges related to access, such as being in an area without reliable internet, or already having household internet access.

Survey respondents were also asked about the technology equipment (Table 2.5) and internet support they provide for staff.

**Table 2.5 Technology Equipment for Staff Unit: Number of Schools Reporting)**

Equipment Support for Staff	Provided by Schools		Needed but not Provided by Schools	
	General Education	Dropout Prevention and Recovery	General Education	Dropout Prevention and Recovery
Desktop computer		6		1
Laptop	5 (all)	8 (all)		
Tablet computer		2		1
Digital Projector	1	3		1
Smart Board	1	3	1	3
Video Recording System	4	3		4
Microphone/ Headset	5 (all)	8 (all)		

As shown in Table 2.5, 100 in all community e-schools, staff are provided with laptops and microphones/headsets. A majority of DOPR e-schools also provide desktops and a majority of GenEd e-schools also provide video recording systems. Fewer DOPR e-schools reported providing video recording systems, but a larger number also said that equipment was needed, but not currently provided.

When asked about internet access, only two of GenEd e-schools and four DOPR e-schools offer internet support/connectivity stipends to staff.

### Facilities

The use of facilities by e-schools was explored in the survey both for general operations, and for assessment purposes.

**Table 2.6 Facilities (Unit: Number of Schools Reporting)**

Physical Facilities	General Education	Dropout Prevention and Recovery
<b>Facilities Specifically Asked about in Survey</b>		
Administrative/Staff Office	5 (all)	8 (all)
Classroom	1	3
Auditorium		1
<b>Other Facilities (Manually Entered by Respondent)</b>		
Testing Center	2	3
Tutoring Lab		2
Enrollment Center		1
Event Center	1	
Orientation Center		1
Outdoor Space for Sports and Activities		1
Parent Meeting Room		1
Professional Development Location	1	
Student Center		1

All e-schools reported that they had administrative or staff office space, and several DOPR and GenEd e-schools said they had a testing center. Additionally, three DOPR e-schools had classroom space and two

of the DOPR e-schools also said they had a tutoring lab. Use of other facility spaces was mixed and limited to individual sites.

**Table 2.7 Assessment Facilities**

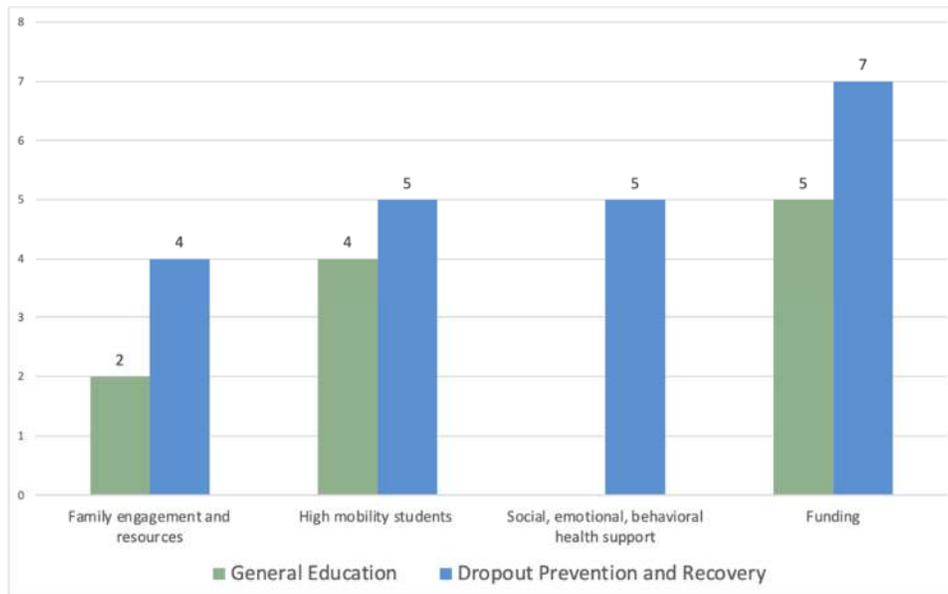
Assessment Facilities	General Education	Dropout Prevention and Recovery
Renting facilities	5 (all)	7
E-school owned facilities	4	2

Additionally, most e-schools — all GenEd e-schools and seven out of eight DOPR e-schools — report they rent facilities for assessment activities. Also, while most GenEd e-schools report using owned facilities for this purpose, only two DOPR e-schools report using owned facilities. The use of rental facilities has cost implications due to not only the actual rent and logistics costs, but likely also staff's travel costs and time to and from rented assessment sites.

### ***Challenges Encountered by Community E-Schools***

There are several challenges e-schools reported encountering in providing quality online education, which may have implications on the equity of education provided to e-school students. A summary of survey responses regarding challenges is displayed in Figure 2.5.

**Figure 2.5 Top Challenges Reported by E-Schools (Unit: Number of Schools)**



Three top challenges mentioned in both types of e-school settings are funding, high mobility students, and family engagement and resources. Another top challenge mentioned among DOPR e-schools was providing social, emotional, and behavioral health support. Other challenges noted by individual schools included: (1) addressing students who are 1 or more grade levels behind and have other challenges; (2) digital access, such as access to digital resources, technology, and the internet, (3) keeping students engaged in earning the 920 hours per year, (4) legislation directed at e-schools such as HB409/410, (5)

state testing/ Increasing cost of testing students face to face, (6) students withdrawn due to truancy (HB 410) not picked up by their home district, and (7) support systems for high risk drop-out students and students with disabilities.

**Funding** is the top concern reported among surveyed e-schools indicating that there are not enough funds available to equitably service students and their varying needs. The most common issue noted by respondents reporting this challenge is the adjustment of funding resulting from student mobility and participation, reducing funding if students do not attend full time. Specifically, for a student enrolled in e-schools to gain full funding, they must complete 920 hours of schooling.<sup>29</sup> Because of attendance issues as well as students' varying expectations, schools often do not receive full funding for all students, especially DOPR e-schools due to the type of students they serve. About half of this group noted this particular challenge.

Also commonly noted as a challenge is the overall fact that e-schools are not funded at the same level as traditional school districts. In addition to the impact of attendance issues on funding, a few respondents also noted that they are not eligible for some additional funding brick-and mortar community schools receive for certain student populations, including additional funding for economically disadvantaged students, and English learners.

When schools do not receive full funding for students, respondents noted that cutbacks are made, and services are not as comprehensive as they could be. The competing demands of students ultimately impact their school attendance and success as well as the funding of quality services granted to the school. Most respondents reporting this challenge expressed a general need for a consistent source of funds to sustain and maintain high quality services.

The second most common challenge identified by respondents relates to serving **high-mobility students** E-School students are faced with challenges in and out of school. As reflected in Figure 3, students may opt-out after the initial orientation or withdraw from school throughout the school year due to a variety of reasons. This creates inconsistency for both students and educators and was noted by nearly all e-schools reporting this challenge.

Four of the eight e-schools reporting this challenge, the majority being Dropout Prevention and Recovery, explicitly noted that student mobility challenges are a result of outside of school issues such as access to basic needs (i.e., food, clothing), inconsistent living situations, or a lack of safety or security in their family residence. These schools mentioned, for example, the need for significant resources to help families overcome these challenges, and thus improve attendance, such as home visits, transportation support to access basic needs, coordination with a counselor or social worker, among others. In short, for e-schools to ensure their students facing the greatest challenges are in regular

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<sup>29</sup> Ohio Department of Education. (2019). Study of Internet- or Computer-Based Community School Funding Models. See more at: <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Finance-and-Funding/School-Payment-Reports/State-Funding-For-Schools/Community-School-Funding/Community-School-Funding-Information/Study-of-Internet-or-Computer-Based-Community-School-Funding-Models-1-1.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>

attendance varied and significant investments are needed. The third most common challenge reported is **family engagement**. The five schools reporting this challenge noted that limited parental involvement or support for students hampers the school engagement efforts. For example, while there are resources available to families, they are not always using or taking advantage of them. One school noted that adult figures in their students' homes change often contributing to engagement challenges. Another school noted the extreme lack of basic resources facing families as a critical need, and one the school struggles to address through their engagement activities and other support.

Finally, providing student **support** was commonly identified as an equity challenge by DOPR e-schools, identified by four respondents within this school type. Specifically, two of these schools commented that students enrolled in these schools have a history of being unsuccessful in a traditional academic setting, largely due to behavioral issues. As result, these schools note the significant resources required to connect with these students and address the underlying issues such as mental health support, access to school social workers, staff time to foster meaningful, and supportive relationships. Also of note are the outside of school student circumstances contributing to the need for student support including as noted by one school, responsibilities such as working full time, parenthood, and attending to personal mental health struggles.

## Focus Groups

Focus groups were held to allow the study team to gain a better understanding of issues raised in the survey, provide stakeholders an opportunity to highlight any other topics they felt important to understand for the study, and to set the final professional judgment (PJ) panel representative school sizes. Three focus groups were held, one each for GenEd community e-schools, DOPR community e-schools, and community e-school sponsors. There were eight participants in the GenEd focus group representing six schools, seven participants from seven DOPR e-schools, and three sponsor participants representing eight sponsored e-schools. The rest of this section identifies common areas of discussion during all three focus groups.

### ***Student Count***

Though not as explicitly detailed in the survey responses, participants from each of the focus groups highlighted that the current student count process for community e-schools impacts numerous aspects of operations and opportunities for students. Participants were cognizant of the reasons and history related to the funding approach but felt the current approach had a number of unintended consequences. The most direct was that community e-schools serve more students, sometimes far more students, than they were funded for in a year. This has impacts on staffing ratios across positions, salary levels, and the academic and support opportunities that schools can provide students. These impacts are described in more detail in the sections below.

A direct impact of the count process for community e-schools includes the need for additional staff to track the data needed for the student count, resources not likely needed in traditional community schools. The students attending these schools often have a higher risk of attendance issues already and the count process requires resources to ensure community e-schools can get as many students counted for funding as possible. These are resources on top of the student support resources utilized by the schools to make sure students mental health and instructional needs are met.

### ***Staffing***

The participants first reviewed the results of the survey related to staffing in the schools. Generally, participants thought the results were indicative of what was happening at the e-schools but felt that context was important in reviewing the information. With community e-schools generally serving far more students than they are funded for, participants indicated that class sizes and caseloads have to be higher than might be ideal to make the financials of each school work. Panelists wanted to make sure that ratios discussed during the professional judgment process were based on actual students served and not just on funded counts. They felt that examining the cost per student served was a better metric than the cost per student funded.

Another concern from the panelists was the ability to pay a competitive salary. Many participants reported being able to attract less experienced staff but not being able to retain staff due to a lack of competitive pay. The community e-schools often lacked traditional step and lane compensation systems that could compete with local districts. They reported acting as feeder schools for local districts, with staff hired away after a few years of training and teaching experience. Once again, the disconnect

between funded students and number of students served was highlighted as one reason the schools struggled with competitive compensation.

The fluid nature of online students caused other staffing challenges for community e-schools. Unlike traditional sites where a building's capacity might limit growth, e-schools can see large increases in student enrollment year-to-year or even within a single year. This means that predicting enrollment is difficult and can cause staffing shortages when an influx of students arrives. This becomes compounded by the fact that nearly 20 percent of students that go through orientation do not continue long-term with the schools. Knowing that the school will not be funded for all of the students also means that decisions must be made on when and who to hire that might not align with actual student counts.

The community e-schools reported having significant struggles finding people to fill certain positions, this was especially true for special education staff. Community e-school leaders recognized that staffing for special education was problematic across the state but felt that the lack of competitive compensation and the remote nature of the work made it particularly difficult for the schools to attract this staff. Schools reported going through multiple staff people for the same position within a school year or not having the position filled at all.

### ***Special Student Populations***

Panelists indicated that historically, students coming to online learning settings often have struggled with traditional school settings. The population utilizing online settings has changed some coming out of the pandemic, with families finding online a good fit, but there continues to be a high rate of students who traditionally have struggled in school, this is especially true in the dropout prevention and recovery e-schools. The schools also report very high rates of special education students, some topping a quarter of the enrolled students. Additionally, e-schools report high numbers of students with 504 plans – many are students with medical conditions – whose needs make the online setting the most conducive learning environment for them.

As mentioned above, finding staff to serve special education students to serve students in person is an acute problem for community e-schools. Beyond compensation, the schools, especially statewide schools that operate across a large geographic footprint, must find staff to serve special education students that require in person services throughout a wide area, and then also must find space to serve the students. An additional challenge mentioned by e-school leaders was getting student records as they enroll in the school. It was reported that often community e-schools will not even know a student has an individual education plan (IEP) until records come for a student, which can be well after enrollment. Participants thought better systems could be developed for the timely delivery of student records statewide.

Both traditional and DOPR e-schools reported serving high numbers of at-risk students due to the nature of online learning. These students need additional supports both instructionally and non-instructionally. All of the community e-school leaders mentioned that the schools were providing these additional supports and recognized how important they were for the overall success of students and families. They

struggled to reconcile serving the needs of their student population with the lack of *Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid* funding for e-schools.

DOPR leaders indicated that they tended to be working with the hardest students to serve. These students face numerous barriers to success and the schools need to provide robust support services to ensure student success. This was seen in the student support staffing ratios from the survey. Many of the students, in addition to being academically at risk of not completing school, come from high poverty/low stability situations which can lead to additional service needs. School staff is heavily engaged with each student to help meet their instructional and non-instructional needs including family needs. The schools are designed to serve these students, but service models are personnel intensive.

### ***Professional Judgment Representative Schools***

The last task for the panels was to review current community e-school sizes and help the study team identify the representative school sizes to use with PJ panelists. Representative schools allow the study team to use a number of school sizes to build the resources for community e-schools across the state when working with the PJ panelists. The goal is to identify school sizes that would allow panelists to identify the resources needed for students in schools that are familiar to panelists without having to build every school size iteration in the state. Table 3.1 shows the grade spans and 2021 headcounts figures for GenEd e-schools and DOPR e-schools.

**Table 3.1 Community E-Schools, Grade Span and 2021 Headcount**

School	Grade span	2021 Headcount
<b><i>General Education</i></b>		
Quaker Preparatory Academy	K-8	156
Buckeye On-Line School for Success	K-12, PS	595
Great River Connections Academy	K-12	1,582
Ohio Connections Academy, Inc	K-12	5,494
Alternative Education Academy	K-12	5,781
Ohio Virtual Academy	K-12	16,557
<b><i>Dropout Prevention and Recovery</i></b>		
Mahoning Unlimited Classroom	4-12	91
Auglaize County Educational Academy	K-12	95
Findlay Digital Academy	9-12	144
Fairborn Digital Academy	9-12	174
Greater Ohio Virtual School	7-12	516
Quaker Digital Academy	K-12	630
GOAL Digital Academy	K-12	657
Ohio Digital Learning School	K-12	677
TRECA Digital Academy	K-12	1,900

The study team felt that with such a small number of sites, it was important to pick representative schools that did not too closely resemble current sites. Based on its experience leading PJ panels, the study team finds this approach ensures that no person on the panel would have a school so familiar that they might default to simply replicating the resources currently in place. Panelists across the focus groups agreed five representative schools were identified. Three school sizes were chosen for GenEd e-schools due to the very large differences in community e-school sizes, at 650, 2,600 and 9,750 students. Two schools were identified for DOPR, including 200, 700 and 2,600 students. More information on how these school sizes were implemented is available below in the PJ section of the report.

The information gained from the focus groups was utilized by study team members during the facilitation of the panels. This included facilitators listening for areas of concern described by the focus groups and exploring the resources necessary to meet the needs for e-schools. It also included facilitators prompting PJ panelists to discuss issues mentioned by the focus groups if they did not come up organically in the conversations.

## Professional Judgment Panels

This chapter presents the results of the professional judgment (PJ) approach. The PJ approach utilizes educator experience and expertise to specify the resources representative schools and school districts need to meet state standards and requirements. The PJ approach provides explicit cost information about not only **how much** should be spent, but also **how** it should be spent. These resources can then be “costed out” by applying salary and benefit information and the prices of other resources (such as for technology) to determine the level of funding needed at a per-student level.

Moreover, the approach selected by the Cupp-Patterson Workgroup to develop the Fair School Spending Plan was a variation on the professional judgment panel approach (Fleeter, 2019) so its use to identify the resources that should be in place to serve community e-school students consistent with how the new funding formula was set in Ohio.

### *PJ Panel Design*

To identify PJ panelists, the study team sought nominations from all community e-schools by direct request of e-school directors via email, as well as from ODE and the Ohio Association of School Business Officials. A total of 22 panelists, from 13 of the state’s 15 community e-schools, participated in the professional judgment panels. Panelists included community e-school teachers, counselors, principals, academic directors, special education directors, treasurers, and school administrators/directors. A list of panel participants is in Appendix B.

The study team hosted three professional judgment (PJ) panels in late September through early October 2022 to identify the resources needed to successfully serve community e-school students in Ohio. One panel focused on the resource needs for GenEd community e-schools, another focused on the resource needs for dropout prevention and recovery community e-schools, and the final review panel reviewed the work of the previous panels and discussed other policy implications for funding of e-schools. In each panel, panelists discussed the resources needed for students in representative settings of different sizes. As was discussed during the focus groups, these enrollment sizes were higher than the average funded counts in these e-schools and was instead intended to represent the number of students an e-school served at a time.

In each panel, participants were provided with instructions to guide the professional judgment group process, along with a summary of relevant Ohio state laws, rules, and ODE guidance governing community e-schools. The state policy summary and PJ panel instructions can be found in Appendices C and D, respectively. Panelists were tasked to identify the resources needed to successfully serve community e-schools in representative school settings, while allocating resources as efficiently as possible without sacrificing quality. Panelists identified the personnel and non-personnel resources needed to serve e-school students.

### General Education E-Schools Panel

The GenEd Community E-Schools Panel began by identifying the school-level personnel needed to support a GenEd e-school of 2,600 students. This representative school setting assumed 1,200

elementary (K-5) students and 1,400 secondary (grades 6-12) students. Panelists determined that on average, about half of GenEd e-school students would qualify as at-risk. Panelists identified base resources for the school, then identified the additional resources that would be needed to serve the at-risk student population above that base amount.

*It is important to note that community e-schools do not currently qualify for the Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid (DPIA) state funding, so while the study team reports the base and additional costs for at-risk separately, the total combined base cost and additional resources for at-risk students represents the cost of e-schools.*

### **Dropout Prevention and Recovery E-School Panel**

The DOPR Panel began by identifying the school-level personnel needed to support an average size DOPR e-school of 700 students. This representative school setting assumed 175 elementary (K-5) students and 525 secondary (grades 6-12) students. Elementary students attend DOPR e-schools largely because their older siblings attend the school. Panelists note that DOPR elementary students come from the same home situations as their siblings that may result in them being considered at-risk as well. By virtue of attending a DOPR e-school, 100% of students are considered to be at-risk, so in this model there is no base level with add-ons for the at-risk population. *Again, community e-schools do not currently qualify for the DPIA state funding, while the costs identified here are for serving a 100% at risk student population.*

### **Review Panel**

During the community e-schools review panel, panelists reviewed the resources identified by the GenEd and DOPR panels. The panel sought to understand differences in the panel's approaches, such as the GenEd panel's staffing model utilizing teachers teaching five of seven classes, while students take all seven class periods, while the DOPR panel assumed students – on average – were each taking five courses to get the credit they needed to graduate.

One of the review panel's goals was to identify the areas where it made sense for there to be different resource levels for GenEd and DOPR e-schools, and to identify areas where a difference in approach resulted in different resource levels that should really be more similar across the settings.

## ***Resources Identified by Professional Judgment Panels***

### **Elementary Personnel**

Panelists first identified the resources needed for elementary grades (K-5) in a representative GenEd and DOPR e-school, with 1,200 elementary students and 175 elementary students respectively. As noted previously, the GenEd panel identified base resources, as well as the additional resources needed to serve at-risk students, assuming 50% of students were at-risk. The third column under GenEd shows the base and at-risk resources combined. For DOPR settings, all students were assumed to be at-risk by definition, so resources were not disaggregated between base and at-risk resources.

### Instructional Staff

Table 4.1 below presents all elementary instructional personnel identified by the panelists, both shown as FTE and as ratios to allow for comparison between the two different size programs.

**Table 4.1. Elementary (K-5) Instructional Personnel in Average Settings, by FTE and Ratio**

	General Education			DOPR
	All Students	At-Risk	Combined	All Students
FTE	1,200 students	600 students	1,200 students (50% at-risk)	175 students
<b>Instructional Staff</b>				
Teachers	35.2	6.1	41.3	6.0
Additional Teachers	6.0		6.0	1.0
Instructional Coaches	2.8	1.0	3.2	0.5
Interventionists	6.0		6.0	0.9
	General Education			DOPR
	All Students	At-Risk	Combined	All Students
Ratio	1,200 students	600 students	1,200 students (50% at-risk)	175 students
<b>Instructional Staff</b>				
Teachers	34 (30:1 in K, 35:1 in grades 1- 5)	98 (to reduce to 25:1 in K, 30:1 in grades 1-5)	25 (incl. the additional teachers)	25 (incl. the additional teachers)
Additional Teachers	200			
Instructional Coaches	436	1477	380	375
Interventionists	200		200	200

**Teachers.** For the GenEd e-school, panelists identified 35.2 teachers at the base level, based on class size ratios of 30:1 in kindergarten and 35:1 in grades 1-5. Once at-risk students were considered, the panelists reduced the class size ratios to 25:1 in kindergarten and 30:1 in grades 1-5, which would add 6.1 teachers, for a total of 41.3 teachers. In addition to the classroom teachers identified above, the panel identified the need for one additional teacher per grade level to allow for specials classes, a total of 6.0 teachers. The panel did not allocate any additional teachers beyond the 6.0 to serve at-risk students. Adding the regular teachers (both base and at-risk) and the additional teachers, produced an average ratio of 25:1 for GenEd.

For the DOPR setting, panelists recommended seven teachers to serve the 175 students, including one teacher per grade and one additional teacher to ensure elementary students had access to specials. This resulted in an average ratio of 25:1, consistent with the GenEd setting.

**Instructional Coaches.** Panelists felt instructional coaches were important to provide instructional support and coaching to teachers, helping analyze data and providing mentoring for new teaching staff.

These coaches are non-administrative positions – they do teacher observations for the purpose of improving instruction but do not perform teacher evaluations. The review panelists recommended a consistent staffing ratio in both settings, recommending instructional coaches be staffed at a ratio of 15 teachers to 1 coach, resulting in 3.2 instructional coaches in the combined base and at-risk column for GenEd, and 0.5 instructional coaches for the 7.0 teachers in the DOPR setting.

**Interventionists.** Interventionists primarily work with small groups of students, providing additional specific support to struggling students, and may do some co-teaching with the classroom teacher. Review panelists believed interventionist ratios should be consistent across settings and believed a 200:1 ratio was appropriate. In terms of FTE, this resulted in 6.0 interventionists for GenEd (all assigned to the base) and about a 0.9 FTE for the DOPR e-school.

### **Student Support Staff**

Table 4.2 next presents all elementary student support personnel identified by the panelists, both shown as FTE and as ratios to allow for comparison between the two different size programs. Overall, the recommended student support staffing was more intensive in DOPR settings, as seen in the lower staff-to-student ratios for each position.

**Table 4.2 Elementary (K-5) Student Support Staff Personnel in Average Settings, by FTE and Ratio**

	General Education			DOPR
	All Students	At-Risk	Combined	All Students
<b>FTE</b>	<b>1,200 students</b>	<b>600 students</b>	<b>1,200 students (50% at-risk)</b>	<b>175 students</b>
<b>Student Support Staff</b>				
Social Worker	0.5	0.5	1.0	0.9
Counselor	4.8		4.8	0.9
Other Support Professional				0.4
	General Education			DOPR
	All Students	At-Risk	Combined	All Students
<b>Ratio</b>	<b>1,200 students</b>	<b>600 students</b>	<b>1,200 students (50% at-risk)</b>	<b>175 students</b>
<b>Student Support Staff</b>				
Social Worker	2400	1200	1200	200
Counselor	250		250	200
Other Support Professional				400

**Social Workers.** Panelists believe the social worker role is especially important in the e-school setting, helping connect families to services. For example, low-income families who would otherwise qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, do not have access to that resource in an e-school setting so social workers play a greater role in helping connect them to community nutrition services. Further, regardless of income level, many families experience crisis, so some level of social work is needed regardless of the

number of at-risk students. As a result, panelists allocated 0.5 FTE for all students in the GenEd setting, and an additional 0.5 for the 600 at-risk students, for a total 1.0 social worker in the GenEd e-school. In the DOPR settings, panelists allocated 0.5 FTE social worker for the elementary grades (at a ratio of 200:1) recognizing that families with elementary students in a DOPR e-school may need more social work support and assistance being connected with community resources.

**Counselors.** For the GenEd setting, panelists believe that counselors should be staffed in alignment with the national association recommendations for school counselors, at 250:1, which would result in 4.8 counselors. The panel did not identify a need for additional counseling support with a higher at-risk population. DOPR panelists recommended a similar staffing ratio for counselors as social workers (200:1), or about a 0.9 counselor at the elementary grades, recognizing that there is less scheduling to do at elementary, and this position is serving in a counseling role for students.

**Other Support Professional.** DOPR panelists recommended an additional 0.4 FTE for another support professional, which could be used to provide additional behavioral and mental health support to students (at a ratio of 400:1).

### ***Resources in Smaller and Larger Settings***

After identifying the instructional and student support staff FTE and ratios in average size GenEd and DOPR settings, the panelists discussed how these resources would scale if the programs were larger or smaller. For GenEd e-schools, this was scaling the program of 1,200 elementary school students down to 300 students and up to 1,200 students. For DOPR e-schools, this was scaling the program of 175 elementary school students down to 50 students, and up to 650 students. Overall, the panelists felt that the staff ratios identified for instructional and student support staff were the same regardless of representative program size.

Using the same staffing ratios as in average size settings, Table 4.3 shares the different FTE that would be generated in the different size settings for GenEd e-schools and DOPR e-schools.

For simplicity's sake, instead of reporting the recommendations for GenEd schools separately for base, at-risk and combined resources (as the resource information was disaggregated in the prior tables), the combined figures assuming 50 percent of students are at-risk are shown.

**Table 4.3 Elementary (K-5) Instructional and Student Support Staff Personnel FTE, by Size of Program**

<b>General Education</b>			
	<b>Combined</b>	<b>Combined</b>	<b>Combined</b>
	<b>300 students (50% at-risk)</b>	<b>1,200 students (50% at-risk)</b>	<b>4,500 students (50% at-risk)</b>
<b><i>Instructional Staff</i></b>			
Teachers	10.3	41.3	155.0
Additional Teachers	2.0	6.0	22.5
Instructional Coaches	0.8	3.2	11.8
Interventionists	1.5	6.0	22.5
<b><i>Student Support Staff</i></b>			
Social Worker	0.3	1.0	3.8
Counselor	1.5	4.8	18.0
Other Support Professional			
<b>Dropout Prevention and Recovery</b>			
	<b>50 students</b>	<b>175 students</b>	<b>650 students</b>
<b><i>Instructional Staff</i></b>			
Teachers	1.7	6.0	22.3
Additional Teachers	0.3	1.0	3.7
Instructional Coaches	0.1	0.5	1.7
Interventionists	0.3	0.9	3.3
<b><i>Student Support Staff</i></b>			
Social Worker	0.3	0.9	3.3
Counselor	0.1	0.9	3.3
Other Support Professional	0.1	0.4	1.6

### Secondary Personnel

Panelists then identified the resources needed for secondary grades (6-12) in a representative GenEd e-school with 1,400 secondary students and DOPR e-school with 525 secondary students. As was the case in the elementary school, the GenEd panel identified base resources, as well as the additional resources needed to serve at-risk students, assuming 50% of students were at-risk. The third column under GenEd shows the base and at-risk resources combined. For DOPR settings, all students were assumed to be at-risk by definition, so resources were not disaggregated between base and at-risk resources.

#### ***Instructional Staff***

Table 4.4 that follows presents all secondary instructional personnel identified by the panelists, both shown as FTE and as ratios to allow for comparison between the two different size programs.

**Table 4.4 Secondary (6-12) Instructional Personnel in Average Size Settings, by FTE and Ratio**

General Education				DOPR
	All Students	At-Risk	Combined	All Students
<b>FTE Count</b>	<b>1,400 students</b>	<b>700 students</b>	<b>1,400 students (50% at-risk)</b>	<b>525 students</b>
<b><i>Instructional Staff</i></b>				
Teachers	56.0	9.3	65.3	21.0
Instructional Coaches	3.7	0.6	4.4	1.4
Interventionists	5.0	2.0	7.0	2.6
General Education				DOPR
	All Students	At-Risk	Combined	All Students
<b>Ratio</b>	<b>1,400 students</b>	<b>700 students</b>	<b>1,400 students (50% at-risk)</b>	<b>525 students</b>
<b><i>Instructional Staff</i></b>				
Teachers	25 (35:1 class size; teachers teaching 5 out of 7 classes a day)	75 (to reduce to 30:1 class size; teachers teaching 5 out of 7 classes a day)	21	25
Instructional Coaches	375	1125	321	375
Interventionists	280	350	200	200

**Teachers.** In the GenEd setting, the base level the panel identified 56.0 teachers, based on an average class size of 35:1, recognizing that some electives courses at the secondary level might have higher class sizes, allowing for some smaller class sizes in core or specialized courses. Further, students were assumed to be taking seven courses a day with teachers teaching five courses a day, a model very similar to the approach in a traditional brick-and-mortar setting. To serve the assumed 700 at-risk students, panelists reduced the class size ratios to 30:1, which added 9.33 teachers, for a total of 65.33 teachers. This teacher figure is inclusive of all content and elective teachers. Once combined, the 65.3 teachers resulted in an average student-teacher ratio of 21:1. The DOR panel identified 21.0 teachers, based on a student-teacher ratio of 25:1. While this staffing ratios differed between the GenEd and DOPR, the review panelists felt that this difference made sense as GenEd e-schools has a more similar schedule structure as brick-and-mortar settings, and staffing that followed suit, whereas the DOPR model was more based on a student caseload model.

**Instructional Coaches.** Review panelists believed the instructional coach ratios built into the elementary level would remain the same at the secondary level, at a 15:1 teacher to coach ratio. In the GenEd setting, this generated 3.7 at the base level, with an additional 0.6 once there were at-risk students and additional teachers, bringing the school total to 4.4 instructional coaches. For the DOPR e-school, this resulted in 1.4 instructional coaches to serve their 21 secondary teachers.

**Interventionists.** Review panelists kept the same 200:1 student-interventionist ratio recommended for elementary grades, in both the GenEd and DOPR setting.

### **Student Support Staff**

Table 4.5 next presents all secondary student support personnel identified by the panelists, both shown as FTE and as ratios to allow for comparison between the two different size programs. Overall, the recommended student support staffing was more intensive in DOPR settings, as seen in the lower staff-to-student ratios for each position.

**Table 4.5 Secondary (6-12) Student Support Staff Personnel in Average Size Settings, by FTE and Ratio**

	General Education			DOPR
	All Students	At-Risk	Combined	All Students
<b>FTE Count</b>	<b>1,400 students</b>	<b>700 students</b>	<b>1,400 students (50% at-risk)</b>	<b>525 students</b>
<b>Student Support Staff</b>				
Social Worker	1.0	1.0	2.0	2.6
Counselor	5.6		5.6	2.6
Other Support Professional				1.3
	General Education			DOPR
	All Students	At-Risk	Combined	All Students
<b>Ratio</b>	<b>1,400 students</b>	<b>700 students</b>	<b>1,400 students (50% at-risk)</b>	<b>525 students</b>
<b>Student Support Staff</b>				
Social Worker	1400	700	700	200
Counselor	250		250	200
Other Support Professional				400

**Social Workers.** GenEd panelists recommended social workers at the secondary level to support students and families and connect them to community resources as needed, with a 1.0 social worker allocated at the base level and additional 1.0 social worker for at-risk students, for a combined total of 2.0 social workers at a ratio of 700:1 in this at-risk population and recommended 1.5 social workers to support students and families and connect them to community resources as needed. Social workers were recommended at a much lower student-social worker ratio (200:1) for a total of 2.6 social workers in the representative DOPR e-school, which review panelists felt was consistent with the greater need of students in these settings.

**Counselors.** GenEd panelists believed that counselors should be staffed in alignment with the national recommendations for school counselors, at 250:1, which would result in 5.6 counselors, without a need for additional counseling for the at-risk population. The panel noted that this ratio is only sufficient if additional student support staff, such as social workers and attendance staff, is in place, so counselors are truly fulfilling the secondary counseling role. DOPR panelists acknowledged the national

recommendations for counselor staffing, but as DOPR e-schools serve an entirely at-risk student population, many of whom have not been successful in traditional school settings, the panelists recommended a lower counselor ratio of 200:1 to be able to serve the needs of DOPR secondary students. The panel recommended 2.6 counselors who would do the scheduling, review previous school records, help coordinate with CTE and College Credit Plus opportunities, and help students plan for graduation and opportunities beyond graduation. The review panelists felt this richer staffing model made sense in DOPR e-schools.

**Other Support Professional.** The DOPR panel recommended 1.0 other student support staff, which would provide additional behavioral and mental health support to students. Combined with the other student support staff positions above, this amounts to approximately a 100:1 student to support staff ratio across the three student support staff position categories, which panelists believed is needed to appropriately support students in a DOPR setting.

### ***Resources in Smaller and Larger Settings***

As was the case for elementary grades, after identifying the instructional and student support staff FTE and ratios in average size GeEd and DOPR settings, the panelists discussed how these resources would scale if the programs were larger or smaller. For GenEd e-schools, the average size program of 1,400 secondary school students was scaled down to 350 students and up to 5,250 students. For DOPR e-schools, the program of 525 secondary school students was scaled down to 150 students, and up to 1,950 students. Consistent with the panelists' decision for elementary grades, the panelists felt that the staff ratios identified for instructional and student support staff were the same regardless of representative program size.

Using the same staffing ratios as in average size settings, Table 4.6 presents the different FTE that would be generated in the different size settings for GenEd e-schools and DOPR e-schools.

For GenEd e-schools, the combined figures assuming 50 percent of students are at-risk are shown.

**Table 4.6 Secondary (6-12) Instructional and Student Support Staff Personnel FTE, by Size of Program**

<b>General Education</b>			
	<b>Combined</b>	<b>Combined</b>	<b>Combined</b>
	<b>350 students (50% at-risk)</b>	<b>1,400 students (50% at-risk)</b>	<b>5,250 students (50% at-risk)</b>
<b><i>Instructional Staff</i></b>			
Teachers	15.9	65.3	78.0
Instructional Coaches	1.1	4.4	5.2
Interventionists	4.0	7.0	7.4
<b><i>Student Support Staff</i></b>			
Social Worker	0.2	2.0	7.5
Counselor	1.8	5.6	21.0
Other Support Professional			
<b>Dropout Prevention and Recovery</b>			
	<b>150 students</b>	<b>525 students</b>	<b>1,950 students</b>
<b><i>Instructional Staff</i></b>			
Teachers	6.0	21.0	78.0
Instructional Coaches	0.4	1.4	5.2
Interventionists	0.8	2.6	9.8
<b><i>Student Support Staff</i></b>			
Social Worker	0.8	2.6	9.8
Counselor	0.8	2.6	9.8
Other Support Professional	0.4	1.3	4.9

### System Personnel

In addition to the elementary and secondary resources just described, panelists also identified system level resources including personnel for school administration, system administration, technology management, and other student/family support.

Table 4.7 presents the system personnel recommended for the GenEd e-school, assuming three different system sizes: 650 students, 2,600 students, and 9,750 students (the combined total of the number of elementary and secondary students in the preceding section at the three size points).

Table 4.7 General Education System Personnel FTE by System Size

FTE Count	General Education		
	650 students	2,600 students	9,750 students
<b>School Administration</b>			
Principal/ Director	1.0	2.0	7.5
Assistant Principal/ Assistant Director		4.0	15.0
Coordinator/ Supervisor	1.0	1.0	3.8
EMIS Coordinator	1.0	1.0	3.8
Clerical Staff	1.5	4.0	15.0
<b>System Administration</b>			
Superintendent	1.0	1.0	1.0
Director	1.0	1.0	2.0
Treasurer	0.5	1.0	1.0
Director of Student Support		1.0	3.8
Operations Director	0.5	1.0	3.8
Federal Programs Director		1.0	1.0
HR	0.5	1.0	3.8
Payroll/AP clerk	1.0	1.0	3.8
<b>Technology Management</b>			
IT Director	1.0	1.0	1.0
Software Development	1.0	1.0	2.0
Cyber Security/Network	1.0	1.0	2.0
IT Support	2.0	7.0	30.0
<b>Other Student/Family Support</b>			
Attendance	2.0	4.0	15.0
Data/Tracking	1.0	1.5	5.6
Admissions/Orientation/Family Liaison	2.0	3.0	11.3
Clerical/Data Entry	1.5	3.0	11.3

Looking at the resources first for the average size GenEd e-school of 2,600 students (presented in the middle column) panelists recommended:

**School Administration.** Panelists recommended two principals, one elementary and one secondary, and four assistant principals. Panelists also recommended 2.0 coordinators, one for EMIS and one that could be utilized to accommodate coordination required for career and technical education programs, as an additional assistant principal, dean or attendance tracking administrator or the like, as well as 4.0 clerical staff positions.

**System Administration.** Panelists recommended: (1) a 1.0 superintendent to oversee the school, (2) 4.0 directors in charge of academics, student support, operations, and federal programs, (3) a 1.0 treasurer to oversee the financial reporting needs of the school, (4) a 1.0 HR professional to oversee the system's human resource matters and (5) a 1.0 payroll/accounts payable clerk.

**Technology Management.** Online schools rely on technology and must be staffed appropriately. This includes preparing devices for student and staff use, distributing technology to students and staff, ensuring school systems are functioning, and providing tech support and troubleshooting as needed. Panelists included the following technology staff: (1) a 1.0 technology manager oversees all student, staff and system technology hardware, software and networking needs, (2) 1.0 software development professional, 1.0 cyber security/network professional, and (3) 7.0 IT support staff personnel provide assistance to students and families with technology.

**Other Student/Family Support.** Panelists included 4.0 attendance staff, given the unique requirements of e-schools to track student attendance and participation. This staffing level includes the resources required to host meetings, work with advocates, complete court paperwork and proceedings, etc. Panelists also recommended 1.5 FTE to handle data and tracking, as well as 3.0 FTE to address admissions, provide orientation, and serve as a liaison for families. These positions are intended to assist with enrollment, making sure students and families can access the school, and provides a general point of contact for families. E-schools have relatively high turnover of families, so the school could be losing and filling up to 25% of their enrollment each year. 3.0 clerical positions were also recommended.

Panelists also considered the resources needed for a smaller (750 students) and larger (9,750 students) GenEd community e-school. To do so, panelists began by looking at the resources they built for the average size program detailed above. Then they explored using scaling, down these results to a smaller size school and scaling up to the larger size school, using the established staffing and other ratios. Panelists then reviewed each resource to see where adjustments should be made, based on economies of scale, or to establish minimum or maximum resource levels in a given setting. Table 4.7 above presented the different FTE recommendations for the smaller and larger settings.

Table 4.8 next presents the system personnel recommended for the DOPR e-school, assuming three different system sizes 200 students, 700 students, and 2,600 students.

Table 4.8 DOPR System Personnel FTE by System Size

FTE Count	DOPR		
	200 students	700 students	2,600 students
<b>School Administration</b>			
Principal/ Director	1.00	1.00	2.00
Assistant Principal/ Assistant Director			
Coordinator/ Supervisor		1.00	5.00
EMIS Coordinator	1.00	1.00	1.00
Clerical Staff	1.00	1.50	4.00
<b>System Administration</b>			
Superintendent	1.0	1.0	1.0
Director		1.0	1.0
Treasurer	0.3	0.5	1.0
Director of Student Support			1.0
Operations Director		0.5	1.0
Federal Programs Director			1.0
HR		0.5	1.0
Payroll/AP clerk	contracted	1.0	1.0
<b>Technology Management</b>			
IT Director	1.0	1.0	1.0
Software Development	contracted	1.0	1.0
Cyber Security/Network	contracted	1.0	1.0
IT Support	1.0	2.0	7.0
<b>Other Student/Family Support</b>			
Attendance	2.0	3.0	7.4
Data/Tracking	2.0	3.0	3.0
Admissions/Orientation/Family Liaison	1.0	2.0	6.0
Clerical/Data Entry	1.5	1.5	2.0

First considering the system resources for the average size DOPR e-school of 700 students (presented in the middle column) panelists recommended:

**School Administration.** Panelists included 1.0 principal, who would oversee both the elementary and secondary programs within the school, and 2.0 coordinators/supervisors, including a work-based learning coordinator and EMIS coordinator. 1.5 clerical staff positions were also recommended.

**System Administration.** Panelists included a 1.0 superintendent to oversee the K-12 school and a 1.0 director level position. Additionally, a 0.5 FTE each was recommended for the categories of operations, HR and finance (treasurer). Panelists also included 1.0 payroll and accounts payable clerk.

**Technology Management.** As previously stated, e-schools has a heavy reliance on technology and must be staffed appropriately. Panelists recommended a 1.0 IT director and 2.0 software development and cyber security/network manager positions to oversee all student, staff and system technology hardware, software and networking needs. 2.0 IT support personnel were also recommended to maintain the system's technology services and provide support to staff and students.

**Other Student/Family Support.** 3.0 positions were recommended to handle student attendance, and another 3.0 positions to handle data/tracking, separate from the EMIS position included previously. These positions handle the FTE tracking, coursework tracking, student enrollment tracking, etc. Panelists indicated that the state has expectations for the level of staffing performing tracking that schools struggle to meet currently. Panelists also indicated a school this size would need 2.0 admissions/orientation staff, who organize and implement orientations to new students/families throughout the year, handle enrollment processes, and are available to prospective and current families throughout the school year. Finally, 1.5 clerical staff were recommended to provide support in this area, including handling student records.

Panelists considered the resources needed for a smaller (200 students) and larger (2,600 student) DOPR community e-schools. To do so, panelists scaled the resources they built for the average size program detailed above, down to the smaller size school and up to the larger size school, using the established ratios. Panelists then reviewed each resource to see where adjustments should be made, based on economies of scale, or to establish minimum or maximum resource levels in a given setting. In the smallest setting, some of the positions would not be hired in house, but instead would be contracted out. In the larger setting, some additional position categories, like federal programs and director of student services, had recommended staffing that was not present in the average size school. Table 4.8 on the proceeding page identifies these staffing differences by size.

**Comparison between system staffing for GenEd and DOPR settings.** Differences in how the GenEd panelists and the DOPR panelists staffed the system level were apparent and reviewed by the review panel, who addressed some inconsistencies were appropriate.

Overall, looking at average size settings (2,600 students for GenEd and 700students for DOPR) system-level personnel came to 95:1 in the GenEd model, while the DOPR model's system-level personnel was a 75:1 ratio, due in part to the differences in size as well as the greater needs identified for other student support, particularly for attendance, in DOPR settings. Panelists felt that DOPR e-schools often have to provide-significant support to re-engage students who miss class time and to keep at-risk students engaged and on track, so that the higher level of support in the DOPR setting made sense.

## Technology

Technology is at the heart of online programs, so the panelists were asked to identify the technology hardware that would be provided to staff and students in both GenEd and DOPR settings.

For every staff member, panelists recommended:

- Desktop/Laptop
- Tablet
- Peripheral (often external monitor)
- Cellphone/desktop phone
- Internet access
- Printer
- Headphones/microphones

For every student:

- Laptop (plus 20% more additional devices to account for churn)
- Tablet
- Hotspot/internet access
- Headphones/microphones

### Other Non-Personnel Resources

Panelists identified other cost areas needed to run the community e-schools, and then the study team surveyed e-school treasurers to gather cost estimates in these areas. Identified non-personnel cost areas and average per student amounts are shown in Table 4.9.

**Table 4.9 Average Non-Personnel Costs in General Education and DOPR settings**

	General Education	DOPR
Professional Development	\$1000/teacher	\$10/student
Supplies, Materials & Equipment	\$160/student	\$135/student
Software/Licensing	\$300/student	\$200/student
Curriculum	\$50/student	
Assessment	\$7/student	
Marketing	\$15/student	\$17/student
Facilities & Utilities	\$300/student	\$400/student
Insurance	\$130/student	\$29/student
Legal	\$10/student	\$21/student
Student Activities	\$5/student	\$100/student
Student Data System (Tracking)		\$30/student
Postage/mailing	\$20/student	\$20/student
Enrollment database	\$14/student	\$4/student
Seal/credential	\$4/student	\$4/student
Audit	\$50/student	\$16/student
Computers/facilities for testing	\$10/student	\$200/student
ITC fee	\$20/student	\$50/student
ESC fee		\$26/student
Sponsorship Fee	3%	3%

Key cost areas included professional development, software and licensing (\$200-300 per student), facilities and utilities (\$300-400 per student), and sponsorship fees (3 percent). State testing-related

transportation and technology costs (up to \$200 per student) was also a significant cost area. Panelists identified other costs associated with testing, including renting facilities, setting up computers and networks required to test, providing travel reimbursement to teachers administering the exams, providing bus passes or gas gift cards to families to get students to the testing site.

Panelists identified other non-personnel cost areas including (but not limited to) supplies, materials & equipment; curriculum; assessment; human resources; finance; IT; marketing; insurance; student data systems; legal; and student activities.

### Cost Estimates

Once the panels completed their work, the study team undertook the process of costing-out the resources identified above, which primarily involved determining salaries associated with the identified FTE positions. Salaries were derived from 2018 -2021 of personnel information provided by ODE. The study team looked at each position for each year and removed any personnel that received a salary that was 2.5 standard deviations above or below the mean. Once outliers were removed, the study team took the average salary across all years to determine the average salary for each position. Additionally, the study team used a benefit rate of 16% plus \$14,265.53 to cover insurance to calculate total salaries and benefits for each position.

Table 4.10 presents the elementary and secondary costs for GenEd and DOPR settings. Since the instructional and student support staff same ratios were used in all size settings, the per student cost is the same within each type of e-school and grade span.

**Table 4.10 Elementary and Secondary Personnel Costs by Personnel Categories**

	General Education				DOPR	
	Elementary, Base	Secondary, Base	Elementary, Combined 50% At-Risk	Secondary, Combined 50% At-Risk	Elementary	Secondary
<b>Instruction</b>	\$3,573	\$3,999	\$4,049	\$4,725	\$4,101	\$4,101
<b>Student Support</b>	\$395	\$422	\$432	\$485	\$1,214	\$1,035
<b>Total</b>	\$3,968	\$4,421	\$4,481	\$5,210	\$5,315	\$5,136

Total costs varied from \$3,968 to \$5,315 per student. Costs estimates were highest in DOPR settings, primarily due to the high costs associated with intensive student support in these settings.

Table 4.11 (personnel) and 4.12 (non-personnel) present the system costs that are in addition to these elementary and secondary costs.

**Table 4.11 System Personnel Costs by Personnel Categories**

System Personnel						
	General Education			DOPR		
	650 Students	2,600 Students	9,750 Students	200 Students	700 Students	2,600 Students
School Admin	\$ 610	\$ 425	\$ 425	\$ 1,006	\$ 566	\$ 393
System Admin	\$ 776	\$ 302	\$ 226	\$ 854	\$ 721	\$ 393
Technology	\$ 667	\$ 318	\$ 287	\$ 493	\$ 744	\$ 167
Other Student/ Family Support	\$ 550	\$ 243	\$ 243	\$ 821	\$ 619	\$ 200
<b>Total</b>	\$2,603	\$1,288	\$ 1,181	\$ 3,174	\$2,650	\$ 1,493

The system level costs ranged from \$1,181 to \$2,603 for GenEd e-schools while DOPR e-schools ranged from \$1,493 to \$3,174. There are some economies of scale issues occurring in the smaller settings due to the panels deciding there was a minimum resource level that each system must have.

**Table 4.12 System Non-Personnel Costs by Area**

Other Costs						
	General Education			DOPR		
	650 students	2,600 students	9,750 students	200 students	700 students	2,600 students
Other Costs	\$ 1,139	\$ 1,139	\$ 1,139	\$ 1,747	\$ 1,285	\$1,212
Staff Tech	\$ 19	\$ 9	\$ 9	\$ 42	\$ 20	\$ 12
Student Tech	\$ 314	\$ 297	\$ 297	\$ 379	\$ 378	\$ 378
<b>Total</b>	\$ 1,472	\$ 1,445	\$ 1,445	\$ 2,167	\$ 1,683	\$ 1,601

The system level other costs range from \$1,445 to \$1,472 in GenEd systems and \$1,601 to \$2,167 in DOPR system. The other costs in the GenEd systems are very similar by size. There is more variation in the DOPR system due to higher resource levels needed at the 200-tudent level to cover fixed costs such as facilities and utilities, insurance, and credentials.

Table 4.13 below adds total school level costs and system level costs to create total cost estimates for each setting and size configuration.

**Table 4.13 Total Professional Judgment Cost Estimates**

Other Costs									
	General Education						DOPR		
	Base			Combined, 50% At-Risk					
	650 Students	2,600 Students	9,750 Students	650 Students	2,600 Students	9,750 Students	200 Students	700 Students	2,600 Students
School	\$ 4,212	\$ 4,212	\$ 4,212	\$ 4,874	\$ 4,874	\$ 4,874	\$5,218	\$5,218	\$5,218
System	\$ 4,075	\$ 2,733	\$ 2,626	\$ 4,075	\$ 2,733	\$ 2,626	\$5,321	\$4,333	\$3,095
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 8,535</b>	<b>\$ 7,153</b>	<b>\$ 7,042</b>	<b>\$9,217</b>	<b>\$ 7,835</b>	<b>\$ 7,724</b>	<b>\$10,854</b>	<b>\$9,837</b>	<b>\$8,561</b>

The final professional judgment panel cost estimates range from \$7,724 to \$9,217 in the GenEd settings and from \$8,561 to \$10,854 in the DOPR settings. The DOPR system is higher because all students in the school are at-risk and have additional resource needs.

## Recommendations

This section examines key findings and the study team's recommendations related to those findings. Each finding and recommendation is linked to information from the report and are typically based on numerous pieces of evidence from the study.

### **Base Funding**

**Finding:** Current funding levels are similar to the funding amounts identified for base level resource needs for GenEd and DOPR community e-school students. The professional judgment panel base cost figures for 2,600 and 9,750 student schools were \$7,142 and \$7,042 respectively. These figures are slightly lower than the FY22 base cost figure of \$7,352.

The study did not build a DOPR e-school with only base cost resources and then separately consider the resources needed for at-risk students; instead, a representative e-school was created where nearly all students are considered at-risk of academic failure, as is the reality for DOPR e-schools. This means resources associated with additional instructional and support needs for at-risk students are included in the identified per pupil cost figures. The study team examined the information from the panels and the current DPIA funding to estimate what portion of the DOPR's overall costs might represent a base figure. Looking at the GenEd panels, when 50 percent of the 2,600-student e-school were assumed to be at-risk students, it resulted in a cost increase of around \$700 per pupil. Taking a linear analysis, this would mean an additional \$1,400 at 100 percent concentration. Reducing the DOPR 2,600 per pupil figure by the 100 percent concentration (\$1,400) would leave a base figure of \$7,141, nearly identical to the GenEd figure at this size. Similarly, the current DPIA formula would provide about \$1,400 at the 85 percent economically disadvantaged concentration. This analysis appears to show base costs similar to Ohio's current base funding for schools in FY22 of \$7,352.

**Recommendation:** Community e-school base cost estimates using the professional judgment approach are very similar to the base cost of \$7,352 in FY22 and should be funded utilizing a similar methodology to sites receiving this base amount. However, it should be noted that this figure would be sufficient only if the additional recommendations are addressed below.

### **Student Count**

**Findings:** E-schools face significant challenges due to the differential approach to both counting student participation and maintaining a student in attendance. Focus group members and professional judgment panelists repeatedly identified student count as one of the greatest challenges to providing the resources needed for students. They highlighted that per pupil costs from this study will only be valid if provided for the students served by the community e-schools and not the current count of students funded.

National research mentions the additional time on task and engagement efforts needed for many online students. Students often come to online settings after having difficulty in traditional schools. The students attending these schools often have a higher risk of attendance issues already and e-schools require a significant amount of staffing to monitor and engage students to ensure their participation.

Further, the count process requires resources to ensure community e-schools can get as many students counted for funding as possible.

The community e-schools understand the history behind and reasoning for the differential count for the schools. Still the count leads to schools serving more students, sometimes far more students, than they were funded for in a year. Comparing FY22 headcount data to enrollment data for funding, e-schools ranged from being funded for just 21 percent of headcount up to 110 percent. The majority of e-schools were funded below head count with the average e-school receiving 85 percent of their headcount. This differential has impacts on staffing ratios across positions, salary levels, and the academic and support opportunities that schools can provide students. Additional staff are also needed to track the data needed for the student count, resources not likely needed in traditional community schools or for online schools in traditional districts.

**Recommendation:** With the large variation in headcount versus funded enrollment the study team would recommend a workgroup be created to identify approaches to student count that allow for recognition of the efforts community e-schools must make to enroll, provide orientation to, and work to continue to engage students in the education process, while balancing the concerns about ensuring funding only for students engaged in the education process.

### ***DPIA and EL Funding***

**Findings:** Both GenEd and DOPR community e-schools provide services for at-risk and English learner students. At-risk students make up a large share of many of the GenEd e-schools and DOPR e-schools. Funding report data from May of 2022, shows e-schools ranged from 26 to 70 percent of at-risk students. The survey discussed that the lack of funding for these students was a barrier to providing the instructional and student supports needed for student academic success. These resources include adequate instructional staff, counselors, social workers, and attendance staff. Focus groups also highlighted the lack of funding for these students as a misalignment with the needs of most community e-school settings. They also highlighted that e-schools housed in traditional districts receive the additional funding for these students.

As discussed above in the base funding recommendation, the professional judgment results showed that both the GenEd and DOPR community e-schools need additional resources to serve their at-risk students. The funding needed to provide the staffing recommended by panelists is similar to the current DPIA funding levels.

Focus group members and professional judgment panelists also discussed the need to provide service to English learners when they enroll in the school. Though not a high percentage of students, the resources needed to adequately serve the students can be high.

**Recommendation:** Community e-schools should receive DPIA and EL funding to be consistent with how other settings in the state, including e-schools in traditional districts, are funded. This funding will allow districts to more successfully serve their student populations.

### ***Size Adjustment***

**Finding:** Though there are only 15 community e-schools, they vary greatly in size ranging from less than 100 students to over 16,000 students, with two-thirds of sites under 1,000 students. The professional judgment results indicate that the smallest settings face higher costs to serve students. Using the 2,600-student district as the baseline figure in both GenEd and DOPR community e-schools shows that in the small settings, 650 and 700 students respectively, costs were 17 percent or 15 percent higher. The 200 student DOPR setting had 26 percent higher costs.

**Recommendation:** The state could consider providing a size adjustment for smaller, independent community e-school settings. It is important that such an adjustment does not provide a perverse incentive for new or current community e-schools to simply create a number of smaller sites to increase funding, so provisions should be made to consider which sites would be eligible for this type of funding. This could include not providing size adjustment funding for sites that utilize a common management organization or are closely aligned with a school district.

## Appendix A, Additional Survey Data

The following tables provide additional information from the e-schools survey on staffing. Both tables provide information from the same survey questions; the first table shows responses from GenEd community e-schools, while the second table provides responses from dropout prevention and recovery e-schools.

**Table A-1.** Time allocation for operational components by position categories (General Education)

Gen Ed	Position categories								
Operation components	Teachers	Intervention Specialists	Instructional paraprofessional	Curriculum specialists/ Instructional coaches	Technology specialists	Student support service professionals	Administrators	Family engagement staff	Clerical support staff
Instruction	42.00	41.00	37.50	21.25	0.00	15.00	14.00	0.00	6.00
Assessment	13.00	10.00	15.00	13.75	8.33	10.00	11.00	4.00	3.00
Content planning	12.00	11.00	10.00	11.25	0.00	6.67	10.00	0.00	2.00
Social emotional learning support	8.80	6.80	7.50	4.75	0.00	14.67	9.80	3.00	2.00
Professional development learning	7.40	7.40	3.50	8.00	0.67	7.33	13.40	0.40	2.40
Family engagement	7.20	7.20	13.50	1.50	16.67	17.00	16.20	64.60	49.00
Others	6.00	9.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.33	10.00	8.00	9.00
Other academic support (non-instructional) (i.e. tutoring...)	2.40	6.40	12.50	33.00	57.33	19.00	9.40	1.00	18.40
Pre-enrollment orientation	1.20	1.20	0.50	6.50	17.00	7.00	6.20	19.00	8.20

*Source: Question 20 in the E-School Survey (Please share how each specific position, on average, divides up their time across the different operational components in terms of an approximate percent.).*

**Table A-2.** Time allocation for operational components by position categories (Dropout Prevention and Recovery)

DOPR	Position categories								
Operation components	Teachers	Intervention Specialists	Instructional paraprofessional	Curriculum specialists/ Instructional coaches	Technology specialists	Student support service professionals	Administrators	Family engagement staff	Clerical support staff
Instruction	47.86	38.57	20.00	3.17	2.86	0.00	5.00	1.67	0.00
Assessment	15.57	15.00	1.67	15.00	18.57	11.43	13.57	7.50	6.43
Content planning	12.86	12.86	1.67	21.50	2.86	0.71	13.57	1.67	0.00
Professional development learning	7.29	8.29	8.67	28.50	7.29	8.00	15.00	5.17	5.86
Social emotional learning support	6.14	6.43	8.33	7.50	3.43	17.14	11.43	17.33	10.71
Other academic support (non-instructional) (i.e. tutoring...)	3.57	9.29	48.00	14.33	22.86	27.14	15.71	11.67	11.43
Family engagement	3.14	4.57	6.67	6.67	7.43	22.86	13.57	37.50	12.14
Pre-enrollment orientation	2.14	4.29	3.33	2.50	23.57	11.29	5.00	11.67	37.71
Others	1.42	0.71	1.67	0.83	11.14	1.42	7.14	5.83	15.71

Source: Question 20 in the E-School Survey (Please share how each specific position, on average, divides up their time across the different operational components in terms of an approximate percent.)

## Appendix B, Participants in Focus Groups and Professional Judgment Panels

### Focus Group Participants

Participant	School/Organization
Kurt Aey	ESC of Lake Erie West
Adam Clark	TRECA Digital Academy
JoAnna DeMotte	Auglaize County Educational Academy
Andrea Dobbins	Charter School Specialists
Marie Hanna	Ohio Connections Academy
Kate Harkless	Ohio Digital Learning School
Tish Jenkins	GOAL Digital Academy
Debra Kennedy	Quaker Preparatory Academy
Shawn Lenney	Greater Ohio Virtual School
Frank Mader	Buckeye Online School for Success
Shannon McElwain	Alternative Education Academy
Rosemary Rooker	Findlay Digital Academy
Lenny Schafer	Ohio Council of Community Schools
Kristin Stewart	Ohio Virtual Academy
Jason Swinehart	Great River Connections Academy
Donald Thompson	Buckeye Online School for Success
Erik Tritsch	Fairborn Digital Academy
Kyle Wilkinson	Ohio Virtual Academy

### Professional Judgment Panel Participants

Participant	School/Organization
Jessica Biggers	Fairborn Digital Academy
Courtney Patrick	Fairborn Digital Academy
Rosemary Rooker	Findlay Digital Academy
Shawn Lenney	Greater Ohio Virtual School
Angie Martin	TRECA Digital
Adam Clark	TRECA Digital
Steve Earnest	GOAL Digital Academy & Findlay Digital Academy
Laura Barber-Purvis	Great River Connections Academy
Donald Thompson	Buckeye Online
Frank Mader	Buckeye Online
Brandy Cox	OHDELA
Raymond Lambert	OHDELA
Stephanie Nickles	Ohio Connections Academy

<b>Participant</b>	<b>School/Organization</b>
Kyle Wilkinson	Ohio Virtual Academy
Kristin Stewart	Ohio Virtual Academy
Katie Brechiesen	Ohio Connections Academy
Rekha Korinko	Ohio Connections Academy
Kate Harkless	Ohio Digital Learning School
Erik Tritsch	Fairborn Digital Academy
Tish Jenkins	GOAL Digital Academy
Jessica Wake	TRECA Digital
Tisha Rinker	Ohio Connections Academy
Jason Swinehart	Great River Connections Academy

## Appendix C, Ohio Community E-Schools State Policy Summary

### Summary of Ohio Policies for Community E-Schools *September 2022*

Community e-schools are a specific subset of Ohio’s community schools that operate entirely online. Two types of community e-schools exist in Ohio: those that serve a general student population and those that are focused on dropout prevention and recovery. Some community e-schools serve students statewide, while others serve students from a specific geographic area. There are currently fifteen community e-schools in the state. This document provides an overview of key state policies governing community e-schools in Ohio.

#### **E-School Sponsorship**

Just as brick-and-mortar community schools in Ohio are overseen by their specific community school sponsors, community e-schools’ sponsors provide oversight of the schools, ensuring the e-school is compliant with Standards for K-12 Online Learning. The Ohio Department of Education is charged with oversight of all sponsors.

#### **Required Services for E-School Students**

Ohio law requires that when a student enrolls in an Ohio community e-school, they:

- are provided instruction by a licensed Ohio teacher,
- receive a computer,
- receive online access to the school, and
- are provided a minimum of 920 hours of learning opportunities in each school year<sup>30</sup>.

E-school<sup>31</sup>Students are assigned a teacher of record, and each teacher of record must have primary responsibility for no more than 125 students.<sup>32</sup>

#### **Provision of Location for Statewide Assessments**

E-schools are required to provide a location for students to take statewide achievement and diagnostic assessments within a 50-mile radius of their residence<sup>33</sup>.

#### **Teacher Qualifications**

While community school teachers may hold a traditional teaching license, community schools may employ teachers with a substitute license or long-term substitute license<sup>34</sup>. Community school teachers may hold a teaching license in accordance with ORC3314.03(A)(10), which includes professional licenses,

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<sup>30</sup> <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3314.03>

<sup>31</sup> <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3314.271>

<sup>32</sup> <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3314.27>

<sup>33</sup> <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3314.25>

<sup>34</sup> <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Community-Schools/Sections/Schools/Properly-Certified-Teachers-Requirements-for-Community-Schools.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>

resident educator licenses, alternative licenses, supplemental licenses, substitute licenses or long-term substitute licenses.

Community school teachers providing services under federal Title programs, career and technical education programs and special education must meet the same licensure standards as traditional public schools teachers. Educational aides in all school settings need to hold an educational aide permit.

### **Dismissal Procedures**

Every e-school's attendance policy must include a process to automatically withdraw a student from the school if the student, "without legitimate excuse," fails to participate in 72 consecutive hours of offered learning opportunities<sup>35</sup>.

Recent legislation<sup>36</sup> effective in the spring of 2021 created new requirements for general education e-schools related to student attendance requirements. It included a definition of "instructional activities" to be used for attendance purposes and identified criteria students must meet to be considered in attendance (participation in 90% of the instructional activities offered or if the student is on pace for on-time completion of enrolled courses). Further, it requires parent/guardian notification if a student has 30 or more hours of unexcused absences in a semester, and outlines the requirement for consequences, including disenrollment from the school, if attendance expectations are not met. If students are unenrolled from an e-school due to these requirements, the student may not re-enroll at the same e-school for the remainder of the school year.

### **State Funding for Community E-Schools**

While e-schools are a type of community school in Ohio, they are treated differently than site-based (brick-and-mortar) community schools for funding purposes. While brick-and-mortar community schools are funded based on an annualized full time equivalency using student enrollment, community e-schools are funded based on an annualized full time equivalency using student enrollment and student participation in online and offline learning opportunities. Community e-schools are eligible for the base state formula amount, plus a small facilities allowance. E-schools are eligible for career and technical education funding and special education funding but are not eligible for additional funding brick-and-mortar community schools receive for certain student populations, including additional funding for economically disadvantaged students and English learners<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3314.03>

<sup>36</sup> <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Community-Schools/eSchools/HB-409-Guidance-Documents.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>

<sup>37</sup> Ohio Revised Code 3314.08, 3317.022, and 3317.026

## Appendix D, Professional Judgment Panel Instructions

### INSTRUCTIONS TO OHIO GENERAL EDUCATION COMMUNITY E-SCHOOLS PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT PANEL MEMBERS

Augenblick, Palaich and Associates  
Denver, Colorado

September 2022

The work you are doing today is part of a cost study being conducted on behalf of the Ohio Department of Education. It relies on your professional experience to identify the resources needed to serve Ohio's community e-school students. Below you will find instructions to help you in this process. It is important to remember that you are not being tasked to build your "Dream School. Instead, you are being asked to identify the resources needed to meet the specific standards and requirements that the state expects students, schools, and districts to fulfill. You should allocate resources as efficiently as possible without sacrificing quality.

1. You are a member of a panel that is being asked to design how programs and services will be delivered in *representative school settings*. These panels are being used to identify the resources that are needed to meet the needs of community e-school students in Ohio. We are looking to understand the resources needed across various delivery methods that are most effective for students in different community e-school settings.
2. Two school-level professional judgment panels are being convened to understand the cost to serve Ohio's community e-school students in: 1. General education community e-schools and 2. Dropout prevention and recovery e-schools. Each panel will discuss representative schools for grade configurations of varying size. A final review panel will be held to review the work of the school level panels, understand any differences in resource needs identified, and discuss cross-cutting issues impacting the cost to successfully serve e-school students.
3. Today, you will be serving on the *general education community e-school panel* to collaboratively identify the resources needed to successfully serve Ohio's community e-school students in representative schools to ensure that all general education e-school students can meet state standards and requirements.
4. The characteristics of each representative school(s) are identified, including: (1) grade span; and (2) enrollment; and (3) the proportion of students with identified additional needs.

5. You will be provided a short summary of state policies for community e-schools; it is not meant to be exhaustive of all requirements that the state requires schools and districts to fulfill, but instead should be considered a refresher or reminder.
6. In designing the resources needed for community e-school students, we need you to provide some very specific information so that we can calculate the cost of the resources that are needed to fulfill the indicated requirements or objectives. The fact that we need that information should not constrain you in any way in designing the program of the representative school(s). Your job is to create a set of programs, curriculums, or services designed to serve e-school students in such a way that the indicated requirements/objectives can be fulfilled. Use your experience and expertise to organize personnel, supplies and materials, and technology in an efficient way you feel confident will produce the desired outcomes.
7. For this process, the following statements are true about the representative school(s) and the conditions in which they exist:

Teachers: You should assume that you can attract and retain qualified personnel and that you can employ people on a part-time basis if needed (based on tenths of a full-time equivalent person).

Facilities: Generally, this process assumes that the representative school has sufficient space and the technology infrastructure to meet the requirements of the program you design. You should assume this is true for the operations of the school, but we will discuss the costs associated with space for student testing during the panel.

Revenues: You should not be concerned about where revenues will come from to pay for the program you design. Do not worry about federal or state requirements that may be associated with certain types of funding. You should not think about whatever revenues might be available in the school or district in which you now work or about any of the revenue constraints that might exist on those revenues.

Programs: You may create new programs or services that do not presently exist that you believe address the challenges that arise in serving community e-school students. You should assume that such programs or services are in place and that no additional time is needed for them to produce the results you expect of them. For example, if you create after-school programs or pre-school programs to serve some students, you should assume that such programs will achieve their intended results, possibly reducing the need for other programs or services that might have otherwise been needed.