



# OAG

Office of the Auditor General

## Report Summary

### Performance Audit

### Virtual Learning in Traditional Public Schools

### Michigan Department of Education (MDE)

**Report Number:**  
313-0224-16

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Virtual learning is a teaching method that uses computer software and/or the Internet to deliver instruction and most commonly takes place in an online environment, whereby the teacher and the virtual learner are physically separated. Section 388.1621f of the *Michigan Compiled Laws* mandates that public school districts allow eligible students to enroll in up to two virtual courses per academic term, semester, or trimester. MDE policies also provide additional opportunities for public schools to enroll students in virtual learning courses. Virtual learning has continued a trend of significant expansion in Michigan's traditional public schools, with the reported number of virtual learners nearly tripling in the last nine school years from approximately 34,000 in school year 2010-11 to almost 100,000 in school year 2018-19.

With the onset of COVID-19, we expect that Michigan's traditional public schools will greatly expand their use of virtual learning methods as a primary means for educating many of Michigan's students for the foreseeable future.

This audit is the second in a three-part series on virtual learning in Michigan.

Audit Objective			Conclusion
Objective #1: To determine the sufficiency of MDE's efforts to monitor and evaluate the virtual learning provided by traditional public schools.			Not sufficient
Findings Related to This Audit Objective	Material Condition	Reportable Condition	Agency Preliminary Response
Significant opportunities exist for MDE to develop an evaluation strategy to assess the effectiveness of the virtual learning provided by traditional public schools ( <u>Finding #1</u> ).	X		Disagrees
MDE stopped the collection of certain student-level data required by State law. By doing so, MDE diminished its and other entities' abilities to compare the effectiveness of the virtual and non-virtual learning courses provided to students in traditional public schools ( <u>Finding #2</u> ).	X		Disagrees

<b>Findings Related to This Audit Objective (Continued)</b>	<b>Material Condition</b>	<b>Reportable Condition</b>	<b>Agency Preliminary Response</b>
The pupil auditors that monitored school districts' compliance with virtual learning requirements excluded approximately 26% of virtual learners from the audit process and did not identify that 14% of our sampled virtual learner graduates had not fulfilled all applicable graduation requirements ( <u>Finding #3</u> ).	X		Partially agrees
Documentation was insufficient to support virtual learners': <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in coursework for 35% of the virtual learners reviewed.</li> <li>• Attendance for 13% of virtual learners reviewed that were enrolled in a virtual course(s) provided on site at a school facility (<u>Finding #4</u>).</li> </ul>		X	Partially agrees
MDE needs to ensure that students' opportunities to enroll in virtual courses are communicated. Over 60% of sampled school districts' student handbooks and 50% of school districts' Web sites did not provide information related to students' opportunities for enrollment in virtual courses ( <u>Finding #5</u> ).		X	Partially agrees
We selected 50 off-site virtual learning buildings for review and determined that MDE did not require the approval of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for these types of buildings, as mandated by State law, and that 46 (92%) of the buildings' addresses did not have a certificate of occupancy for educational purposes on file with the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs to certify the building's compliance with applicable building codes and other laws ( <u>Finding #6</u> ).		X	Agrees
<b>Observations Related to This Audit Objective</b>	<b>Material Condition</b>	<b>Reportable Condition</b>	<b>Agency Preliminary Response</b>
Strong collaborative efforts are needed to help ensure that the Center for Educational Performance and Information data is complete and accurate for use by educational stakeholders ( <u>Observation #1</u> ).	Not applicable for observations.		

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