

AUDIT PROPOSAL

A Comparison of Virtual School Expenditures and Outcomes in Kansas and Other States

SOURCE

This audit proposal is required by K.S.A. 72-5173.

BACKGROUND

Virtual schooling is an increasingly common educational option. Virtual schools allow students to attend school over the internet without being physically present in the classroom. Such schools offer flexibility to students to attend classes at any time and to progress at their own pace. Virtual schools also offer the opportunity to take courses that a student's home school district does not offer. Nationwide, 44 states had at least 1 public virtual school in the 2019-20 school year.

Virtual schools take a variety of forms across the country. Some states allow individual districts to operate their own virtual schools. In some states, students can enroll in any virtual school in the state. In others, students can only enroll in a virtual school in their district or region. Other states operate just a single statewide virtual school. Typically, in these states, any student in the state that wishes to enroll in a virtual school must enroll in the state-sponsored school. In Kansas, any school district may operate a virtual school after receiving approval from the Kansas Department of Education. Further, a student can enroll in any virtual school in the state.

K.S.A. 72-5173 requires our office to report on several issues related to how statewide virtual schools operate. The final audit report is to be submitted to the Legislature by January 15, 2023.

AUDIT OBJECTIVES AND TENTATIVE METHODOLOGY

The audit objectives listed below are the questions we would answer through our audit work. The steps listed for each objective convey the type of work we would do. These may change as we learn more about the audit issues.

Objective 1: How much do statewide virtual schools operated by other states spend and what are their academic outcomes? Our tentative methodology would include the following:

- Talk with KSDE officials and review documents from organizations such as the National Council of State Legislatures and the Education Commission of the States to identify states that operate statewide virtual schools.
- For a selection of states that operate statewide virtual schools, contact state officials to understand how those states operate their schools. This would include information such as whether they contract the operation to a private entity, what services are

provided, and what is expected of school districts.

- For the same selection of states, we would also review any available data on district expenditures, state costs, and academic outcomes.

Objective 2: How do Kansas' virtual school expenditures and academic outcomes compare to a selection of states that operate statewide virtual schools? Our tentative methodology would include the following:

- Talk with KSDE officials and review documents to understand how virtual schools in Kansas operate. This would include information such as how virtual schools are funded and how KSDE approves them.
- Work with KSDE and school district officials to determine how much the state spends on virtual schools, how much districts spend, and what the academic outcomes are for virtual school students.
- Compare Kansas' virtual school expenditures and academic outcomes to those in the other states we selected in question one.

ESTIMATED RESOURCES

We estimate this audit would require a team of **3 auditors** for a total of **6 months** (from the time the audit starts to our best estimate of when it would be ready for the committee).