



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

December 22, 2023

Dr. Michael Leitera  
Chief Executive Officer  
Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School  
2605 Nicholson Road, Suite 4100  
Sewickley, PA 15143

Dear Dr. Leitera,

Based on a thorough review of Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School's (PA Distance) renewal application and other documentation, and a mutual agreement concerning enrollment parameters, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (Department) is renewing PA Distance's charter, subject to the information contained in this letter and any areas for correction noted within the Decision to Renew Charter and Appendix A. The renewed charter shall be effective for a term of five years, beginning July 1, 2024, and ending June 30, 2029.

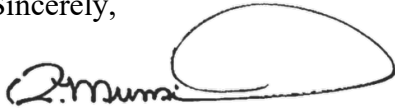
The Department will continue to monitor and examine PA Distance's operations throughout this term to determine whether PA Distance is meeting the terms of its charter, the requirements of the Charter School Law, and other applicable state and federal mandates. By granting a renewed charter, the Department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

Please note that the Department will continue to monitor the progress of PA Distance's students by reviewing students' academic achievement, assessment participation rate, academic growth, and adjusted cohort graduation rates. Beginning Fall 2018, the academic performance of all public schools, including cyber charter schools, is evaluated based on standards for annual meaningful differentiation as identified by [Pennsylvania's ESSA State Plan](#). Each year, the Department will calculate each public school's progress toward meeting or exceeding long-term goals.

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

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Mumin", followed by a large, loopy flourish that extends to the right.

Khalid N. Mumin, Ed.D.  
Secretary of Education

**PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**PA Distance Learning Charter School** : **Charter Renewal Effective:**  
**Renewal Application** : **July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2029**

**Decision to Renew Charter**

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

The Department granted a charter to Pennsylvania Distance Learning Cyber Charter School (PA Distance) for the term of July 1, 2015, through June 30, 2020. PA Distance submitted a renewal application to continue operating a cyber charter school and has continued to operate its cyber charter school by extension of the previous charter term until such time as the Department finalized a renewal decision.

Based on a comprehensive review of PA Distance’s operation during the charter term beginning July 1, 2015, including the information submitted with its renewal application; information gathered by the Department’s representatives; and other sources of data, the Department is renewing PA Distance’s charter to operate a cyber charter school, subject to this Decision to Renew Charter, the areas for correction noted within Appendix A, and the mutually agreed-upon enrollment parameters outlined herein and in the charter as PA Distance has been designated for Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI). With the exception of the agreed-upon enrollment parameter, which becomes effective immediately, PA Distance may continue to operate its cyber charter school until the commencement of the term of the renewed charter.

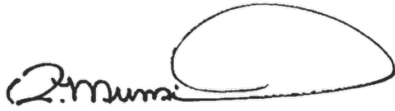
The baseline enrollment number from which the enrollment parameter is calculated would be PA Distance’s highest October snapshot from the previous three years; the baseline number would be used to calculate a one-time 10% enrollment increase that may not be surpassed during any time period PA Distance is designated for CSI.

The renewed charter shall be effective for a term of five (5) years beginning July 1, 2024, and ending June 30, 2029.

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

The Department is also providing written notice to PA Distance of areas of the operation of its cyber charter school that require attention and correction (see Appendix A). This notice is

provided to allow PA Distance the opportunity to address areas that may not be in compliance with applicable requirements. Failure to address areas identified by the Department may result in additional action by the Department, including revocation of the charter.

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Khalid N. Mumin, Ed.D.  
Secretary of Education

Date Mailed: 12/22/2023

## APPENDIX A

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

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

- Academic Proficiency
- Academic Growth
- Graduation Rate
- Governance and Operations

### **PA Distance must improve its assessment and accountability program.**

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

The Department examined various indicators related to PA Distance's academic performance over its charter term, including, but not limited to, academic achievement, academic growth, and graduation rates. For the past several years, students in all grade levels and all subjects have significantly underperformed on the PSSA and Keystone Exams.

In 2020-2021, PA Distance's combined ESSA Indicator for ELA proficiency was 28.7% and in 2021-22, its combined ESSA Indicator for ELA proficiency was 27.6%, significantly lagging behind the averages of other cyber charter schools (46.1%), brick-and-mortar charter schools (35.4%), and traditional public schools (58.2%). More concerning is PA Distance's combined ESSA Indicator for Math proficiency, which in 2020-21 was 7.9%, and dropped to 5.2% in 2021-22. This again lagged substantially behind the cyber charter average (17.0% in 2021-22), brick-and-mortar charters (14.6% in 2021-22), and traditional public schools (39.3% in 2021-22). PA Distance's combined ESSA Indicator for Science proficiency in 2021-22 is slightly better, with an average of 27.6%, but still lags behind the averages of other cyber charter schools (45.5%), brick-and-mortar charter schools (37.4%), and traditional public schools (50.4%).

Additionally, PA Distance's three-year average growth rate, as reported in the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVASS), showed significant evidence that students did not meet the academic growth standard in several areas. Specifically, PA Distance did not meet growth standards when computing PSSA math across all grades (-3.11, Well Below Average), and the PSSA ELA average across all grades was -1.98, also below average. It should be noted, however, that PA Distance's Keystone PVAAS growth in 2022 was meeting or exceeding the average in all three categories.

PA Distance is also lagging in its 4 and 5-year combined cohort graduation rates. In 2019, this graduation rate was only 57.34%, dropping to 54.90% in 2020, and only seeing a slight increase to 56.54% in 2021. This is well below the averages of other cybers (62.97% in 2021), brick-and-mortar charters (86.86% in 2021), and traditional public schools (89.84% in 2021). Under ESSA, Section 1111(c)(4)(D), “all public high schools in the State failing to graduate one third or more of their students” receive Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) designations. 20 U.S.C. § 6311(c)(4)(D).

Beginning Fall 2018, the academic performance of all cyber charter schools is evaluated based on standards for annual meaningful differentiation as identified by Pennsylvania’s ESSA State Plan. Each year, the Department will calculate for each public school, including PA Distance, its progress toward meeting or exceeding long-term goals. In addition, a cyber charter school that is identified for CSI or Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (A-TSI) will be required to take specific corrective actions. Designation as a CSI school may serve as a basis for revocation or nonrenewal of the cyber charter’s charter.

Therefore, notwithstanding that the Department has renewed PA Distance’s charter, the Department may require corrective action and/or use designation as a CSI school or failure to exit CSI status as a basis for nonrenewal or revocation of PA Distance’s charter. As PA Distance is designated as a CSI school, PA Distance must be prepared to provide to the Department the following:

- A comprehensive needs analysis that identifies the root causes of inconsistent student achievement results;
- A comprehensive data analysis that examines PSSA, Keystone, and PASA data;
- An explanation of remedial programs that PA Distance will use to ensure progress from year-to-year;
- A written plan of action for increasing its academic performance, academic growth, and graduation rates;
- A fully executed school improvement plan to increase PA Distance’s academic proficiency and graduation rates so as to exit the CSI designation status;
- Participation in quarterly review meetings—attended by PA Distance’s leadership, the assigned Intermediate Unit school improvement facilitator, and staff from the Department’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education—to ensure alignment in activities between PA Distance’s school improvement plan and any deficiencies noted in this renewal.

### **PA Distance must alter its governance structure**

During the initial discussions with PA Distance, the Department noted that PA Distance only had two members on the current Board of Trustees. At that time, PA Distance indicated a willingness to add at least two additional trustees. While the Department respects PA Distance’s efforts to recruit quality board members, it is also imperative that additional members be added. As PA Distance is permitted to recruit candidates from the entire adult populations in the commonwealth, the Department is confident that PA Distance’s efforts in this regard will yield acceptable candidates soon.