

## Appendix C: Diane Ravitch on Virtual Schools

\*\* Diane Ravitch re Virtual Schools

National charter chains with central management structures made handsome profits in Ohio. They were ending democratic control of public schools.. seeking to compete, not to collaborate.

### **“The Reign of Error”**: Chapter 17: “Trouble in E-land”

Claim: Virtual schools will bring the promise of personalized, customized learning to every student and usher in an age of educational excellence for all.

Reality: Virtual schools are cash cows for their owners but poor substitutes for real teachers and real schools.

Entrepreneurs... devise online programs, new devices, and new kinds of schools to cut costs by replacing teaching with technology.

p. 181, 182 “The biggest pot of gold for business-minded reformers was the for-profit online charter school market. The first to see this opportunity, and to act on it, were the founders of a new company called K12Inc (in 2000).” According to New York Times, K12Inc spent \$26.5 million on advertising in 2010, funded with public dollars.

The virtual charters receive tuition payments from the state that far exceed their costs. ...make handsome profits. ...have no school buildings ...no custodians, no heating or cooling costs, no libraries, no gyms, no cafeterias, no social workers, no guidance counselors, no playgrounds, no after-school activities, and no transportation costs. ...are able to have larger “class size,” because one teacher can monitor forty, fifty, a hundred, or more computer screens.

p. 186, 187 Lobbying by industry – K12Inc -- \$700,000 between 2007 and 2011 in Pennsylvania. Massachusetts -- \$200,000 spent by K12 to lobby legislators.

K12Inc History in **Virginia** -- [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/virtual-schools-are-multiplying-but-some-question-their-educational-value/2011/11/22/gIQANUzkzN\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.90dda09bc0d5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/virtual-schools-are-multiplying-but-some-question-their-educational-value/2011/11/22/gIQANUzkzN_story.html?utm_term=.90dda09bc0d5)

2011: *During recent deliberations over virtual schooling in Virginia, a member of the state Board of Education raised the issue of socialization.*

*“This would appear to make it possible to go from kindergarten through eighth grade without ever stepping into a real classroom,” David M. Foster said. “I’m not sure I want to encourage that. . . . Collaborative problem solving, socialization, working with other people is key not just to the global economy but to getting along in life.”*

Targeting rural counties in Virginia:

The Virginia Virtual Academy (VAVA), another K12 venture, began enrolling full-time students across the commonwealth in fall 2009, more than a year before state law addressed this new kind of education. The Virginia school offers a lesson in how **K12** relied on political savvy and statehouse connections to build its business.

### **2009 in Virginia:**

K12Inc was the only private company present during talks to craft that legislation. *McDonnell has received \$55,000 in campaign contributions from K12 or its executives since 2009, including a \$15,000 payment to his political action committee this month*

State aid varies by school district and follows a formula based on poverty, among other factors.

Affluent Fairfax County receives \$2,716 per pupil from Richmond, whereas relatively poor Carroll County receives \$5,421, according to the state Education Department.

This year, 66 Fairfax students are enrolled in the virtual school. Richmond is paying the virtual school twice as much for those students as it would if they attended neighborhood schools in their own county.

“Clearly, it’s not a logical or equitable system,” said state [Sen. George L. Barker](#) (D-Fairfax). “It’s a horrible deal for taxpayers.”

Barker has twice tried to change funding so that subsidies are based on where students live. Twice he was rebuffed by Gov. Robert F. McDonnell (R), a champion of school choice who successfully promoted legislation to authorize full-time virtual schools in 2010.

In Carroll County, the Virginia Virtual Academy provides a revenue stream for the public school system, which collects a \$500 registration fee for each out-of-district student. On top of that, the county collects a management fee — 6.5 percent of the taxpayer dollars that flow to K12.

In what may be an unintended irony, Carroll County is using that windfall — \$178,450 last year — to buy old-fashioned but much-needed textbooks for its brick-and-mortar schools.

p. 191 K12Inc successful? In its annual report for fiscal 2011, K12Inc acknowledges the effects of state policy on its business interests. The report refers to lobbying costs incurred at the state level to fight “harmful” legislation “aggravated by a negative media.”

p. 192, 193: some of Ravitch conclusions:

...home schooling on the internet is appropriate for some but not others

...once the profit motive entered the equation... the goal was more enrollment

...what are children missing when they have so little interaction with peers or adults?

...or with other students to exchange ideas?

#### Chapter 26 “Make Charters for All”

Standards:

Ban for-profit charters and charter chains...

Virtual charters:

...regulate to provide oversight for [recruitment practices](#), attrition rates, misrepresentation, and quality.

...reimbursement of virtual charter schools should be reduced to reflect their actual cost of instruction: for profits should be banned.

...students who wish to enroll in virtual schools should be interviewed by guidance counselors and have legitimate reasons for home instruction.

#### Chapter 30: “Protect Democratic Control of Public Schools”

...the local board should be a forum for public opinion.

...public schools need the support of the public that funds them; ...be governed by those who are willing to work diligently to improve them...

#### Chapter 32: “Privatization of Public Education Is Wrong”

Paraphrased: School as a business model? No, a school has to take in all the “raw material” – that’s why it’s not a business, it’s a school!

Page 312: Nothing inherent in competition guarantees that students will learn about history and government or the principles of democracy, nor will it assure that young people are prepared to vote wisely or to assume the responsibilities of citizenship. Competition and choice exacerbate inequality and segregation by race and class. ...best schools do not substitute computers for teachers.