

The Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow Opposes the Funding Action of the Ohio Department of Education



Six Reasons Why

1.) **Retroactive Changes in Rules are Unfair**

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) seeks to "claw back" or demand that tens of millions of dollars in funding be returned by ECOT for the 2015-2016 school year, based on a new funding standard ODE did not even announce until late January 2016. In other words, ODE seeks to predicate an entire school year's worth of funding on rules ECOT was unaware until more than half of the school year had already passed. On top of that, ODE did not formally commit to applying this standard for 2015-2016 until even later, July 2016, after the school year had ended. It is fundamentally unfair and inappropriate for an administrative agency to seek to recover prior funding based on a school's failure to comply with a standard announced during the school year.

2.) **Requiring Students And Teachers To Measure Participation With A Stopwatch Is Not A Valid Measure Of Educational Quality**

The use of "time spent" by students as a measure of determining the quality of education provided by a school makes no sense. First, whether in an e-school or a traditional brick and mortar school environment, the fact that a student is logged-in or sits in class for a certain period of time tells us nothing about whether the student is actually learning or making academic progress. Rather, the quality of the programming and interaction provided by the school, coupled with the students' unique circumstances and how the school accounts for and addresses them, are much more indicative of a school's level of success.

Moreover, in an e-school environment, specifically, tracking of hours via online activities does not provide a complete or accurate picture of a student's true participation in learning activities because, often, time spent reading books, researching online, or writing papers on a word processor are not tracked through the school's server. The lack of guidance from ODE as to how student durations are to be calculated or tracked in the eschool environment is also troubling and untenable.

There is also the issue of auto-logouts. These logouts, which occur after a certain period of electronic inactivity, *aren't defined in state law or in the administrative code*. Imagine a student is studying in the afternoon and simply gets up to go to dinner. Should the e-school server automatically log the student out after 15-minutes, 30-minutes, 1-hour, 4-hours, 10-hours? Tying tens of millions of education dollars to the hours, minutes and seconds that students are logged into school servers without providing any rules or guidance as to this key issue is irrational. In light of this, auto-logouts could easily be gamed by e-schools to artificially manipulate millions of funding dollars.

Because of these glaring deficiencies, the metric of "login time" is simply not a valid indicator of educational and academic success.

3.) **Graduation Rates, As Currently Calculated, Are Misleading For Schools Like ECOT**

ECOT has been criticized for having a four-year a graduation rate of 39%, even though ECOT functions much like a dropout prevention or dropout recovery school for a large percentage of its students. Over 90% of the students transfer to ECOT after beginning 9th grade elsewhere; the average student arrives academically *credit deficient*; and a vast majority of ECOT students are characterized as having a low socioeconomic status (including some who are homeless). ECOT takes students who have suffered from bullying at other schools, students with serious medical problems, students who are pregnant, (sometimes for the second time), and students with chemical addictions and long-term drug rehab engagements. Even a negative story about ECOT in the New York Times acknowledged that ECOT has a far higher percentage of special needs students, 20%, than the state average. ECOT welcomes them all (as a statewide, public community school, it is *required* to do so).

Despite these challenges, ECOT manages to graduate about 4 in 10 students *on-time*, based on the criteria established by federal and state bureaucrats. Furthermore, the ECOT graduation rate doesn't reflect the many thousands of other ECOT students who also graduate, but simply not within four years of starting high school. Some of these students, who have failed at other schools but ultimately graduate from ECOT in their late teens and early 20s, are some of the school's greatest success stories.

For these reasons, standardized on-time graduation rates are an inappropriate measure of school quality, *especially for schools serving a dropout prevention population*. 60% of ECOT graduates say that they would not have received a diploma but for ECOT. With ECOT graduating about 2,500 students a year, more than any single district in the state, thousands of Ohioans have diplomas because of ECOT. The benefit to Ohio's economy is obvious.

4.) **Selective Application to Certain E-Schools**

Even if ODE's new durational standard made sense, one would expect ODE to apply it to all e-schools as a means of ensuring that state funds are being spent to promote quality education. ODE has not done so. Instead, only approximately half of Ohio's nearly two dozen e-schools are being held to this new standard of student login time as a metric for state funding for the 2015-2016 school year. The others have been given a year or more – some with additional guidance from ODE – to comply with this standard, without facing any retrospective funding losses.

5.) **Student Absenteeism in District Schools Doesn't Similarly Interest the ODE**

The actual time a student spends engaged in learning opportunities in brick and mortar schools is inexplicably not of apparent concern to ODE. ODE has taken no steps to track the actual time traditional school students spend engaged in learning opportunities. At the simplest level, a student could simply daydream all day every day without jeopardizing a brick and mortar school's funding.

It begs the question: why hasn't ODE asked for money back from *district* schools with far higher rate of student absenteeism than ECOT? Collinwood High School in Toledo, for example, has a chronic absenteeism rate of 49.3%, according to [this](#) Ohio School Report Card (page 21). Even worse, Walnut Ridge High School in Columbus has a 72.2% chronic absenteeism rate according to [this](#) Ohio School Report Card (page 21). If the Ohio Department of Education truly believed in student engagement time as way to fund education, they would be asking for money back from the many district schools with far worse absenteeism rates than ECOT.

6.) Major Changes to Community School and E-School Funding Should Be Passed by the Legislature and Signed by a Governor

While there will always be a role for state departments to implement the details of public policy as established by the Ohio legislature, it is not the ODE's prerogative to legislate or make public policy. The establishment and enforcement of an entirely new system of eschool funding, which ODE has unilaterally sought to impose, reflects a drastic change in policy that should only be made by the legislature – not an administrative agency.

In short, tens of thousands of high school graduates have a better life because of the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow. We simply ask the following:

- Policy changes should be applied to future funding, not past funding that was already paid and spent
- E-schools should be measured by learning and financed based on cost to provide students with a quality education, not time, which does not correlate at all with quality education
- Any new rules should be applied to all e-schools with advanced notice, not selectively applied to only some e-schools
- Any major policy changes should be enacted as new law, not devised and implemented by un-elected officials

If we can agree on those simple terms, ECOT can continue helping students toward better lives.



Rick Teeters
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