

THE JOURNAL

Online Charter Schools

9 Ohio Cyber Schools May Have to Pay State \$83 Million

- By Richard Chang
- 10/07/16

The **Ohio Department of Education** could demand repayment of \$83 million from nine online charter schools for allegedly inflating student attendance records, according to reports in the **Columbus Dispatch** and **Education Week**.

At the top of the list, Ohio's largest online charter school, the **Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT)**, may have to pay more than \$60 million for 9,000 students who did not complete enough work to be considered full-time, the state ed department contends.

The other eight schools reported 4,998 enrolled students, but the state was only able to verify 1,654, one third of the total. Those figures include **Quaker Digital Academy** and the **Buckeye Online School for Success**, which got credit for zero students.

Leaders at several of the online schools said they felt state regulators duped them and plan to appeal the findings to the **State Board of Education**.

"We really feel like we were misled," Jeff Nelson, superintendent of the **Virtual Community School** in Reynoldsburg, told the **Columbus Dispatch**.

Nelson said the Ohio ed department first told him the school would not have to provide data showing how long students were logged in to the school's computer system for its 2015-2016 attendance review, but would need that information for its 2016-2017 review, the **Dispatch** reported.

However, "then they came back in June and told us we'd have to produce it for 2015-2016," Nelson told the Dispatch. "We feel it's unreasonable for them to go back and ask for information they know we didn't have."

The Ohio education department said it could only verify 280 full-time students at Virtual

Community School, significantly below the 835 students the school reported. Those findings could cost the school more than \$3 million in state aid.

Last Friday, Sept. 30, Franklin County Judge **Jenifer French sided with the Ohio Department of Education**, allowing the state to review attendance records for ECOT, which had requested to block the state from requiring the school to provide log-in durations as a way of measuring how many students attended the school.

The problem of attendance at virtual, online charter schools is not limited to Ohio; in fact, it has become a national issue. **California**, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania have also seen controversies related to the reporting of student attendance at online charter schools.

About the Author

Richard Chang is associate editor of THE Journal. He can be reached at rchang@1105media.com.

Content - editorial@thejournal.com | Website - dnagel@1105media.com
Subscriptions - THEJournal@1105service.com | Contact the webmaster: [\[+\]](#) **Site Feedback**
[\[+\]](#)

©1994-2017 1105 Media Inc, Ed-Tech Group. See our **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use**