

# School of Excellence that is a Cyber School Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

A school of excellence that is a cyber school (hereafter referred to as a “cyber charter school”) is a public school academy and meets the federal definition of a charter school. This FAQ has been designed to address the multitude of questions the public has about these schools. If your question is not addressed within this compilation, please let us know and we will try to add it during the next update cycle.

## A. Names

1. If a school has “cyber school” in its name does it mean that the school is a charter school?

Answer: No. There are no strict naming conventions stipulated within the current law that prohibit any educational entity from using the term “cyber school” when describing one of the schools or programs.

2. If a school has “academy” in its name does it mean that the school is a charter school?

Answer: No. There are no strict naming conventions that prohibit any educational entity from using the term “academy” to describe one of their schools or programs. As a matter of fact, not all academies have to be public schools. They could be private schools operated by private entities.

3. If the term “virtual” is used in the name of the school does it mean that the school is a cyber school or a cyber charter school?

Answer: No. There are no strict naming conventions that prohibit anybody from using the term “virtual” to describe a school, a program, or something else. For example, Michigan Virtual High School isn’t a school or a program. (See [www.mivhs.org](http://www.mivhs.org))

4. How many cyber charter schools are there in Michigan?

Answer: As of September 3, 2013, there were seven cyber charter schools operating in Michigan. They were:

Entity Name	Chartering Agency	Authorized Grades	Educational Service Provider
Great Lakes Cyber Academy	Central Michigan University	9-12	Connections Education, LLC
ICademy	Lake Superior State University	K-12	Innovative Educational Services
LifeTech Academy	Eaton Rapids Public Schools	7-12	Engaged Education
Michigan Connections Academy	Ferris State University	K-12	Connections Academy
Michigan Great Lakes Virtual Academy	Manistee Area Public Schools	K-12	K-12 Virtual Schools
Michigan Virtual Charter Academy	Grand Valley State University	K-12	K12 Inc.
Mosaica Online Academy of Michigan	Baldwin Community Schools	K-12	Mosaica Online

- Are there questions I can ask to determine the difference between a district virtual program and a cyber charter school?

Answer: Yes. You can ask what school would be listed on a student's diploma, transcript, etc. You can also ask if the school district offers traditional school programs, blended learning programs, or other educational options. The cyber charter schools (listed above) are stand-alone districts with their own district and building codes issued by the State of Michigan. The cyber charter school's name would be listed on student records.

## **B. Enrollment**

- How many students can enroll in any individual cyber charter school in Michigan?

Answer: Maximum enrollment at any individual cyber charter school is dependent on the school's years in existence. A cyber charter school in its first year of operation cannot exceed 2,500 students. A cyber charter school in its second year of operation cannot exceed 5,000 students. A cyber charter school in its third year of operation cannot exceed 10,000 students.

2. Is there a limit to the number of students that can enroll in cyber charter schools in Michigan?

Answer: Yes, current law establishes the limit at 2% of Michigan's 2011-2012 statewide, K-12 enrollment (1,543,588) which equates to approximately 30,871 students.

3. Who can enroll at a cyber charter school?

Answer: Generally speaking, enrollment eligibility into a cyber charter school is the same as any other charter school in Michigan.

4. Can a cyber charter school deny enrollment for any "cyber charter school" specific reason?

Answer: The only reason that a cyber charter school can deny enrollment to any student is if its school enrollment cap is met or if the statewide enrollment cap is met.

5. Do all cyber charter schools accept enrollments on a statewide basis?

Answer: No, not all cyber charter schools operate statewide, although all cyber charter schools can operate statewide if their charter contracts and charter authorizers allow them to do so. The statewide authorizers are the state public universities and Bay Mills Community College.

6. If a student enrolls in a cyber charter school that has some seat-time requirements, does the student have to travel to wherever that seat-time requirement must be satisfied?

Answer: Yes, any student considering enrollment in a cyber charter school should also consider seat-time and travel requirements before doing so. Generally speaking, the cyber charter school is not under any obligation to provide transportation. Current legislation (MCL 380.553a) states "instruction and learning may occur remotely from a school facility."

### C. Instructional Issues

1. Do all cyber charter schools provide 100% instruction online or via the internet?

Answer: No. With few exceptions, all cyber charter schools offer some “in person” instructional opportunities in the form of tutoring, field trips, and various clubs. Some offer traditional seat-time requirements in a blended learning modality (e.g., 50% online and 50% in seats), while some have a short “in-person” orientation period followed by periodic visits for exams, labs, and field trips.

2. Are all instructional models the same?

Answer: No. A parent or student looking to enroll in a cyber charter school should ensure they understand the instructional program and the requirements of that program. Parents and students often find the flexibility of a cyber charter school education to be extremely positive for motivated students. Conversely, cyber charter school students with experience in the traditional brick and mortar classroom might suggest that they had to do more work to meet requirements in a cyber charter school program that they would in the traditional classroom.

3. Do the cyber charter schools have to provide a computer and an internet connection?

Answer: The current law requires cyber charter schools to offer the family of each pupil a computer and to provide a subsidy for the cost of internet access.

4. Do cyber charter schools have to provide 1098 hours of instruction?

Answer: Current law contains a requirement that the cyber charter school will make educational services available to pupils for a minimum of at least 1,098 hours during a school year and will ensure that each pupil participates in the educational program for at least 1,098 hours during a school year. Please keep in mind that a cyber charter school does not have to follow the traditional school calendar although it does have to honor some specific holidays (e.g., New Year, Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc.).

5. Who runs these cyber charter schools?

Answer: All public school academies in Michigan (including schools of excellence that are cyber schools) are Michigan non-profit corporations led by a board of directors that are assigned by the public school academy's authorizer. Once in place, that board of directors may then choose to enter into a vendor contract with an education service provider to operate the school on their behalf.

6. Are some education service providers better than others?

Answer: Yes, of course. Parents and students should do their own independent research to determine which cyber charter school will work best for them. Things to consider should include: curricular delivery, curriculum, co-curricular activities, transportation requirements, and education service provider's academic track record of success.

7. Are teachers required to be certified and highly qualified?

Answer: Yes, all teachers must be Michigan certified and highly qualified according to state board rule.

8. Can a cyber charter school provide courses to other educational entities, including home school or private school students?

Answer: Yes. However, if the cyber charter school expects to receive a prorated amount of state aid for a student's participation in a particular course, they must meet the statutory requirements contained within the State Aid Act for doing so.

9. Does the Michigan Department of Education certify or otherwise approve online/virtual/computer-based instructional materials or curricula offered by service providers?

Answer: No. It is the responsibility of the district or the PSA to select and approve curricular materials.

## D. Authorization Caps

1. Are there any caps on the number or type of cyber charter schools that can operate in Michigan?

Answer: Yes. Aside from the 2% enrollment cap that could affect the number of cyber charter schools operating in Michigan, there are specific authorizing caps. There are caps for statewide authorizers and for local education agencies, intermediate school districts, and community colleges.

2. What is the cap on the number of cyber charter schools that statewide authorizers can issue?

Answer: State public university authorizers and Bay Mills Community College are the statewide charter authorizers. In the absence of the 2% enrollment cap coming into play, the statewide authorizers may issue a total of five cyber charter school contracts through December 31, 2013, ten through December 31, 2014, and then up to 15 thereafter. Ferris State University (Michigan Connections Academy), Grand Valley State University (Michigan Virtual Charter Academy), Central Michigan University (Great Lakes Cyber School) and Lake Superior State University (ICademy) have already issued cyber charter school contracts.

3. Can local education agencies issue a charter contract for a cyber charter school?

Answer: Yes, in the absence of the 2% enrollment cap coming into play, every local education agency (LEA), intermediate school district (ISD), and community college (minus Bay Mills Community College) may issue one charter contract for a cyber charter school that may operate statewide. Baldwin Community Schools (Mosaica Online Academy of Michigan), Eaton Rapids Public Schools (LifeTech Academy), and Manistee Area Public Schools (Michigan Great Lakes Virtual Academy) have already done so.

## **E. Special Education**

1. Do cyber charter schools have to provide special education programs and services?

Answer: Yes, cyber charter schools must provide special education programs and services.

2. How are special education programs and services delivered when the student doesn't attend a brick and mortar facility on a regular basis?

Answer: Like those attending a brick and mortar facility, students with disabilities receive an Individual Education Program (IEP) or a Section 504 Plan that outlines the programs and services the respective student shall be provided. The only difference between the programs may be where the programs or services are provided, how they are provided, or who provides them. A cyber charter school student with disabilities may receive services in their own home, at the local or intermediate school district, or at some other mutually agreed upon location. The services may be in person or via an internet connection, and may be provided by a local school district employee, a qualified contractor, an employee of the education service provider operating the school, or by an employee of the cyber charter school.

3. How are Individualized Education Program Committee (IEPCs) meetings held at cyber schools?

Answer: Cyber schools have the same requirements regarding IEPCs as brick and mortar public schools in Michigan. IEPC meetings can be held in person at a mutually agreed upon location, via the internet, SKYPE, or other electronic means. Cyber schools must follow the same IEPC documentation procedures as other public schools in Michigan.

## **F. Miscellaneous**

1. Do cyber charter schools offer sports programs?

Answer: Most cyber charter schools do not offer sports programs. However, in accordance with the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) rules, if a cyber charter school does not offer sports programs it may choose to enter into a cooperative program with a local school district to allow students to participate in high

school athletics. See  
<http://www.mhsaa.com/aboutthemhsaa/faqs.aspx> .

2. Are high school diplomas from cyber charter schools just as good as diploma's from a traditional district?

Answer: Yes and no. If the student intends to go on to college, there shouldn't be a problem. However, high school students should check with the colleges and universities they are planning to attend to make sure that those institutions will give necessary credit for high school courses taken from various education service providers. The only current issue seems to exist with students wishing to join the military. Historically, the military has viewed online programs as "alternative" and some military services restrict the enlistment of applicants from "alternative high schools." We expect that situation to evolve but current or prospective high school students wishing to join the military after graduation should check with their local recruiter for more specific information.

3. Can students residing outside of Michigan attend and pay tuition to a Michigan cyber charter school?

Answer: No. Michigan's cyber charter schools are public school academies and are restricted by law from charging tuition.

4. Do students attending cyber charter schools have to meet the same inoculation requirements as students attending brick and mortar buildings?

Answer: Yes. Students attending cyber charter schools in Michigan must follow the law as it relates to student inoculations. There is no legal inoculation exception for students attending cyber, virtual, or online programs which means there is one standard for all public school students.