

# Virtual Schooling: The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly

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# What are virtual schools?

- Virtual schools are also referred to as Online schools or Cyber schools.
- Full-time virtual schools means that the full curriculum is delivered via the internet.
- Full-time blended learning schools indicates that all students within a school receive a combination of face-to-face instruction part of the day or week and they also receive the remainder of the curriculum via the Internet.
- There is a range of options when it comes to the use of new computer and communication technologies.

# Continuum of virtual education options

Least  
dependent  
on Internet



Most  
dependent  
on Internet

**Teachers  
informally  
innovate and  
integrate  
technology**

**Schools purchase  
online courses  
(pay per student/  
course)**

**Full-time  
blended  
learning  
schools**

**Full-time  
virtual  
schools**

**Largely unresearched models and  
programs developed by teachers and  
schools**

# What's happening in the USA?

- Number of schools >500 virtual and approx. 140 blended learning schools
- Hundreds of largely unresearched programs and classroom innovations
- Enrollments approaching 300,000 students. Fastest growing form of school choice.
- The virtual and blended learning schools largely dominated by private companies or organizations that open and operate them for profit.
- Demographics
- Attrition
- Outcomes

# Why its not working?

- For-profit interest imbedded in the more corporate model being used
- Wrong students enrolled OR Model does not suit most students who are recruited and enrolled
- Wrong accountability measures
- Wrong finance mechanisms
- Lobbying and purchasing of influence
- Providers invest in further recruitment to replace departing students rather than fixing the model

# Being Sold a False 'Bill of Goods'

- Claims by advocates regarding theory of how things should work
  - Highly effective teachers will now be able reach hundreds of students instead of only 30 at a time.
  - Highly effective teachers will be better remunerated to ensure that they are highly motivated.
  - These effective and highly motivated teachers will be deliver a high quality and research-based curriculum.
- Sounds logical and sounds good but what if things don't work as intended?
  - There is potential for hurting hundreds or thousands of students if curriculum is flawed, and if teachers are not motivated or deemed highly effective they may negatively impact hundreds of students instead of a single classroom of students.

# Recommendations for USA

- Moratorium on new schools or adding new students to current schools
- Develop a new model with input from educators, researchers, and families.
- Develop suitable incentives, disincentives, and oversight mechanisms to help ensure student interests are served before corporate interests
- Rethink the funding formula to be based on students who successfully complete full year and demonstrate mastery of content.
- Regulate recruitment practices, establish max class sizes, etc.
- Pilot test the new model before lifting the moratorium
- Allow multiple entities to develop and deliver individual courses, but ensure that the courses are reviewed and approved prior to use.

# Tentative Recommendations for New Zealand

- Study and better understand current practices in state schools and in the Virtual Learning Networks. Conduct needs assessment to understand how to support schools and VLN.
- Incentivize teachers and state schools to continue to expand their online services, by providing technical assistance and providing teachers with time to move individual courses to blended learning or fully online courses
- Develop national support agency/entity that would do the following (this entity could be based on Te Kura if their roles & responsibilities are revised and expanded):
  - Develop and deliver online courses that any schools can access, perhaps subsidize the fees
  - Review and approve online courses developed by other providers
  - Provide professional development to teachers and administrators to support integration and increased use of new technologies.
  - Provide support and guidance to schools that wish to develop blended learning or full-time virtual school programs
  - Provide incentives and support for schools to collaborate via VLN
- Restrict new providers, especially private, for-profit providers from setting up virtual schools, although they may have a role in developing and delivering individual courses
- Develop or provide a common elearning platform for all schools to use
- Avoid rushing into reforms. Instead envision the future and plan and work systematically to improve and expand online and blended learning options for students