



February 22, 2021

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB109

Thank you for your willingness to discuss the urgent and important issue of allowing a student to attend a fully virtual option offered by a nonresident school board in a nonresident school district through the full-time open enrollment program. Whitnall School District supports this option and would like to provide some details about how it impacts the Whitnall School District.

During July and August, the Whitnall School District solicited feedback from its parents to determine their preferences in how we offered learning during the 2020-21 school year in a pandemic. We spent considerable time listening to our parents in both surveys and focus groups to deeply understand their concerns and questions. Whitnall determined that we would provide in-person learning as the primary mode of learning but would provide the option of virtual learning to those parents who had circumstances in which they could not or did not want to send their child in person.

Approximately 80% of parents selected the in-person learning option and we opened the school year on September 1 with in-person learning 5 days a week. We have had in-person learning for 5 days a week without any pauses at our elementary schools and a short two-week pause in November at our middle and high school due to staff isolations and quarantines. At semester, we allowed parents to choose to change learning options based upon circumstances; we had more parents return their child to in-person learning. We continue to be in-person 5 days a week for the majority of our families.

Keeping our schools open has required extreme mitigation efforts and extraordinary measures by our staff. Those measures also include providing a virtual learning option to those students whose parents chose virtual learning due to pre-existing medical conditions or concerns about their child's health or a family member's health. We have been able to meet their needs this year and are proud of our response to our families and the community.

Whitnall has historically accepted open enrollment students to provide stability in resident enrollment and programming options. Once accepted, those students are considered part of the Whitnall community. As is stated in state law, open enrollment students must be afforded the same rights and privileges as resident students. During this past school year, virtual learning was made available to all parents, regardless if they had an open enrollment student or resident student. Should Whitnall determine that a virtual learning option is necessary for 2021-22, we would want that same option for our families. Requiring a virtual charter school to be created to address a temporary need is not in the best interest of personnel or families.

I ask that you support SB109 to allow a student to attend a fully virtual option offered by a nonresident school board in a nonresident school district under the full-time open enrollment program during the 2021-22 school year.

Should you wish to discuss my letter or observations more, feel free to contact me at lolson@whitnall.com or 414-525-8411.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lisa L. Olson".

Lisa L. Olson, Ph.D.
Superintendent