

My name is Laura Wiechertjes and this is my 12th year teaching middle school and high school science – 8 of which has been online. I currently teach high school Biology and I am the Science Department Lead at Insight School of Michigan. Prior to becoming an online teacher – I had no idea what an online school did. I originally became a teacher to work with students and to make a difference. But when I became an online teacher I discovered that I was also saving lives. The students who attend online schools come to us for very specific reasons and without us many of them would drop out or attempt to get their GED or truly struggle in the traditional brick and mortar setting. Cyber schools and the equal student funding they deserve are vital to the success of our unique student populations.

Students come to online schools for many different reasons – but the underlying cause is the traditional brick and mortar setting did not work for them. Parents and students have made the choice to find a better fit. In the nearly 8 years that I have taught online both in Arizona and in Michigan I have come to truly realize just how important online schools are to so many families and cutting the student funding by 25% would drastically hurt the schools and the students they serve. Over the years I have taught many online students with severe health issues where it would be impossible to attend a traditional brick and mortar school. Many students are dealing with substance abuse issues where they might be in and out of various treatment facilities but are able to keep up with their online schoolwork while they are getting healthier. Some students come to us because they are already working to help provide for their parents and some might even be the caregiver for their parents and siblings and they need a more flexible schedule. We have some teen parents who rather than dropping out chose to attend school online so they can take care of their children but still pursue an education. Many students want to be challenged with harder and more diverse classes that might not be available in their local school. Some of our students are already pursuing their goals in life such as sports, music, modeling or their careers of choice and online schools allows them the freedom to get an education but also advance their lifelong dreams.

And for many of our students a traditional brick and mortar setting simply did not fit. No matter the reason students chose online schooling – it is vital that we provide the best online school possible to help these students get an education to be successful in life. This means equal funding for cyber school students.

Cutting student funding by 25% for cyber schools will negatively impact the students we serve by increasing class sizes and also losing course options, student support services and other valuable programs vital to the success of the school and students. Losing those funds could even cause some online schools to close leaving many of those students and families without a viable schooling option. The majority of the students at my school Insight School of Michigan are considered at risk. We are their last and only option to obtain an education because they have exhausted all other options.

I have a student right now who is bedridden, and any small illness could kill him – he obviously cannot attend a traditional high school. Another student of mine last semester was in and out of hospitals dealing with depression, but she was able to keep up with my class online because of its flexibility. Our 2017 Salutatorian desperately wanted to drop out of his previous brick and mortar high school. Insight School of Michigan was his last option and in his own words during his speech last spring – he experienced success and teacher support for the very first time in his life. Online schools have become a safe haven for LGBTQ students, teen parents, special ed students and those who have been bullied. Cyber schools serve a very unique student population and these students shouldn't be unfairly targeted – frankly they need all the help they can get. I implore you to help me save these students' lives by not cutting our funds. Cutting cyber school funding by 25% could close these schools and these students have nowhere else to go. I believe all students deserve a right to an education and students who chose to attend online shouldn't be penalized for that choice. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.