

## The School District of Philadelphia Virtual Academy (PVA) Report

### 2015-2016 SY

This brief summarizes the findings of a study conducted by the Office of Research & Evaluation (ORE) which examined student characteristics and outcomes at the School District of Philadelphia Virtual Academy (PVA), the School District of Philadelphia’s (SDP) public cyber school, for school year (SY) 2015-2016. The full report is available upon request.

#### Study Overview

This study examined the specific experiences of students in the PVA in the 2015-2016 school year. Three primary research areas were the focus of this evaluation:

1. Outlining characteristics of PVA students, including demographic information and motivational profiles.
2. Examining enrollment and retention of PVA students.
3. Examining student achievement outcomes including performance on the Pennsylvania System of Student Assessments (PSSAs).

#### Why is this study important to SDP?

- **As online schooling continues to grow, there is a pressing need for research that investigates the populations served by, as well as the outcomes of, virtual learning.** Cyber schools in Pennsylvania enroll over 28,000 students annually (The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2014).
- **Virtual schools serve a variety of students.** This may include students who were in traditional school settings that lack resources, those with physical handicaps that prevent them from attending brick-and-mortar schools, and those who are prevented from attending traditional schools due to disciplinary problems (Roblyer, 2006). Given the potential populations PVA is able to serve, it is important to routinely examine the school’s progress in order for it to remain a reasonable option for students for whom the traditional brick-and-mortar model will not suffice.
- **Virtual schools have had lower student retention and achievement outcomes than traditional schools.** Historically, online schools have struggled with high student failure and dropout rates (Roblyer & Elbaum, 2000). Nationally, virtual high schools have consistently underperformed compared to brick-and-mortar schools (Roblyer, Davis, Mills, Marshall, & Pape, 2008). More specifically, the Illinois Virtual High School reported a completion rate of 53% in its first full operating year (Clark, Lewis, Oyer, & Schreiber, 2002). Given the existing research, it is important to track PVA’s retention and achievement in order to determine if the PVA experience supports SDP students on their path toward high school completion and postsecondary success.

#### Pennsylvania Virtual Academy (PVA)

PVA is a District-run, online schooling option available to students in grades 6-12. It opened to students in 2013.

PVA students receive a laptop computer and reimbursement for internet access. There is no tuition to attend the PVA.

PVA’s curriculum is approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and taught by state-certified teachers.

Drop-in learning centers are available to students.

#### School Demographics

*During the 2015-16 SY, PVA students were (n=311\*):*

Asian	--
Black	68%
Latino	14%
Other	5%
White	13%
Female	61%
Male	39%
Special Education	9%
ELL	--

\*as of October 1, 2015

## Findings

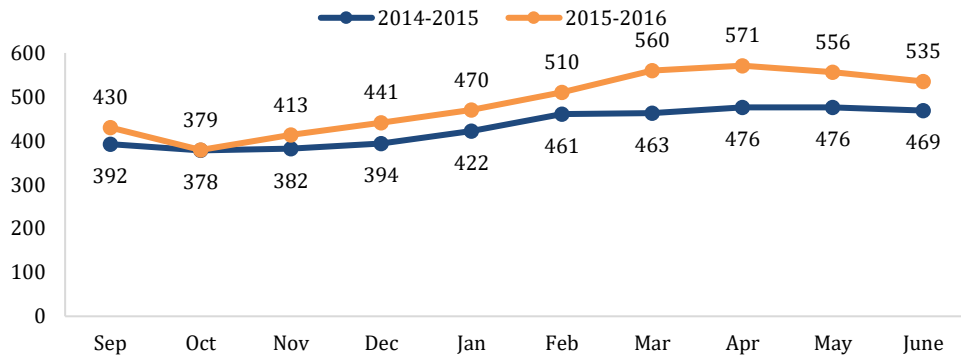
The majority of PVA students surveyed applied only to PVA as their first choice for school during the 2015-2016 school year.

Other Schools Applied To	%
None	41%
Multiple	11%
Neighborhood	9%
Cyber Charter	9%
Charter	7%
SDP Other	7%
Other	7%

The majority of PVA students surveyed plan to graduate from PVA.

How Long Surveyed Students Think They Will Stay at PVA	%
Until They Graduate	55%
Just the School Year	27%
Other	18%

Monthly enrollment\* varied through the 2015-2016 school year, with a high of 571 students enrolled in April 2016 and a low of 379 students enrolled in October 2015.



\*Monthly enrollment represents a count of all students who were enrolled in PVA at any point in that given month

Proportionally, fewer students attending PVA scored Proficient or Above on the PSSA reading or math assessments as compared to all other SDP students during the 2015-16 school year.

Reading	Proficient or Above		Basic or Below	
	PVA	SDP	PVA	SDP
Grade 6	28%	34%	73%	66%
Grade 7	23%	34%	77%	66%
Grade 8	17%	35%	83%	65%

Math	Proficient or Above		Basic or Below	
	PVA	SDP	PVA	SDP
Grade 6	6%	17%	94%	84%
Grade 7	8%	18%	93%	82%
Grade 8	6%	14%	94%	85%