



# September 2019

## AFTERWORDS

Newsletter of Active Retired Members  
Chapter 11



AfterWords is the official publication of the Active Retired Members of OSSTF, Chapter 11 Thames Valley (ARM C11). Opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policies of ARM C11 or OSSTF. If you no longer wish to receive ARM communications, please reply with a message to unsubscribe.

At the luncheon on September 25th- and in regular mailings from our president- you will be updated on whatever is happening in public education in the tumultuous year ahead. Now that you are retired- and can travel in any season- this issue has a distinctly vagabond theme:

- ⇒ A great article by WAH on the “weasel words” of Doug Ford and Steven Lecce regarding jobs and class sizes
- ⇒ Some insider tips on WHEN to book cheapest flights
- ⇒ A reminder about our Chapter 11 Facebook page
- ⇒ A chance to share Joe and Kathi Wilson’s beautiful trip to Iceland
- ⇒ A peek at what happened with Cyber Schools in Pennsylvania from this blog: [curmudgucation.blogspot.com](http://curmudgucation.blogspot.com)
- ⇒ A reminder of how our ARM insurance policy choices were created- and why they’re trustworthy.



### President & Executive Message

We hope that you have all had a memorable summer and we wish a warm welcome to all the newly retired ARM members.

The goals of ARM this year are to continue our donations to the community, to reach out to those about to retire and retirees who do not have a health benefit plan with OTIP/ARM.

On your behalf, the President continues to attend five ARM Council Toronto meetings. We will keep you informed of the District 11 and the Provincial OSSTF notices regarding bargaining of new contracts and we’ll monitor the ongoing cuts and changes by the Ford government. We must all remain vigilant, informed and supportive of OSSTF campaigns.

Do you know any colleagues that are close to retirement who would like to receive our ARM newsletters? Please ask them and then provide me with their non-board email. Remember to check [www.armcouncil.org](http://www.armcouncil.org) for newsletters and events in other Chapters to which you are always welcomed.

Only a few spots left for the Fall Luncheon gathering **Wed. Sept.25th**...rsvp to Mary Lou now.

All the best, Mary Lou, Daina, Kae, Wendy, Bryan, Joe.

#### ***P.S. In case you missed this information:***

*"The announcement from the Ontario Government regarding the changes to OHIP will have no effect for ARM insureds who travel. They are still covered for \$2 million per person per year. Whether it will influence the overall claims' costs for travel, and hence the premium on your plan....time will tell. It may certainly result in higher claims costs for the plan as a whole. " Robin MacDonald /Business Development Manager, OTIP*

# WeaselWords

## Public education in Ontario is in for a very bumpy ride

***In their ongoing attack against public education in Ontario, Premier Doug Ford, Minister of Education Stephen Lecce and the rest of the PC caucus continue to trot out “weasel words”: that “no teachers will lose their jobs as a result of the changes because positions can be reduced through attrition” that the government is “determined to put our students first” and that education unions are “fear-mongering” by indicating that the cuts to public education will be devastating and cause a huge detrimental effect on secondary schools in particular.***

As someone who was a high school teacher for 19 years, followed by 14 years in various full-time roles with the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation, I can tell you unequivocally that those Ford government assertions are complete hogwash. Now that the new school year has started, and as story after story is appearing in the media telling of horrendous class sizes, and thousands of students with holes in their timetables because the courses they wanted have been cancelled, it is glaringly obvious that the unions are correct.

Attrition in staffing is a process whereby employees who leave for various reasons – retirement, resignation, unpaid full-time leaves of absence, for example – are *not replaced with new hires*. What this means is that positions are in fact cut, and the employees remaining are left to do the all of the work that the previously larger staff would have done. In a high school, a full-time teacher teaches 6 classes over the course of a year, and therefore for every high school classroom teacher not replaced it means 6 fewer classes can run in that school. So, for example, if a high school had 100 full-time classroom teachers and 10 of them retire/resign or go on an unpaid leave of absence, up to 60 classes will not run the following year. Keep in mind that if there are still approximately the same number of students in the school, all classes will be that much larger because the same number of students need to be slotted into that many fewer classes.

In addition, collective agreements have provisions for maximum class sizes in various types of classes for various reasons. For example, many technology classes and other classes such as chemistry or Foods classes have low maximum class sizes for safety reasons. In addition, many elective courses run with smaller class sizes simply because their enrolment is not as large. This means that other classes must be larger to achieve the mandated average class size, and those classes are usually academic classes in compulsory subjects and/or in the higher grades where there are no safety issues and where enrolment is naturally higher. As such, with a 22:1 average class size, there were already classes in some schools with sizes in the low-mid 30’s.

So, now, we have a situation where government regulation has mandated the class size average go up to 28:1 (up a whopping 6, from 22) by 2022-23, and you have a recipe for chaos. If there are the same number of students who must be slotted into classes and many fewer teachers, it only stands to reason that a) many classes will be much larger (possibly into the high 30’s or even into the 40’s), and/or b) many classes with lower enrolment which might have run in the past will be cancelled (and in turn put further pressure on the sizes of the remaining classes because those students still need to be slotted into other classes, and/or c) many students will be forced into e-learning courses (regardless of whether online learning is suitable for them) which have an even higher average class size (35:1). All of this makes no sense whatsoever and is extremely detrimental to all students.

So where does the “attrition funding” come in? It is temporary funding “for up to four years to protect front-line staff impacted by the proposed changes to class sizes and e-learning; allowing school boards to phase in the proposed class sizes” (Ministry of Education memo, April 26, 2019). This is not “new” money but rather re-allocated money from the Pupil Foundation Grant to the Cost Adjustment and

Qualifications and Experience Grant to make it look like there is no cut in funding. So, while teachers who might otherwise have been laid off may be kept on for the time-being until there enough teachers have retired/resigned/gone on leave, this is really all just smoke and mirrors and sleight of hand, because as teachers do continue to retire, resign or take voluntary leaves, these positions will continue to be cut from the system and by the end of the next four years, this “attrition funding” will disappear.

The other little understood effect that all of this will have is that this also puts newly graduating teachers even further behind in their quest for full-time work. The last decade had already been particularly difficult for those entering the teaching profession because of the huge over-supply of teachers. Year after year, thousands upon thousands of newly certified teachers were entering the ranks only to find themselves on Occasional Teacher (OT) Rosters for years on end. In 2015, the new 2-year teacher education program which also halved the number of students enrolled in such programs gradually alleviated the surplus somewhat, but it was only this past year that the over-supply had finally started to ease enough such that boards were having difficulty finding enough OTs for long-term occasional positions and keeping their OT Rosters at an optimum level such that one-off absences could be readily covered.

The Ontario College of Teachers’ most recent annual *Transition to Teaching* study which has been tracking employment trends in teaching since 2002 reported just a few months ago that “The 2018 survey results suggest that the accumulated teacher surplus of the recent past is nearing depletion.... Unless some increase occurs in one or more of the various sources of Ontario teacher supply, teacher shortages can be expected to reach well beyond the French-language and French as a second language teacher shortages recognized over the past few years” ([www.oct.ca/becoming-a-teacher/transition-to-teaching](http://www.oct.ca/becoming-a-teacher/transition-to-teaching)). Unfortunately, there will indeed be an unanticipated decrease in the number of teachers needed as a result of the vastly increased average class size regulation as attrition is used to reduce the teaching force. Because retiring and resigning teachers will not be replaced by new hires, newly graduating teachers will once again be relegated to the OT Rosters for the foreseeable future which will create a new oversupply of teachers.

Make no mistake, the current government is slashing the funding for public education in secondary schools to the bone. Students are in much larger classes (and therefore get much less individual attention) and many are unable to take the courses they really need for their post-secondary plans or want for interest’s sake because of lack of enrolment. None of this is good for kids. The teachers and educational workers who do still have jobs will have increasingly onerous working conditions of larger class sizes, fewer resources and less support. As such, for the government to keep parroting their weasel words that “no front-line teacher will lose a job” and that they “are putting student achievement at the centre of everything” is not only disingenuous but patently false.

And now that all public education collective agreements in the province expired on August 31, 2019, it is completely evident that public education in Ontario is in for a very bumpy ride, and as Active Retired Members we may be called upon to support our former colleagues in possible labour actions in the coming year(s).

-by Wendy Anes Hirschegger



This question about best times to book a flight is as shrouded in myth and mystery as the climate plan of our Ford government. Here is an article from [airfarewatchdog.com](http://airfarewatchdog.com) with one travel expert's opinion.

### [RAVEL TIPS & ADVICETRAVEL NEWS](#)

## When Is the Best Time to Book Your Flight?



by Tracy Stewart May 03, 2019

When is the best time to buy your flight? Ask around and you're likely to hear varying answers, all of them supported by facts and figures, culled from data that wavers from year to year.

This type of info *can* be helpful in providing consumers with an average overview of the marketplace, but at the end of the day airfares remain unpredictable.

Ticket prices can *and do* change several times over the course of a single day. If you go by averages alone, you risk missing out on all the really good *really cheap* fares that bubble up with zero notice.

### How Far In Advance Should You Book a Flight?

According to a study released this spring by [CheapAir](#), the best time to book a domestic flight is 76 days in advance, up from 70 days the previous year.

Meanwhile, a [similar report](#) from Expedia recommends booking more than 3 weeks ahead, even pinpointing Sunday as the cheapest day to buy.

That's counter to the previous consensus among travel pundits that held Tuesday as the best day to book. And it wasn't so long ago that Hopper [pointed to](#) Thursday as the day when fares are at their lowest.

But wait! CheapAir delves deeper, sorting data by seasonal variables. It's no surprise that fall and winter provide the best value for flyers. The average difference between the lowest and highest priced day in fall came out to be \$83, making it the best season for those who tend to book on the fly. Those numbers suggest booking about two months or 69 days in advance.

Winter is only a tad less at 62 days advance, with inflated holiday fares widening the gap between the cheapest and most expensive days to \$203. In spring, the study points to 90 days ahead of departure as the ideal time to buy.

Everyone wants to get away in summer, with demand at its highest in July. If you've been following along [in our blog](#), you'll already know that your chances of scoring a cheap summer fare are greater for August and September travel, when fares begin to dip. According to the study results, the best time to book a summer fare is 47 days in advance.

These averages can be whittled down further by route. Both [CheapAir](#) and [SkyScanner](#) include a Best Time to Book tool with route specific estimates based on historical data. For example, SkyScanner lists the best time to book a trip from Los Angeles to New York as nine weeks (63 days) in advance. CheapAir says to book your Los Angeles to New York flight anywhere from 31 to 100 days in advance.



## What's the Best Day of the Week to Book a Flight?

There *is* a somewhat reliable weekly rhythm when it comes to advertised airfare sales. [Southwest](#), [JetBlue](#), and other carriers release sales late Monday night and Tuesday morning, which then leads other airlines to adjust fares to match or undercut. So Tuesdays and even Wednesdays are great for catching sales.

Often, the very best fares are unadvertised, independent of any sale. And it's not at all unusual for an airline to offer a fare for less than it appears in its own sale.

The best time to book your fare is—very simply—when it's cheap. And a really cheap ticket can creep into the inventory at any time, any day, sometimes departing as early as tomorrow. If you search based only on the results of the studies mentioned above, you risk missing out on some pretty fantastic deals.

Because no one wants to fritter away the day punching dates into an OTA search calendar, the best way to keep tabs on low airfare is to [sign up for free alerts](#), if you haven't already. Keep in mind, some search sites exclude results for certain airlines, such as Southwest and Delta, both of which are always included on [Airfarewatchdog](#). You can also follow along on Twitter [@airfarewatchdog](#). Additionally, it's a good idea to sign up for regular notifications directly from your preferred airline.

## Should You Book A Flight Now or Wait For a Cheaper One?

Knowing when to book can be a tough call to make. Ultimately, there's no real guarantee, as it's impossible to predict what fares might pop up tomorrow or next week. What you *can* do in the immediate moment is compare the fare you're considering with what is available on other carriers as well as other booking sites. Remember, not all sites will list every airline. Southwest most famously does *not* include its fares on OTAs. Shop around and make sure you have a complete picture of what's available before you book.

If you do book, and happen to see a better fare immediately after, you can take advantage of the DOT's 24-hour hold policies that allow you to cancel your booking without penalty.

### ARM Chapter 11 Executive 2019-20

President: Mary Lou Cunningham

Vice President and

Newsletter Editor: Daina Janitis

Secretary/Treasurer: Kae Ackland

PAC Representative: Bryan Smith

Facebook Administrator: Wendy Anes Hirschegger

Member-at-Large: Joe Wilson

## ARM Chapter 11 Facebook Group

Do you have a Facebook profile?

If so, PLEASE accept the invitation to join the  
OSSTF ARM Chapter 11 Facebook Group.

It's refreshed daily by our moderator with news of interest to  
Ontario teachers- active and retired!

Go to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ARMChapter11ThamesValley/> and click the "Join" button. It is a "Closed Group" which means that only members of the group can see the postings there, but others can find it on Facebook and see the description of the group.

We will be posting information about upcoming ARM meetings/events, links to websites and resources provided by speakers at those meetings, and ARM Chapter 11 newsletters, as well as information from the OSSTF provincial office, including links to new issues of *Update* and *Education Forum*, media releases and various other important communication to help keep you informed.





## And our own Intrepid Traveler- Joe Wilson- fulfilled a dream this summer. He and Kathi visited Iceland.

Visiting Iceland had been a long-time wish for my wife and me. We have travelled to most parts of Canada, and greatly prefer actively enjoying the beauties of the natural world to going on crowded cruises and visiting the typical, highly developed tourist sites. Part of my personal bucket list is negative: never visit Florida, Las Vegas or even the sadly desecrated Niagara Falls.

So, in a sense Iceland is the perfect dream destination for us:

- remote (barely south of the Arctic Circle; 170 K north of Yellowknife)
- spectacularly beautiful (volcanoes, glaciers, fiords)
- sparsely inhabited (the population of the whole island is less than London's)
- culturally vibrant:
- it is among the most literate countries in the world
- it has more authors per population than anywhere else in the world
- many quality museums, performance halls, concerts
- very progressive: during the 2008 world-wide financial mess Iceland refused IMF demands to impose austerity (the worst cure for a recession), but rather imprisoned some of the bankers who caused it.
- very out of the ordinary:
- settlement haltingly started only about 11 centuries ago; no indigenous population
- their language is unique (my name in Iceland would be Joe Lorneson; my wife's would be Kathi Calsdottir). All place names in this article are English approximations of the Icelandic spelling: they have a different alphabet. Luckily for travellers English is ubiquitous in Iceland.
- it is among the youngest geological sites in the world, still threatened by such extreme events as volcanic eruption.

Once we decided to go, how to arrange it? Chance it on our own? Large or small tours? We settled on a self-drive tour, and my research luckily led me to Nordic Visitor, a company with a wide menu of possible Icelandic experiences. I'm sure there are other companies that offer satisfying ways to visit Iceland, but Nordic Visitor proved to be an inspired choice. So, following is a brief description of how a self-drive tour of Iceland, under the direction of Nordic Visitor, worked for us.

On arriving at Keflavik airport at 9:00 a.m. Iceland time – 5:00 a.m. per our jet-lagged body-clocks – we were met by our shuttle driver, who took us to our first booked special attraction, the Blue Lagoon spa. When we booked our trip, Nordic Visitor offered a wide range of separate attractions they would book for us. So, our driver took us over an alien landscape of lava rock to Iceland's most "touristy" attraction. For two hours we floated in warm geothermal water full of mineral salts, silica and blue-green algae. A complimentary drink, an optional silica mud mask (me no; wife Kathi yes) – relax to the max!



Then our driver took us to our home for two days in Reykjavik, the Hotel Fron. The tour booked all our accommodations for us, all of them private, comfortable and more than satisfactory. The Hotel Fron consists of a sort of campus of buildings in downtown Reykjavik, on a narrow street full of shops, restaurants, coffee houses and bars. We were upgraded, gratis, to a suite, with 2 bedrooms and kitchenette. Attached to the hotel is the Scandinavian Restaurant, where we had many always wonderful meals.



(One special part of the trip: we are avid Toronto Raptor fans, and so managed after some difficulty to live-stream the NBA final game on my wife's laptop. At 4:00 a.m., Friday June 14, the noise from Reykjavik's very active nightlife was supplemented by Raptorous cheering from our hotel room. Then to bed to rest up, despite the 24 hour daylight, for our excursion.)

We opted for extra days in Reykjavik so we could experience this remarkable city, and get our bodies adjusted for our 14 day car tour of the island. Reykjavik is full of coffee-houses, bars and fine restaurants. It is walkable, inviting and lively (this despite Iceland recently being named as the most peaceful country in the world!). Some of the attractions: a large, stunning, glass-clad concert hall; a towering Lutheran cathedral; many museums; great food. In fact, every meal we had in Iceland was delicious: sea-food, the best lamb you will ever have, inventively cooked local produce.

To begin the self-drive tour, another driver shuttled us to the car-rental place, where we picked up our Land Rover Discovery, an all-wheel drive SUV. Our main route was the Ring Road, which encircles an island the same size as Newfoundland. The roads are narrow, with no shoulders, almost no guard rails, and many one-lane bridges. The entire island infrastructure is supported by a population of less than 400,000, so there are some limitations on what they can do. But the ring road is almost all paved, and the island features many tunnels through the mountains (one day we drove through 28 kilometers of tunnels!). Note that the trip is around the coastal perimeter, in that the interior is all mountains, old and still-active volcanoes and glaciers. There are few all-season roads leading to the interior, and the car rental agreement is clear about travelling only on approved roads. Note that there are free-ranging sheep EVERYWHERE, and they have the right-of-way.



The ring road is about 1300 Ks, but we also travelled to the more remote (but stunningly beautiful) west fiords, adding about 500K more. So, each day of our 14 day tour covered less than 200K. The bonus: each night our comfortable accommodation was pre-booked, with restaurants on site or nearby. All of them included a deluxe breakfast, always a wide-ranging and delicious buffet. Icelanders love coffee, and it is invariably wonderful. Tim Hortons would not thrive in Iceland!

One ironic downside: the island is so popular that they welcome 1.3 MILLION visitors a year. So, many of the most spectacular sites are often clogged with large tour buses and tourists. All too many of the latter can, seemingly, only take pictures if they or a friend is in them. (I can only imagine their picture nights for friends and relatives: "There's me blotting out the Snaefellsjokull Glacier; there's Kim obscuring the Gullfrabui waterfall; there's Hans hiding the Stokkur Geyser..."). I'd harrumph "damn tourists!", but the irony would be inescapable.

Another factor which is both a plus and minus: Iceland tries to keep its many attractions as natural as possible. There is none of the cursed over-development of places like Niagara Falls and Grand Bend. But, this also sometimes means walking along slippery, uneven trails beside an impossibly beautiful waterfall and gorge, with a rock wall on one side and oblivion on the other. I remember thinking on one such site, "If you slip, fall toward the rock wall". So, it helps to be fairly fit and adventurous to visit some of these sites, but also wonderful to be so close to awesome, unspoiled natural beauty. And, one can always just admire them from a safe distance (hard to do when it is so spectacularly beautiful).







Here is a sampling of some of the beautiful sites we visited:

Geysir geothermal area. Geyser Strokkur erupts every few minutes. Rope guides ensure tourists don't poach themselves. There are bubbling sulphur pits and various hot pools. A great deal of the energy use in Iceland is geothermal – the great upside to living on an island formed by volcanoes, and with about 30 active volcano systems.

The Jokulsarlon Glacier Lagoon. It is amazing to be driving close to the base of huge glaciers, and even more amazing to zip along in a zodiac over a large (18 square kilometers) lagoon full of icebergs trapped until they melt enough (usually 4-5 years) to escape to the ocean. We were taken close enough that I got pictures of an iceberg calving off the 25 metre high glacier face. The guide said the really dangerous icebergs are the ones that break off the 200 meters underwater – they just suddenly explode to the surface.

The Dettifoss waterfall: It is the most powerful in Europe, 45 meters high and 100 metres across. There are MANY other spectacular waterfalls along the ring road, in that it is on a coastal plain beside the mountains that comprise the Icelandic interior. There are ones you can walk behind; ones that are located in impossibly scenic canyons; ones in a variety of shapes and sizes. Does one start to think, "O well, there's just ANOTHER incredibly beautiful waterfall!" Not really. Ontario seemed flat and a little boring after we got back.

The Namaskarol geothermal area. It is a Martian-like terrain, where the mountainside is stained neon green, orange and stark white due to the various gases escaping from subterranean vents. There are volcanic craters holding startlingly blue water. It is covered with bubbling sulphur-mud pools and fumeroles. We were standing on dormant but still active volcanic systems.

There were so many other sights.

- ◆ Whale watching and puffins;
- ◆ picturesque fishing villages;
- ◆ esoteric museums (would you believe a Herring Museum; a Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft; and The Icelandic Phallogical Museum, located in Reykjavík, Iceland, which houses the world's largest display of penises and penile parts – we couldn't bring ourselves to visit it – maybe next time!.)
- ◆ majestic fiords
- ◆ lava caves

Our one traumatic adventure occurred in the extreme west of the Island, which is very much off the beaten track. We encountered the only gravel section of the main route we were on in a section that left the coast and climbed over the mountains. It was raining, and the road was quite steep, with near-180 degree switchbacks rated (correctly!) at 20KPH. There was no shoulder, narrow road, and no guardrails. And then we drove into the clouds. Luckily we met only one other car, and our Range Rover was a serious vehicle. Eventually we reached the other side of the mountains and left the clouds. Just as I was starting to peel my knuckles off the steering wheel, we hit a significant pothole and blew a tire. By the time I found a NARROW pull-off, the tire was shredded. Nordic Visitor had provided us with a cell phone, but we had managed to let the battery go flat (!). And, no CAA. Working half on the road, we got the tire changed, and I emailed our wonderful Nordic Visitor contact for assistance.

She contacted the car rental company, and got approval for us to buy a new tire, no cost to us. Perla also phoned to our next destination and teed us up to buy a new Michelin tire from a very helpful dealer in Patreksfirdi (if you ever need a new tire in western Iceland, I can help....). So – not fun while it was happening, but now a featured travel story.

Unexpected things can happen on a foreign trip, but Nordic Visitor was always there to support us, and even alter our itinerary during the trip. They more than earned the rather steep amount such a trip costs. Note that Iceland is pretty expensive. The basic cost for our 14 day excursion is \$3174 each (includes all hotels, breakfast, car rental, shuttles, maps and detailed travel support information – and special help when needed!). Additional costs: airfare, dinners (\$100 or so, top quality, with drinks), extra attractions, incidentals. Rather expensive, but good value. It was very reassuring at all stages of our preparations and the trip itself to have Nordic Visitor's prompt and helpful support. It was money well spent.

I cannot recommend visiting Iceland via self-drive tour highly enough. It is not for everyone, perhaps, but for anyone who wants an exciting, activity-packed visit to an incredibly beautiful place, that is both very different and very inviting – Iceland is for you.



Let Joe Wilson inspire you!!

Please consider a submission to YOUR newsletter. *AFTERWORDS* needs articles, an opinion piece on a topic that concerns you, a report on an interesting trip or person you've met while travelling, a poem or a book review. Articles should be about 600 words or less and sent to me at [armpresident@osstf11.com](mailto:armpresident@osstf11.com) Editing may be done for clarity or space limitations

You may recall that one of the banes of your teaching career was finding yet ANOTHER theory or method (tried and abandoned in some other country) imposed on your classroom. Since the Ford government is slipping four online courses into Ontario mandatory for graduation- let's see what happened in Pennsylvania with Charter Cyber Schools.

You can read [more interesting observations on curmudgucation.blogspot.com](http://curmudgucation.blogspot.com)



Wednesday, August 28, 2019

## PA: Poorer Districts Worst Hit By Cyber Schools

A study released in February shows that poorer school districts are bearing the brunt of funding Pennsylvania's cyber schools. The study was published in the American Journal of Education, and you can tell it's serious because its title is painfully dull: **Cyber Charter Schools and Growing Resource Inequality among Public Districts: Geospatial Patterns and Consequences of a Statewide Choice Policy in Pennsylvania, 2002-2014.**

Bryan Mann (University of Alabama) is a professor of education policy and foundations, and co-author David Baker (Penn State) is a professor of sociology, education and demographics. As the title suggests, they looked at the changes in cyber enrollment and the patterns and financial costs of that enrollment from 2002 to 2014. And because it's behind an academic paywall, we'll have to depend on **second-hand reporting** of the results, as well as **their own writing about it.**

The abstract of the study, translated from heavy academese, boils down to this:

When cyberschools started, everyone said, "Cool! Computers! I bet that'll make kids damned smart!" But then it turned out that cyber schools don't actually school well at all, and as word got out in the media, upscale communities ditched it, while enrollment in poorer areas kept up. So now districts with low tax bases are losing "significant revenue" to the cybers, despite the "dubious academic benefits."

From the anecdotal perspective of someone who taught in a less-wealthy rural-ish district, that sounds about right.

There are several other takeaways from the study, all worth noting.

The study confirmed many of the usual criticisms of the cybers. Because Pennsylvania's payment system for cybers is **an unholy mess that only a cybercharter lobbyist could love**, the cybers are crazy profitable. And **Mann and Baker note** that

*a steady stream of recent, scientifically sound, national evaluations reveals that cyber charter students tend to score lower on year-end tests and also have lower growth in learning over time than regular public school students. The same is true in Pennsylvania, where there is even evidence of knowledge loss (negative growth scores) from 4th to 8th grade in reading and math, literature, algebra, and biology among many cyber charter students.*

They note, as I have in the past, that for a certain group of students with particular disabilities, cybers "can be a godsend."

The drop in enrollment in well-off communities while enrollment in less wealthy, less educated communities is documented in the paper. The number of students lost is virtually never enough to reduce any operating costs for the district, so the bullet has to be bitten in other ways. The average payout for a district is \$800K, which in smaller districts is a serious amount of money, which districts deal with mostly by cutting staff and programs, or the more radical move of closing buildings. We've seen all three approaches in my region, and while it's impossible to draw a straight line from



cybercharter payments to, say, not replacing an English teacher when he retired, and districts face other pressures (we'll talk about PA's pension mess another day), losing a pile of money to cybercharters certainly doesn't help.

If you are outside of PA, there are two other things to know-- PA has a cap on how much school districts can raise taxes, and cybercharters are approved by the state, so local districts have no control at all.

Baker and Mann say that after an initial boost for cybers (they started appearing here in 2000 and were put into law in 2002), 2005 marked the first downturn in enrollment, coinciding with the first published studies that showed lousy academic results.

So why do some school districts still end up having so many cyberstudents? **The Notebook asked around in 2016**, and heard answers like "safety" or the child was having trouble keeping up or escaping Big Standardized Test emphasis or getting away from other "problem students" in public school.

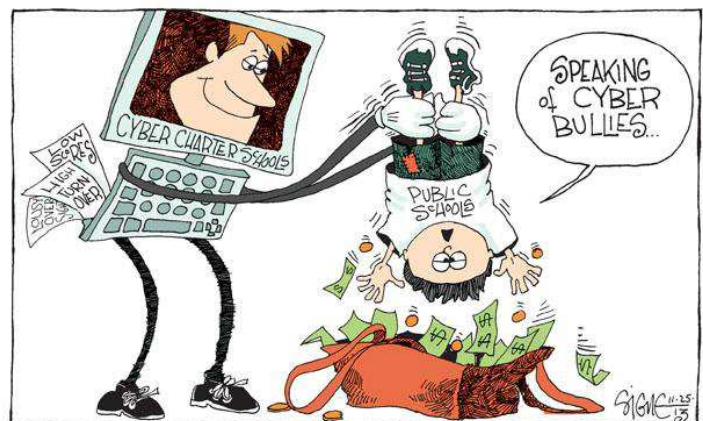
But not all reasons are so education-related. **Two superintendents testified in August** noted other reasons. Some can be very local, like students who have moved into an area to be near a parent in the nearby prison, and who don't want to have to talk about it. Some are more universal. Daniel Webb of Everett Area School District said some enroll to avoid accountability, e.g. the family who pulled all their kids because one child was disciplined for smoking.

The teacher bag of anecdotes contains many similar tales. The family who put a student in cyberschool because they were about to draw fines for chronic tardiness and skipping. The family who put a student in cyberschool to avoid repeated disciplinary issues. The family who put a student in cyberschool because he's failing, and he's heard that it's easy to pass cyberschools (which, given the lack of controls of who actually does the assignments, is probably true). Some students just like the idea of being able to get up when they want, go "to school" when they want, go hang out when they want. There is a repeated pattern of students leaving public school because they lack the self-discipline to cope with the institutional demands (we can discuss how much of the fault lies with the institution another day) without realizing that they are stepping into a setting where the demand on their self-discipline is even greater.

In fact, one of the areas that I have yet to see studied, is the number of cybercharter boomerang students-- students who leave the public school, cyberschool for a year, and then come back. I had those students in my classroom more than a few times; they always returned further behind than when they'd left (of course, if they hadn't stayed behind, then they probably wouldn't have returned). I'd ask these students what they did in cyberschool; often the answer was "Nothing."

But I digress. Part of the answer to the question posed by this study is that the bad news about cybercharters many failings was most likely to drive away students and families that were most concerned about academics, leaving behind families that enroll in cybercharters for other purposes, and for whatever reason, those families are in the less-wealthy rural-ish districts, which end up footing the bill.

There are remedies. Rep. Curt Sonney is no BFF of public education, but he has made numerous **efforts to rein in the cybercharters**, including a hugely sensible bill that would require parents to pay their own tuition to a cybercharter if the local public school offers an online option (many do, in a effort to woo back some families). Heck, someone could just shut down the ten-out-of-fifteen cybercharters that are **operating without a current charter agreement!** But the cybers spend **a huge amount of lobbying money** in Harrisburg.



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The standard argument is that cybercharters help make school choice more available, particularly in areas without bricks and mortar charters. What this study shows is that, by draining poorer districts of funding and forcing them to cut staff and programs, cybercharters are actually making fewer choices available for poorer PA districts. It really is long past time to shut them down.



And...some words of  
wisdom from our  
OTIP/ RAE0  
Insurance Brokers

**OTIP.** When someone chooses to be a member of the education community, they're choosing more than a career. They're choosing a life — a life dedicated to putting others first.

Our name is OTIP.

Our initials stand for Ontario Teachers Insurance Plan. What we stand for is putting members of the education community first. Members are our reason for being — helping them protect the things they care about is what gets us out of bed in the morning, and it's what makes us look forward to tomorrow. It's been like that since day one.

40 years ago, a group of like-minded individuals came together to create OTIP. They strongly believed the insurance needs of Ontario's educational workers would be better served by a not-for-profit insurance advocate that was part of the education community; an insurance advocate with the determination, skill and vision to work with the best insurance companies to shape and innovate products and services specially built for the education community.

Today, we proudly offer a full range of group and individual insurance products that all share one thing in common. They were created to specifically address and satisfy the unique needs of our members. Why? Because we believe that insurance built around our members is the best insurance of all.

At OTIP, we don't have a profit motive. We have something more inspiring: a "putting members of the education community first" motive. The proceeds we generate by meeting the needs of our members and going beyond expectations enable us to continually develop new and better ways to protect what matters to them most.

OTIP is proudly governed, led and inspired by the four education affiliates and their local leaders who daily champion the employees of Ontario's education communities. Being affiliate-led means we understand, like no other, the needs and hopes of our members. Every product and service we offer has been shaped and improved by this deep understanding.

And that will always be true.