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February 16, 2023

Thank you for inviting me to speak about how Maple Run Unified School District uses online learning as one of our flexible pathways. My name is Bill Kimball, and I am the Superintendent of Schools for the Maple Run Unified School District, which serves the municipalities of Fairfield, St. Albans City, and St. Albans Town. Our district has approximately 2,750 students educated in 3 PreK-8 grade schools, Bellows Free Academy and Northwest Career and Technical Center. Currently, I am in my fourth year serving our community.

I was asked to speak to the Senate Education Committee about how we use online learning to support students in meeting their educational goals. Online learning is one of several flexible pathways we have at BFA – St. Albans for our students. Along with online learning, our students can access dual enrollment classes taught onsite at both the high school and our technical center. They can access college credit at several local colleges, with CCV being our leading partner, and they can have job-embedded work experiences, or internships through our job placement coordinator.

BFA has a rich history of offering online classes. Starting in 2003, the Academy worked with two providers to offer online options as a credit recovery strategy for students over the summer, or the following school year. In that first year, our Student Services Online Coordinator, Scott Cooledge, then a special educator, supported students who accessed these resources. We saw that students who repeated the same class at BFA had a much higher dropout rate than those whose second attempt to complete the class happened with a different provider. During those initial years, we worked with Oak Meadow and the Edmentum Courseware (Plato) curriculum for credit recovery and a few initial credit attempts.

In 2007, we wanted to expand the program to offer a greater range of courses, so we partnered with Virtual High School, then the Concord Consortium out of Massachusetts, to provide a richer set of classes. In addition, we kept our partnership with Edmentum to provide credit recovery options for our students. Working with the Virtual High School allowed one of our instructors to teach a Virtual High School course during one of his blocks and subsequently become a teacher of other teachers on how to instruct online classes. We receive 50-semester seats in Virtual High School's course catalog for our students to access their classes in exchange for providing a teacher to teach a two-semester course. We have purchased additional seats for some years as the demand has grown. In addition, at BFA, Scott Cooledge, our Student Services Online Coordinator, supports our local students by facilitating weekly communication between the students, teachers, and parents. We have found this to be very valuable in ensuring student success. He keeps track of the student's progress and will help teach students the transferable skills they need to achieve in this learning mode.

Over the past seven years, we have had 1170 semester online courses accessed by our students, with the highest point being the 2020 – 2021 school year with 352 classes. If we take out the 2020-21 school year because of pandemic demand, we average 137-semester classes annually. During that time, 57% of the students who took the course were female, and approximately 90% did not qualify for free and reduced lunch. These statistics do not mirror our overall demographics of our high school.

Over the years, we have seen online courses work for self-motivated students and help them to understand how this learning mode best fits their needs. It has allowed middle school students to access advanced math topics and world languages we do not offer. It also supports students who need to learn away from school. We have found that it allows students to complete their high school experience with their peers while involved in other commitments. For example, we have students who are elite athletes, or are in family situations that take them away from the district. These students may have a learning interest we cannot offer onsite.

I want to tell you about two of our students so you can see how we use online courses to help them meet their learning needs.

I had the chance to talk to two seniors about why they take online classes, what is working for them, and what is not. I spoke with Heather L'Esperance and Nick Farinaccio, who are applying to college next year. They are students taking multiple AP courses and have conflicts in their schedules. Both of them have found online classes that continue their learning and interest them. Nick is taking BC Calculus, and Heather is taking American Popular Music and Young Adult Literature. They like taking online courses because it allows them to learn at their pace during the week and find topics that interest them. They can access learning at any time and learn outside the school day. There are other skills that are learned in these online classes, for example, managing time effectively and being self-directed. They also noted that when they do not budget their time, they have a heavy workload the night before the weekly assignments are due.

Along with these two students' experiences, I would be remiss if I left out my experience as a parent. I am the proud father of two daughters, one in college and one a junior at Peoples Academy in Morrisville. Both used online learning during their high school experience, and while both were successful with their courses as far as achievement; it only really fit one of them as a learning mode. My oldest daughter, Meghan, is a social learner. She was very successful in health and AP Literature, but she missed the personal conversations about literature she had in her other English classes, as well as the opportunity to meet with her peers.

On the other hand, my younger daughter has liked her online learning this year. During the past summer, Peoples Academy had a staffing change, and Emily needed help to find a course to replace the class she was planning to take. So, she looked to online classes to fill an open period and found American Sign Language. She has enjoyed it so much, she dropped an elective she planned to take this semester to take ASL II. This learning mode works for her because she can determine her pace of learning, schedule it when she wants to work on the course, and can meet with the teacher at times outside of school hours.

In Maple Run, we see online courses as an option that works for some students. This reality is the most crucial point: online learning is not a replacement for in-person classes for most students. However, it does help students who are self-motivated to learn or have an outside reason to motivate them to use this as a learning option.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about online learning opportunities. I would be glad to take any questions.