

Charter School Operator—Ron Packard—with a Huge Charter School Presence in Ohio Expands into the West Virginia Charter Market

Former K12 Inc., now named Stride Inc., online charter school business operation expands into WV. Charter business operator Ron Packard crossed the Ohio River to fill his pockets with money from the WV treasury. While CEO at K12 Inc., Mr. Packard collected at least \$5 million annually. He left K12 Inc. and started his own company, Pansophic Learning. Accel, a division of Pansophic Learning, will be operating in WV.

West Virginia Approves First Virtual Charter Schools (Nov. 20)

The West Virginia Professional Charter School Board approved the state's first two statewide virtual charter schools in a 3-0 vote, *The West Virginia Gazette* reported. Starting next year, the West Virginia Virtual Academy will enroll up to 2,500 students in kindergarten through 12th grade while the Virtual Preparatory Academy of West Virginia will enroll up to 2,000. The board did not approve a third virtual charter, the West Virginia Connections Academy, which would have enrolled an additional 3,500 students, the *Gazette* reported.

The West Virginia Virtual Academy will be operated by Stride, Inc.—formerly K12, Inc.—the nation's largest for-profit educational management organization by total enrollment, according to a report from the National Education Policy Center. The Virtual Preparatory Academy of West Virginia will be operated by Accel Schools, a division of Pansophic Learning, the *Gazette* reported. According to the same NEPC report, Accel operates 36 other schools in six states other than West Virginia. Both Pansophic Learning and K12, Inc. were founded by Ron Packard.

In March, West Virginia authorized the nation's broadest voucher program. Beginning in September 2022, this program will provide \$4,600 scholarships to all K-12 students whose families choose to send to private schools, even if they already don't use public schools, according to the *Gazette*.

According to the West Virginia charter school law, the state is limited to two statewide online charter schools. The board stated that it "regrets" that cap in its official statement on their decision, reported the *Gazette*. The law allows for 10 additional brick-and-mortar charters, three of which were also approved by the board. Two of those schools will be administered by Accel.

- A. Thomas

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