

# Keeping Pace with k – 12 Online Learning

## A Review of State-Level Policy and Practice

2007

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# Acknowledgements

This is the fourth annual *Keeping Pace* report. The first *Keeping Pace* was published in 2004, in response to a request for timely online education policy information by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). Stevan Kalmon, then of the CDE, was a strong advocate for the report, and helped with raising funds, writing and editing. Cathy Gunn, then of Learning Point Associates, was instrumental in suggesting and overseeing publication and distribution. The four funding organizations in the first year were the CDE, Illinois Virtual High School (IVHS), Learning Point Associates, and Wisconsin Virtual School. The 2004 report was a smaller effort than subsequent years, surveying 22 states and conducting in-depth research into 11 of them. In 2005 *Keeping Pace* expanded to review all 50 states, largely in response to the vision of Matthew Wicks of IVHS, and the 2006 report continued this broad approach.

For the 2007 report, funders are Clark County School District, Connections Academy, Florida Virtual School, Illinois Virtual High School, Odyssey Charter Schools, Texas Education Agency, and Virtual High School. In addition, the BellSouth Foundation (now AT&T) contributed funds to help with dissemination of the report.

In all four years of the report, the funding organizations have provided critically important expertise and guidance. The 2007 report is very much a collaborative effort that builds on the leadership and experience of the following people:

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Kate Loughrey, Texas Education Agency

Liz Pape, Virtual High School

Mickey Revenaugh, Connections Academy

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Pete Knopf and Matt Wicks, Illinois Virtual High School

Julie Young, Florida Virtual School

Susan Patrick of the North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) has contributed valuable expertise in all areas of k-12 online learning.

Another set of key contributors to the report are the people associated with an online program or education agency who gave their time to provide the information that is the basis for *Keeping Pace*. We have been consistently surprised by the amount of time and quality of responses we receive from people around the country. This report would not be possible without their input.

We have made every attempt to ensure accuracy of the profiles in *Keeping Pace*, but recognize that in a report of this breadth some errors of accuracy or omission are likely. We welcome comments, clarifications, and suggestions; please send them to [johnw@evergreenassoc.com](mailto:johnw@evergreenassoc.com).

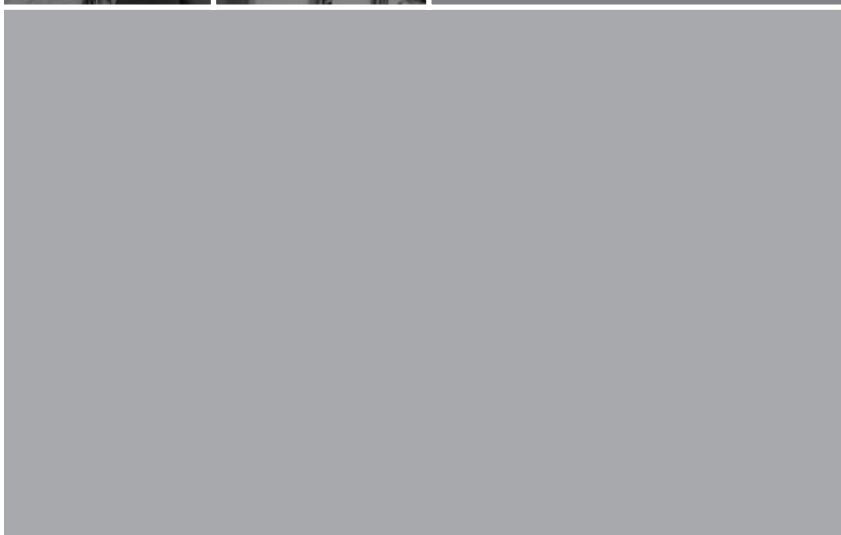
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**Executive  
Summary**



# Executive summary

Online learning at the k-12 level has grown so much in recent years that the main issue in most states is no longer whether or not online learning is occurring, but rather how it is being implemented. As of September 2007, 42 states have significant supplemental online learning programs (in which students enrolled in physical schools take one or two courses online), or significant full-time programs (in which students take most or all of their courses online), or both. Only eight states do not have either of these options, and several of these states have begun planning for online learning development. In addition to the spread of online learning programs to most states across the country, the majority of existing online programs show considerable growth in the number of students they are serving.

The increase in online learning has created countless new educational opportunities for students to take courses that were not previously available to them, in subjects ranging from core courses to electives such as Mandarin Chinese. It has allowed rural school districts to provide access to highly qualified teachers in courses that the districts could not previously offer. Online learning has also allowed students and parents the flexibility of a new educational option.

Key findings of the *Keeping Pace* research include:

- New online programs are being developed every year, and the total number of online programs is increasing quickly.
- Myriad types of programs exist, mixing and matching among variables that include type of governance (state-led, charter, district, etc.); amount of instruction online (fully online, hybrid); course types; student types; geographic reach; and other variables.
- Promising practices, with demonstrated success, are being developed in teacher professional development, teacher management, communication between teachers and students, data management, course development, and other areas of practice.
- A small number of programs have attracted attention from policymakers due to questions about finances, quality, and ways in which the programs adhere to existing laws and regulations. There has been increased scrutiny of online programs, particularly full-time programs, in a few states, and programs that do not adhere to quality standards risk creating a backlash that could impair all online programs.
- Data to evaluate online programs against face-to-face education are lacking, in part because of shortcomings of state data systems and in part because online student populations are at most only 1-2% of the total.

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- Data to compare online programs to one another are insufficient because of a lack of common measures in calculating and reporting student achievement.

Major online learning program and policy developments in 2006-2007 include

- Florida Virtual School, the largest online program in the country in terms of number of unique students, had more than 100,000 course registrations, more than 90,000 course completions, and more than 50,000 students in 2006-2007.
- K12, Inc., the largest operator of online schools across the country, filed for its initial public offering in late July. Its prospectus discusses the company's growth, from 11,000 students in fiscal year 2005 to 27,000 in FY 2007, an annual growth rate of 35%.
- The Missouri Virtual Instruction Program, an unusual state-led program in that it is offering both elementary and high school classes, and full-time and supplemental, began operations in Fall 2007 with over 2,000 students.
- State auditors in Colorado, Idaho, and Kansas released audits of online learning programs across their respective states.
- Wyoming created a distance education task force that will be reporting to the state in Fall 2007. Wyoming does not have a state-led online learning program, nor numerous online district programs or charter schools, so the legislature has the opportunity to lay the groundwork for the development of online learning in the state.
- In Arizona a bill to expand the Technology Assisted Project Based Instruction (TAPBI) program, a pilot of 14 online district programs and charter schools, was passed by the legislature but vetoed by the Governor.
- Indiana's budget bill HB1001 stipulated that virtual charter schools would not be funded through June of 2009.
- Michigan moved ahead with implementing its requirement, passed in 2006, that all students have an "online learning experience" before graduating.

## Looking ahead

Online programs continue to grow and provide new educational opportunities for students, and state policymakers continue to be challenged to find the most appropriate ways to oversee these new programs. While most programs appear to be offering a high-quality educational option for students and parents, the lack of transparency and data in many states, and questionable practices from a few programs, may threaten the sustainability of online learning for all. In light of this threat, many online programs believe that some regulation of online learning is appropriate, as long as it relies on transparency, primarily measures outcomes data instead of mandating inputs, and is flexible enough to allow for



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innovation and developing practices. Processes and outcomes of online programs that should be reviewed include:

- Student achievement outcomes, including participation in state assessments
- Student demographics
- Curriculum development procedures
- Teacher training, supervision, and evaluation, including communication requirements
- Tracking of attendance and activity in the course
- Special education services.

Oversight of online programs should be flexible and allow for innovation. State agencies overseeing online programs, for example, might provide guidelines for each category and then build reporting requirements for online programs that are tied to those standards. With the many approaches to online learning that are in place, it would not make sense to be overly prescriptive.

The *Keeping Pace* research demonstrates that successful, high quality online programs are being developed and delivered at many different levels, from national programs to single-district programs, as well as state-led, multi-district, and consortium programs. The most important variable is not the level at which the program is being offered, but whether the program is able to deliver and ensure a quality educational offering for students. By demonstrating quality outcomes, online education will continue to grow and provide educational opportunities for students and parents.



**Section 1:  
Introduction,  
findings  
and analysis**



# Introduction

Online learning at the k-12 level has grown so much that the main issue in most states is no longer whether or not online learning is occurring, but rather *how* it is being implemented. As of September 2007, 42 states have significant supplemental online learning programs (in which students enrolled in physical schools take one or two courses online), or significant full-time programs (in which students take most or all of their courses online), or both. Moreover, several states that do not yet have large online programs, such as Wyoming and Vermont, are formally exploring online learning through the creation of distance education task forces. In addition to the spread of online learning programs to most states across the country, the majority of existing online programs show considerable growth in the number of students they are serving. Forty percent of the online programs responding to a recent survey reported annual growth of over 25% in the 2006-2007 school year, and half of these programs reported growth of 50% or higher.

The increase in online learning has created countless new educational opportunities for students to take courses that were not previously available to them, in subjects ranging from core courses to electives such as Mandarin Chinese. It has allowed rural school districts to provide access to highly qualified teachers in courses that the district could not previously offer. Online learning has also allowed students and parents the flexibility of a new educational option. Furthermore, the growth and spread of new online programs, particularly full-time online schools, has captured the attention of several states that are looking closely at how these programs attract students, teach students, and account for their spending.

For example, in December of 2006 Colorado released an audit of full-time online programs across the state. The next day, a banner headline in one of the state's two largest newspapers proclaimed "*Online Ed Slammed: state audit assails lack of oversight, blocks new schools until system is fixed*" With the audit and subsequent publicity, policymakers, educators, parents, and students who were previously unfamiliar with k-12 online education received a quick—although not entirely accurate—education in the policy and politics of online learning in Colorado. In May of 2007 the Colorado legislature responded to the audit by passing a law that will greatly improve oversight of online programs, and support continued growth of online learning.

Colorado was not the only state to focus attention on online learning in late 2006 and the first half of 2007. Kansas and Idaho also conducted formal audits, echoing some of the concerns found by the Colorado audit, although in less depth. In other states, new programs were created or had their first students; and several states passed new laws expanding (or in a couple of cases restricting) online education options.

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This report is the fourth in a series of annual reports looking at the status of k-12 online education across the country. It is sponsored and guided by seven organizations with expertise in online learning: Clark County School District (Nevada), Connections Academy, Florida Virtual School, Illinois Virtual High School, Odyssey Charter Schools (Nevada), Texas Education Agency, and Virtual High School. These organizations believe that online learning benefits students by increasing educational opportunities, and recognize that appropriate policies and practices are required for sustainable growth.

## 1.1 Methodology

The information found in *Keeping Pace 2007* came from two primary data-gathering efforts: the first a web-based program survey, and the second a combination of Internet research and phone interviews with state education agency personnel.

The survey was designed to gather information from as many k-12 online programs as possible, including state-led programs, full-time and supplemental programs, charter schools, and district-level programs. The survey was distributed through posting on a discussion board of the North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL), by email from NACOL to many of its members, and by email directly to many programs known by *Keeping Pace* researchers. The survey contained extensive questions about the type of program, number of students, teachers and teaching practices, and student demographics. While many of the questions were similar to the questions asked of state-led programs in previous *Keeping Pace* reports, others were specific to full-time programs. The survey also included numerous questions to determine whether programs were tracking student demographics.<sup>1</sup> Survey results were used in two ways: first, to provide part of the data underlying the issues analysis discussion, and second to create the program profiles in section 2. The program profiles were reviewed by the programs prior to their publication. A total of 82 surveys were completed. Because very few formal reporting requirements for online programs exist, the self-reported program survey data were not independently verified against other information sources.

For state policies, Internet research and reviews of state laws were combined with interviews of education agency personnel. For states with little new activity in 2007, in many cases personnel reviewed and made minor changes to program profiles presented in *Keeping Pace 2006*. For the states that had passed new laws, or for which *Keeping Pace* had incomplete information in 2006, the profile was created for the first time. In most cases, the state education agency reviewed the final version of the profile for accuracy.

In addition to the methods discussed above, two other sources of information were used extensively. The sponsoring organizations for *Keeping Pace* provided extensive expertise and knowledge of the state of online learning across the country. Their familiarity with existing research and significant developments in online learning nationwide was a key source of information for this report. In addition, NACOL was an informal partner to *Keeping Pace*. As the leading association most familiar with nationwide k-12 online learning developments, NACOL provided valuable assistance in research and providing contacts.

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<sup>1</sup> The survey questions on student demographics were based on personal communication with Robert Blomeyer and from Blomeyer and Dawson (2005), *Virtual schools: Policy and Practice Consideration*. In Berge and Clark (eds.) *Virtual schools: Planning for Success*. New York: TC Press.

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## 1.2 How to read this report

The goal of *Keeping Pace* is to serve as a useful document for policymakers and practitioners, and as such, it takes a journalistic approach to research and writing. Most state and program profiles include footnotes that reference state laws, state policies, and websites of programs. However, in some cases, the information is general and was gathered through numerous website reviews and phone interviews with state agencies; in these cases footnotes are not included. The primary purpose of footnotes is to provide the source documents that will be most valuable to readers.

In a field that is growing and changing as rapidly as online education, timeliness of information is imperative, and indeed timeliness has been one of the drivers of interest in *Keeping Pace*. Research for this year's report was conducted from May through August of 2007, and every effort has been made to ensure currency of information as of September 1, 2007.

This report has several goals. First, it strives to add to the body of knowledge about online education policy and make recommendations for advances. Second, it serves as a reference source for information about programs and policies across the country. *Keeping Pace* attempts to be useful for both policymakers and practitioners who are new to online education as well as those who have extensive experience in the field. Third, because there has been so much online education activity in the past year, the report attempts to capture new activity. With these goals in mind, the report's second chapter, titled *National snapshot and the year in review*, captures both a picture of the state of online learning in 2007 as well as a sense of the rate and type of changes being implemented.

Chapter three of the report discusses findings categorized by key issues such as funding, teaching, and accountability, including analysis and recommendations. This analysis chapter integrates findings from the program survey and the state profiles research.

Chapter four presents 25 program profiles. Unlike previous *Keeping Pace* reports, the program profiles are not limited to state-led programs. Instead the profiles capture a cross-section of program types, including state-led and district-led, supplemental and full-time, charter schools, and both synchronous and asynchronous programs.

Chapters five through eight present state profiles of more than 40 states, divided into southeastern, northeastern, central, and western regions.

Although presented first, the key issues chapter of the document builds on the program and state profiles presented later in the report. The state profiles contain most of the footnotes and references to source documents.

## Definitions

For simplicity, *Keeping Pace* draws a distinction between **supplemental programs** and **full-time programs**. The distinction is not precise, because a few supplemental programs have some full-time students, and programs that fall into the full-time category have some part-time students. Although not exact, the distinction is important because students in supplemental programs are enrolled in a school separate from the online program, while students in full-time programs are enrolled only in the online school. In addition,

- Full-time programs typically are responsible for these students' scores on state assessments required by No Child Left Behind, which is the primary way in which student outcomes, and school performance, are measured; and
- Public education funding which follows the student flows to full-time online programs, unlike most supplemental programs that are funded by other means. (Florida Virtual School is an exception in that FLVS receives public education funding.)

The way in which *Keeping Pace* counts student numbers for full-time programs and supplemental programs is fundamentally different. For supplemental programs we count **course registrations**—one student in one semester-long course—while in full-time programs we count **enrollments**, defined as one year-long full-time equivalent (FTE) student.

Other terms used in this report are defined as:

**State-led online programs** are created by legislation or by a state-level agency, and/or administered by a state education agency, and/or directly funded by a state appropriation or grant for the purpose of providing online learning opportunities across the state. State-led programs are typically supplemental, offering courses for students who are otherwise enrolled in a traditional school setting. Examples of state-led online programs include the Illinois Virtual High School, Kentucky Virtual High School, and Michigan Virtual School.

Because online programs evolve, some programs are categorized as state-led that do not fit the definition presently, but did in important stages of their development. Florida Virtual School, for example, is now independent and funded via the state's full-time equivalent (FTE) public education funding, but previously received funding via legislative appropriation.

**State-led online initiatives** are different from online programs in that initiatives typically offer online tools and resources for schools across the state, including aggregating courses from outside sources, instead of developing and offering their own courses that are taught by teachers that they have hired. Examples include the Washington Digital Learning Commons, Oregon Virtual School District, and Massachusetts Online Network for Education (MassONE).

**Full-time online programs**, sometimes called cyberschools, are online learning programs in which students enroll and earn credit towards academic advancement based on successful completion of the courses (or other designated learning opportunities) provided by the online school. Many full-time online schools are charter schools.

Some states draw a distinction between **single-district programs**, which serve students who reside within the district that is providing the online courses, and **multi-district programs**, which serve students from multiple districts. Multi-district programs may be state-led, run by a **consortium** or **network**, or operated by one district offering an online program to students from other districts.

**State-level policies**, including legislation, education code, and formal rules promulgated by the state education agency, are a main focus of the state profiles. This report is primarily interested in policies that were created to address online learning in its various forms, but also includes policies that were created for brick-and-mortar schools, or other types of distance learning, that are used to regulate online learning in the absence of specific online policy.

# National snapshot and the year in review

Creating a snapshot of the national landscape is a challenge because there are so many types of online programs and categorizing them is difficult. Within these limitations, this chapter provides several different views of summary data that focus primarily on **supplemental** multi-district programs and **full-time** multi-district programs. State-led programs, a common type of multi-district program that is usually supplemental, are also broken out in the summaries below.

| Geographic Reach |   |   |
|------------------|---|---|
|                  | Multi-district  | Single-district   |
| Program Type     |   |   |
| Supplemental     | In 38 states, most programs are state-led but some are district-led. In several New England states the primary supplemental program is Virtual High School, located in Massachusetts. | Unknown number of programs because of very limited reporting. In many cases course vendors or other online programs provide courses to the district. Distinction between a small number of online courses and a program is unclear. |
| Full-time        | In 18 states, mostly online charter schools   |   |

The focus on multi-district programs, instead of single-district programs, is based on two factors. First, multi-district programs tend to be larger, to have better-developed policies and practices, and to create more policy implications than single-district programs. Second, very few data are available for single district programs.

The division between supplemental and full-time programs is consistent with the way students think about their online experience, as a single course or as the main source of their education. Also, many issues of policy

and practice are tied to whether the online program is supplemental or full-time. It is important to note that the distinction between full-time and supplemental programs is blurring, as discussed in chapter 3.

In most states, the main supplemental offering is a state-led program or initiative. In a few states (Nevada, Wisconsin, Montana, Indiana, Kansas, and Minnesota), there are significant district-led supplemental programs offered across districts. Three New England states—Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire—have significant numbers of students taking supplemental online courses through Massachusetts-based Virtual High School.

Also, in most states, many full-time, multi-district online schools are charter schools. Only one state without charter schools, Washington, has a significant number of full-time, multi-district programs.

In summary, as of September 2007, 42 states have significant supplemental online learning programs, significant full-time programs, or both. Only eight states do not have either of these options, and several of these states have begun planning for online learning development.

Breaking this down into the supplemental and full-time categories:

- 38 states have significant supplemental, multi-district online programs or initiatives, including 30 states with state-led programs or initiatives.
- 18 states have significant full-time, multi-district programs.
- 14 states have both significant supplemental, multi-district online programs/ initiatives, **and** significant full-time, multi-district programs.
- 8 states have neither.

## National Summary

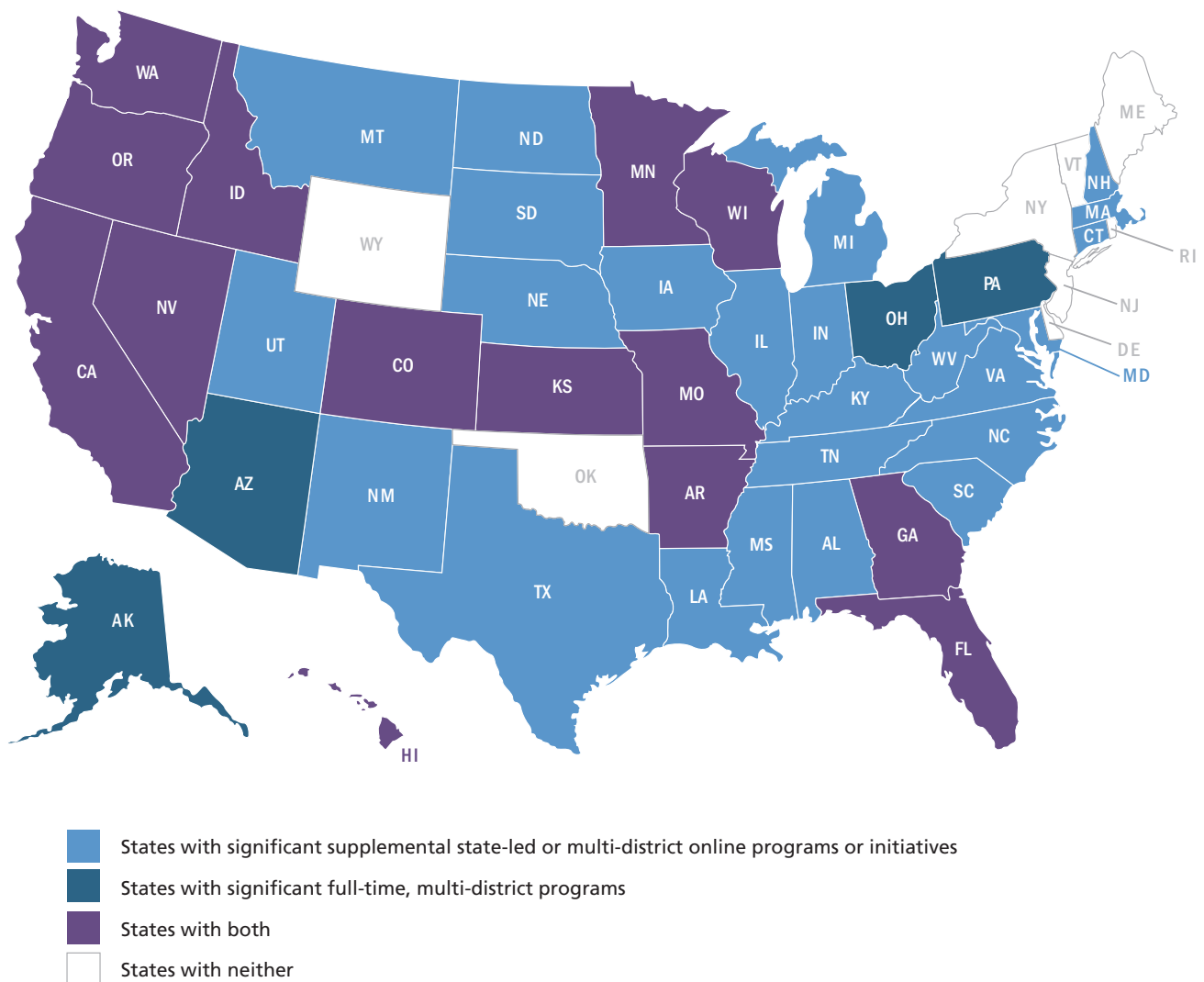
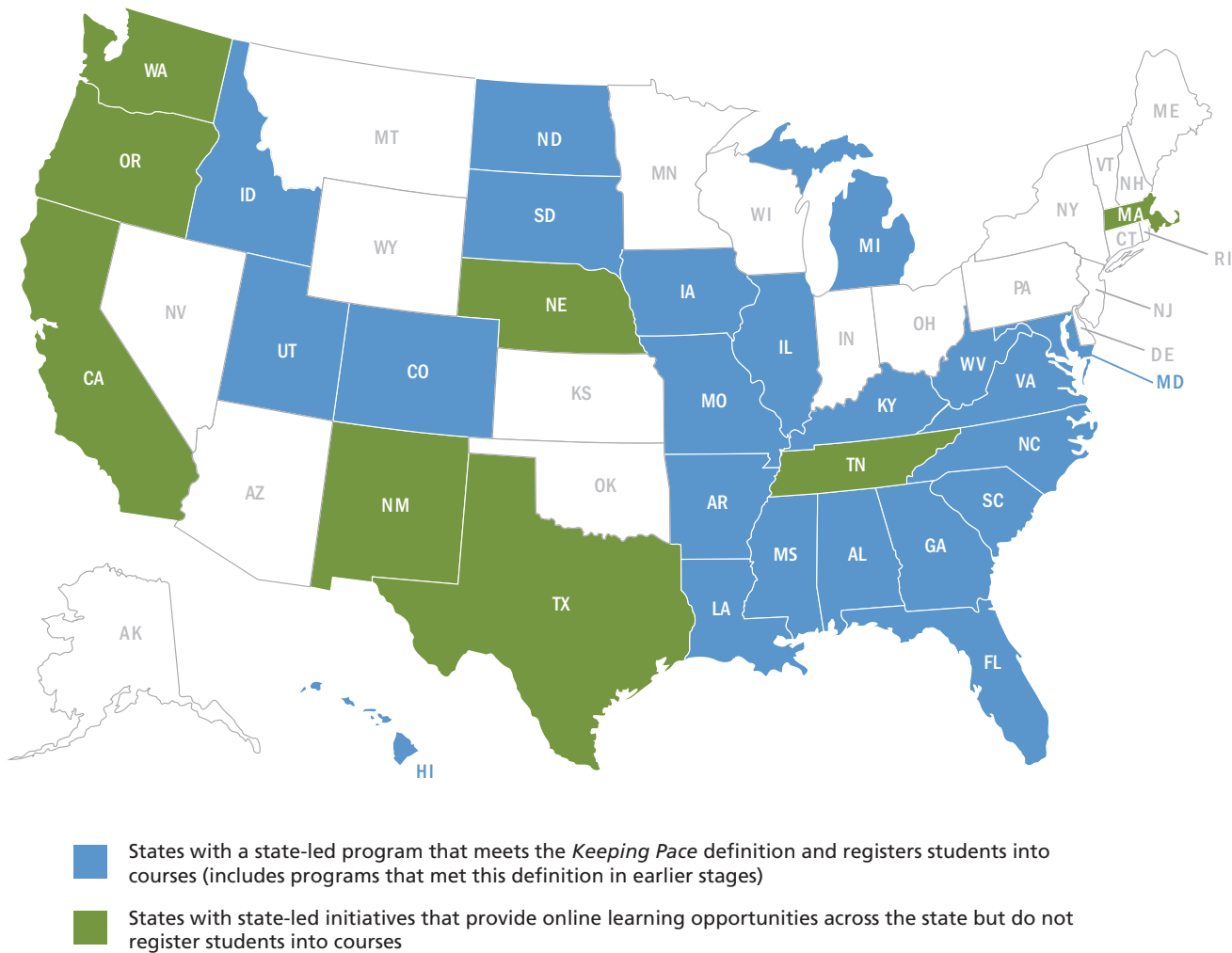


Figure 1: National summary of how online learning is being implemented across the country.



As discussed above, state-led programs and initiatives comprise most of the significant supplemental programs. There are 30 states with state-led programs or initiatives, including states with programs in development stages. These include programs such as the Florida Virtual School, Michigan Virtual School, and Illinois Virtual High School, and initiatives such as the Washington Digital Learning Commons and Nebraska Distance Education Council. (See Figure 2: States with state-led programs and initiatives. Also see definitions in chapter 1 for further explanation on the difference between state-led programs and state-led initiatives.)

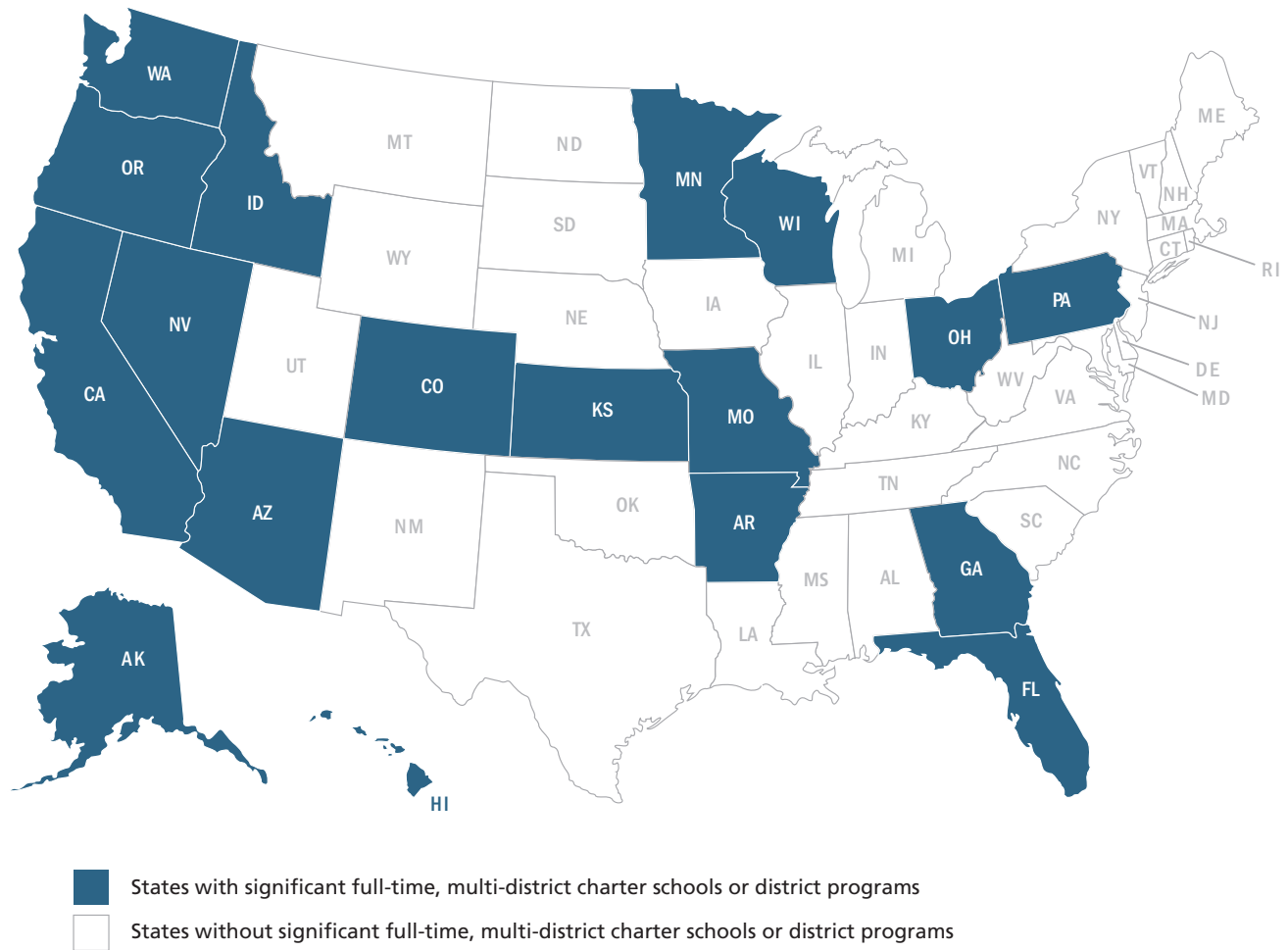
### States with state-led programs and initiatives



**Figure 2: States with state-led online learning programs and initiatives.**

Finally, 18 states have full-time, multi-district online schools. States with the largest number of students in these programs include Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota. (See Figure 3: States with full-time, multi-district online programs.)

### States with full-time, multi-district online programs



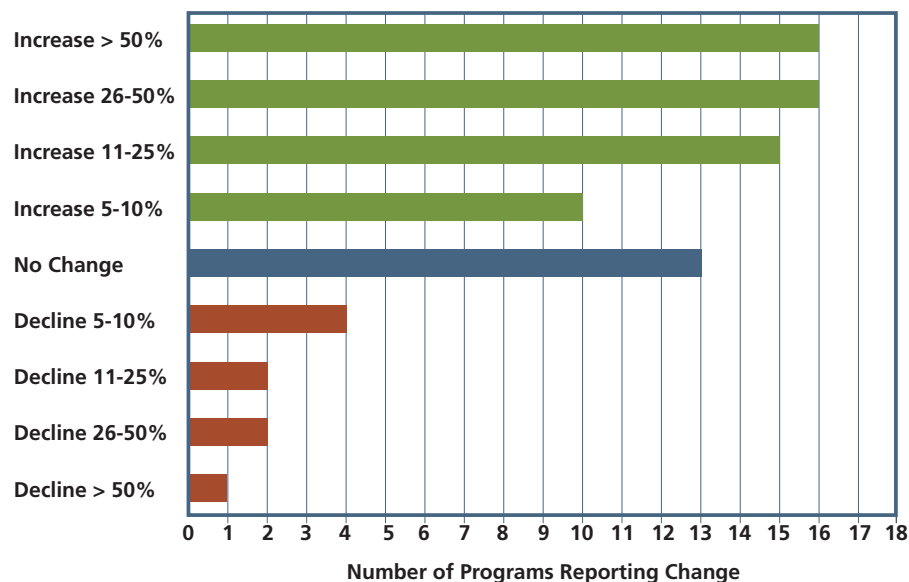
**Figure 3: States with full-time, multi-district online programs.** In most states that have full-time, multi-district programs, these programs are charter schools (though Missouri is unusual in that its full-time, multi-district program is state-led). States that do not have full-time, multi-district programs typically have one or more of the following attributes: they do not have a charter school law (10 states), they have either a law or precedent that does not allow online charter schools or makes them difficult to operate (about 5 states, depending on the definition used), or they do not allow students to choose schools outside of their district of residence. In about 15 states there does not appear to be a reason why online charter schools do not exist, but none have yet been created, perhaps in part because of reluctance of charter school authorizers.

## 2.1 Growth of online students and programs

The *Keeping Pace* research demonstrates the rapid growth of online education in two ways: growth of student numbers in existing programs, and new programs being developed and enrolling or registering students for the first time.

### 2.1.1 Growth of existing programs

The *Keeping Pace* survey results demonstrated that many online programs are growing rapidly, while only a few are declining. Indeed, 20% of all programs responding to the survey reported growth of more than 50% between the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years, and 40% reported growth of 25% or higher. The fact that 11% of programs reported a decline, and 16% reported no change (defined in the survey as enrollments or registrations staying within 5% of the previous year), suggests that the growth is not entirely across the board, but is tied to some combination of funding, quality, and awareness among students, parents, and educators. Also notable is that many of the programs reporting significant growth were among the largest programs in the survey; for example, Florida Virtual School reported growth of more than 25%. This demonstrates that the large percentage increases are not merely based on small programs adding a relatively small number of students.



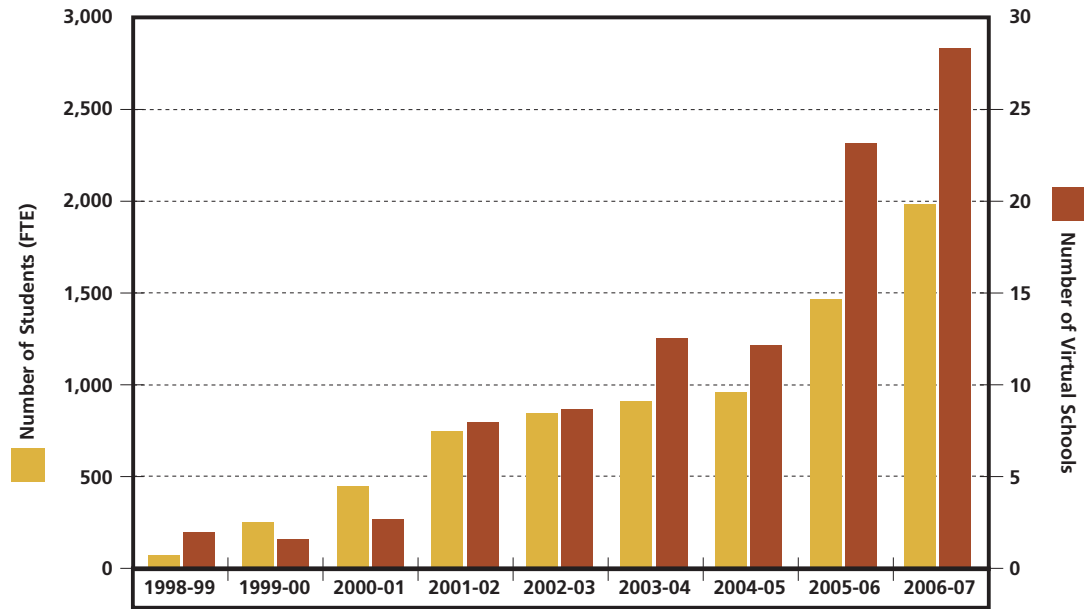
**Figure 4:** Number of programs reporting percent change in number of course registrations (for supplemental programs) and enrolled students (for full-time programs) between school years 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. One program reported a decline of 50% or higher, 13 programs reported no change, and 16 programs reported increases of 50% or more.

At the state level, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) reported an increase of 52% in the number of students taking one or more courses online between the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years in programs certified by the MDE. (Single-district programs are not required to report.) Most of this growth occurred as students taking supplemental

courses.<sup>2</sup> The Kansas audit of online programs counted an increase in total FTE of 38% from 2005-2006 to 2006-2007, and a total increase of 123% between 2004-2005 and 2006-2007.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.1.2 Growth in number of new programs

Because only a few states track online programs, the total number of programs is unknown, yet the number appears to be growing because new programs are being created every year, and very few, if any, are known to have closed. Data from the few states that track online programs demonstrate the growth in the number of programs, for example, Figure 5 from the Kansas state audit.



**Figure 5: Program and student growth in online programs in Kansas. Source: Kansas audit of online programs.**

The *Keeping Pace* survey response included 10 programs that have opened since Fall 2006, or 12% of all responses. These include the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program (MoVIP), Chicago Virtual Public School, Nevada Virtual Academy, and the North Carolina Virtual Public School. The survey asked programs in what year they started, and the results show new programs have come online in each of the last several years—including every Fall semester from 1998 to 2007, and most Spring and Summer semesters of those years—suggesting steady growth over time.

<sup>2</sup> Karen Johnson, Minnesota Department of Education, personal communication, August 6, 2007

<sup>3</sup> Legislative Division of Post Audit, State of Kansas, K-12 Education: Reviewing Issues Related to Virtual Schools, April 2007; retrieved August 6, 2007, from <http://www.kasb.org/legis/2007/07paVirtualSchools.pdf>

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## 2.2 State audits of online programs

One of the significant developments in late 2006 and 2007 was the release of audits of full-time online programs by three states: Colorado, Idaho, and Kansas.

Colorado was the first state to release its audit, in December of 2006. The report questioned the practices of several full-time online programs and the oversight capability of the Colorado Department of Education. The Trujillo Commission, formed in response to the audit, captured the audit's findings in its report:

“Auditors found that state oversight of online programs was lacking in numerous ways. Auditors reported that the Colorado Department of Education... did not effectively use the accreditation process to maintain oversight of school districts. Some school districts did not use their own accreditation processes. In some instances chartering processes were not effectively used to maintain adequate oversight of online programs... [and] individual schools did not maintain adequate oversight of their own program.”

The state Board of Education also created a task force to respond to the audit's findings; both the task force and the Trujillo Commission suggested recommendations for legislators. In response, the legislature passed Senate Bill 215, which made numerous changes to online education regulations. The new law in Colorado is among the most comprehensive online education oversight laws in any state. The key elements, among many details of the bill, are

- Creation of an online division within the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) that will oversee online programs, primarily through oversight of district authorizers plus regular reporting by the programs themselves.
- A requirement that the online division and state Board of Education create quality standards for online programs; and that the state board consider including the quality standards in accreditation requirements.
- A distinction between multi-district online programs and single-district programs. While both types of programs must submit an annual report to CDE, the multi-district online programs are subject to greater oversight because the authorizers of multi-district programs must be certified by the state as demonstrating the capacity to run an online program.
- A requirement that online programs that use physical facilities in which students meet formally as part of their schooling enter into a memorandum of understanding with the school district in which each physical facility is located.
- Removal of the existing prohibition on funding online students who were not public school students in the prior year, as of June 2008.
- A requirement that all online programs report annually to the state.

Idaho released a shorter audit of online programs in March of 2007. The audit discusses how online charter schools are recognized and defined in charter school law, and the lack of any similar definition or recognition of online programs that are not charter schools. It states:

“Virtual charter schools in Idaho operate under a framework of state laws, rules, and other oversight mechanisms. Virtual schools are not required to comply with most

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rules made by the State Board of Education, but must comply with the general education laws of the state and the rules and laws that specifically apply to charter schools. Initial oversight of virtual schools occurs throughout the petition approval process. The Public Charter School Commission and the state accreditation process provide some ongoing oversight of virtual schools in operation. *However, neither the approval nor oversight processes address key areas related to virtual education: curriculum development, delivery of instruction, and student-teacher contact.*<sup>4</sup> (Italics added)

In addition to charter school requirements, Idaho's online schools are required to be accredited according to standards developed by the state or by the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools. However, no accreditation requirements specific to online schools exist.

The audit also says:

“Current statutory definitions do not adequately consider the design of virtual schools, nor do they provide specific information related to development of curriculum, how instruction will be delivered to a student, and the frequency of contact between teachers and students. As a result... virtual schools vary widely in these three key areas of operations.”<sup>5</sup>

The audit report concludes with several recommendations, including defining virtual public schools, requiring that all online charter schools be authorized by the Public Charter School Commission, and requiring all online schools to report annually. As of July 2007 the legislature has not passed any new laws in response to the audit.

Both Colorado and Idaho have state-led, supplemental programs that were not studied by the auditors. Colorado Online Learning and the Idaho Digital Learning Academy do not have full-time students and are not “schools” according to the federal definition; for these and other reasons they were not part of the audits. However, while the funding issues are different for state-led programs compared to full-time programs, many of the other issues, such as accountability, quality of courses, and hiring and managing teachers, are similar.

Kansas, the third state in which an audit has been released recently, does not have a state-led program, but does have 35 online programs operated by school districts and educational service centers across the state.<sup>6</sup> Unlike Colorado and Idaho, neither of which had strong online education policies prior to the audits, Kansas did have policies requiring online programs to report to the state Department of Education, and tied funding of online students to this reporting. However, the state education agency did not follow through with its policies, according to the audit:

“The Department has established comprehensive policies and procedures to provide general oversight of virtual schools. These include policies on funding, teaching and curriculum standards, accountability for student achievement, equity and access, and annual reporting requirements. In 2005-06, these policies and procedures were recognized as some of the strongest in the country. However, Kansas' actual oversight of virtual schools is weak because the Department often hasn't carried out the policies it has established.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Office of Performance Evaluations, Idaho Legislature, Virtual School Operations Education Report, March 2007, p. 15

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 25

<sup>6</sup> The State Audit listed 28 online programs but more have been added since the release of the audit.

<sup>7</sup> Legislative Division of Post Audit, State of Kansas, K-12 Education: Reviewing Issues Related to Virtual Schools, April 2007; retrieved August 6, 2007, from <http://www.kasb.org/legis/2007/07paVirtualSchools.pdf>, p. ii

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While each of the three states that conducted an audit has some state-specific issues, several general lessons for online programs emerge from the findings. The primary lesson is the ongoing need for quality assurance of both courses and instruction—not only to ensure quality for students, but also to demonstrate quality to other stakeholders. It is likely that these audits are the beginning of greater scrutiny of online programs by states and policymakers. With greater analysis comes the opportunity to prove that online learning works, and to demonstrate how online programs are increasing educational opportunities for students across the country.

## 2.3 Other online learning developments in 2006-2007

Major online learning program and policy developments include:

- Florida Virtual School, the largest online program in the country in terms of number of unique students, had more than 100,000 course registrations, more than 90,000 course completions, and more than 50,000 students in 2006-2007.
- K12, Inc., the largest operator of online schools across the country—mostly charter schools—filed for its initial public offering in late July. Its prospectus discusses the company's growth, from 11,000 students in fiscal year 2005 to 27,000 in FY 2007, a compound annual growth rate of 35%. The company's revenue in FY 2006 was \$116.9 million.<sup>8</sup>
- The Missouri Virtual Instruction Program, an unusual state-led program in that it is offering both elementary and high school classes, full-time and supplemental, began operations in Fall 2007 with over 2,000 students.
- Minnesota passed a law to implement several changes to its online learning requirements. The law was amended to:
  - Define “supplemental online learning” as an online course taken in place of a course period during the regular school day at a local district school and “full time online learning provider” as an enrolling school authorized by the department to deliver comprehensive public education.
  - Specify that online learning providers of supplemental courses must make available to the enrolling district the course syllabus, standards alignment, content outline, assessment requirements and contact information.
  - Delete the student online learning enrollment maximum of 12 semester credits per year and add a supplemental online learning enrollment limit of 50% of the student's full schedule unless agreed upon by enrolling district.
  - Change the requirement that online learning providers “affirm” to the commissioner that online learning courses have equivalent standards or

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<sup>8</sup> K12 Inc. Prospectus; retrieved August 9, 2007, from <http://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1157408/000095013307003072/w35617sv1.htm#103>

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instruction, curriculum and assessment requirements as other courses offered to enrolled students, to the requirement that providers “demonstrate” these qualities.

- North Dakota passed a law requiring the state Department of Public Instruction to create an approval process for online courses being provided from out of state (but not between schools in North Dakota.) Notably, the law states that all teachers must “meet or exceed the qualifications and licensure requirements placed on the teachers by the state in which the course originates” meaning that teachers do not have to be certified in North Dakota. This law is significant because state certification of teachers remains a stumbling block for many programs operating across state lines.
- Wyoming created a distance education task force which met during Summer 2007 and will be reporting to the state in Fall 2007, with the expectation that the state legislature may address online learning in 2008. Wyoming does not have a state-led online learning program, nor numerous online district programs or charter schools, so the legislature has the opportunity to lay the groundwork for the development of online learning in the state.
- In Arizona a bill to expand the Technology Assisted Project Based Instruction (TAPBI) program, a pilot of 14 online district programs and charter schools, was passed by the legislature but vetoed by the Governor. Governor Janet Napolitano said that the results of a review of TAPBI, due in November 2007, should be considered before expanding the program.<sup>9</sup>
- Indiana’s budget bill HB1001 stipulated that virtual charter schools would not be funded through June 2009: “A virtual charter school is not entitled to any funding from the state of Indiana during the biennium and is not entitled to a distribution of property taxes.”
- The Pennsylvania Department of Education joined several state legislators in calling for a standard funding rate for online charter schools, possibly one that would be lower than the rate for physical charter schools or traditional schools.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, Michigan moved ahead with implementing its requirement, passed in 2006, that all students have an “online learning experience” before graduating. The Michigan Department of Education released its guidelines for the Michigan Merit Curriculum. The guidelines for online learning require that students:

- “Take an online course, or
- Participate in an online experience, or
- Participate in online experiences incorporated into each of the required credit courses of the Michigan Merit Curriculum.”

The guidelines go on to explain options for the “online learning experience” and require that the “meaningful online experience requires a minimum accumulation of twenty hours... for students to become proficient in using technology tools to virtually explore content.”

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<sup>9</sup> Arizona State Board for Charter Schools, Board Briefs, Volume V, Issue VI, June 11, 2007

<sup>10</sup> [www.pdenewsroom/cwp.view.asp?Q=128768&A=3](http://www.pdenewsroom/cwp.view.asp?Q=128768&A=3)





The following chapter discusses key issues in online learning using two main sources of data: the *Keeping Pace* web-based survey of online programs, and the review of state policies that are detailed in the state profiles in chapters 5 through 8.

## 3.1 Variations among programs

Online education is provided in a nearly endless variety of program types. Variables include the program organizational type and governance, the geographic area from which students are drawn, whether the program is full-time or supplemental, and whether courses are synchronous or asynchronous.<sup>11</sup> Categories of programs aren't perfectly delineated, but identifying a few of the major ones is valuable. They include:

- **State-led programs:** This is a well-known category because in many states the state-led program is the highest profile online program. Examples include the Florida Virtual School, Illinois Virtual High School, Michigan Virtual School, and Idaho Digital Learning Academy. Attributes of state-led programs are discussed in section 3.2 below.
- **State-led initiatives** provide courses and/or online tools, resources, and services but are different than the programs in the first category. Different types of state-led online learning initiatives have developed in recent years, with a number of states recognizing the value of providing online learning opportunities, but choosing a different model than the programs described above. Examples include the Massachusetts Online Network for Education (MassONE), the Washington Digital Learning Commons (DLC), and the Oregon Virtual School District. They are different than the state-led programs, such as the virtual schools in Florida, Illinois, Michigan, and Kentucky, in that the latter programs all have their own courses (although some may be licensed), and their own teachers (although they may be part-time, adjunct teachers). The state-led initiatives may be better described as providers of online tools and resources and aggregators of online courses, although no single definition describes them all.
- **Charter schools** are a type of public school available in the 40 states that have passed charter school laws. Charter schools have an authorizer who may be (depending on the state) a school district, a university, or a state-wide authorizer created for that purpose. There are two types of charter schools related to online learning: fully online

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<sup>11</sup> Gregg Vanourek, "A Primer on Virtual Charter Schools: Mapping the Electronic Frontier," National Association of Charter School Authorizers Issue Brief No. 10, August 2006. Vanourek is Founding Partner of New Mountain Ventures.

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charter schools, which were created to be primarily or entirely distance education programs, and charter schools that are partially online and partially face-to-face.

- District online programs are, as the name implies, run by school districts. Although a district may authorize a charter school, in this report the term “district-run program” does not include charter schools. District programs may be single-district, meaning that the program serves only students who reside within the district, or multi-district, meaning that the program attracts students from districts other than the one that has created the online program. This is an important distinction that is recognized in policy and oversight mechanisms in Minnesota and Colorado.
- Consortium or network programs are a final, catch-all category. Examples include the Virtual High School Global Consortium, Wisconsin eSchool Network, and Connecticut Adult Virtual High School. These programs recognize that there is value in economies of scale, in combining resources to create online courses, train teachers, and provide student support, and are demonstrating that such programs do not necessarily have to be run at a state level or by a state education agency.

### 3.1.1 Online program categories are becoming less distinct

Although the categories discussed above are important, they are blurring in several ways:

- Grade levels served by programs are overlapping: In the program survey, 38% of programs offered courses to elementary students (k-5 or k-6), 62% offered courses to middle school students (grades 6-8 or 7-8), and 85% offered courses to high school students (grades 9-12). Clearly, many programs offer a wider variety of grade levels than just elementary, middle, or high school grades. Eighteen respondents said they serve elementary, middle, and high school students; almost all of these are full-time programs and at least some of them started at the elementary level and have expanded to the upper grade levels. State-led and supplemental programs are most likely to serve only high school students, but a significant number of these programs are expanding to middle school grades.
- The distinction between supplemental and full-time is blurring: About a third of the programs that identified themselves as supplemental had at least some full-time students. In some cases the full-time students come from a set population; both the Georgia Virtual School and Illinois Virtual High School said their full-time students are primarily or entirely hospitalized or homebound. Conversely, a number of the full-time programs are expanding to serve supplemental students as well. In Minnesota, which does not have a state-led program, most of the growth in the number of online students in the last year has been among supplemental students.
- The distinction between online and face-to-face is blurring: Several types of blending between online and face-to-face teaching exist. One example is teachers in physical classrooms incorporating online tools such as discussion forums or online assessments to extend learning for their students. Another form of blended learning occurs when primary instruction is delivered online, with the occasional face-to-face meeting between teachers and students. These meetings can be at the beginning of the course or throughout the semester. For example, Odyssey Charter School has its online students meet face-to-face with teachers weekly.

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- Another model combining online and face-to-face has students regularly access their online course from a physical facility and have access to a mentor or facilitator at that facility. A version of this approach is common among the state-led supplemental programs working with local schools. When this method is applied to a full-time online school that creates the physical setting for students, there may be significant policy implications because the online program may create the physical setting, which looks very much like a school, within another school district. One example is Hope Online Learning Academy Co-op, the second largest online program in Colorado with 1,520 full-time students in school year 2005-2006. Hope students meet every day in learning centers operated by the school, where they take online courses under the supervision of a mentor. The licensed teacher of record for each course interacts with students online.

The approach of having students in a full-time program meeting at a physical location is not common, and perhaps it will remain an anomaly. In the program survey only 11 respondents (13%) said they bring students together in a physical location more than once per week, and the comments in response to the question suggest that some of the programs that said yes may not actually get together as often as once per week.

## 3.2 State-led program attributes

State-led programs and initiatives are an important type of program, because in many states the state-led program is the main driver of online education. These programs have in common that they were created, funded, or implemented by the state or a state agency. They are usually mostly or entirely supplemental, serve mostly or entirely high school students (some have a small number of middle school students), and typically work with local schools who grant course credit and award diplomas. They may license or develop their courses, or a combination of both. They hire teachers either full-time, part-time, or a combination of both. They are usually funded by state appropriations that are independent of the number of course registrations they have, and they often charge course fees. These and other program attributes are detailed in Table 1 below. (The table does not include all state-led programs due to space constraints.)

**Table 1: Summary of key attributes of state-led programs<sup>12</sup>**

| State | When program started              | Governance/Org type <sup>13</sup>                                | Funding model <sup>14</sup>   |
|-------|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| AL    | Fall 2005                         | SEA  | State approp, federal 9%, no course fees                                |
| AR    | Spring 2000                       | SEA  | State approp, \$500 per student up to 1000 students                     |
| CO    | Fall 1998                         | NGO, funded by state approp.                                     | State approp, course fees   |
| FL    | Fall 1997                         | Special school district  | State FTE funding based on successful course completions                |
| GA    | Summer 2005                       | SEA  | State FTE funds, course fees  |
| KY    | Spring 2000                       | SEA  | State approp, course fees   |
| ID    | Fall 2002                         | SEA  | State appropriation tied to number of course registrations, course fees |
| IL    | Spring 2001                       | Through IL Math and Science Academy and state Board of Education | State approp. course fees, limited federal funds                        |
| LA    | Fall 2000                         | SEA  | State approp private grants, federal funds                              |
| MD    | Fall 2002                         | SEA  | Federal funds, course fees  |
| MI    | Spring 1999                       | NGO  | State approp, course fees, private grants, federal funds                |
| MO    | Fall 2007                         | SEA  | State approp, FTE funding to school districts is reduced                |
| MS    | Fall 2006                         | SEA  | State approp and private grants   |
| VA    | Fall 2004<br>(for online courses) | SEA  | State approp, course fees   |
| WV    | Fall 2000                         | SEA  | State approp  |

<sup>12</sup> Most of the data are based on the *Keeping Pace* program survey, and some additional data are based on the Southern Regional Education Board's *Report on State Virtual Schools*, August 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Governance/Organization type: SEA means state education agency and NGO means non-profit, non-governmental organization

<sup>14</sup> Funding: "State approp" means a state appropriation; in most cases (except where noted) the appropriation is not tied to the number of course registrations or unique students.

| # course registrations <sup>15</sup> | Full-time students?           | Grades served                                | # courses/<br>% licensed | Enrollment types <sup>16</sup>           | # teachers <sup>17</sup> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 7,000                                | No                            | 9-12   | 44, 50%                  | Set dates                                | 133 pt                   |
| 3,850                                | ND <sup>18</sup>              | 9-12   | 35, ND                   | Set dates                                | 23 pt, 6 ft              |
| 1,227                                | No                            | 6-12   | 68; 10%                  | Set dates                                | 32 pt                    |
| 100,000                              | Less than 5%                  | 6-12   | 90; 3%                   | Self-paced                               | 320 ft; 175 pt           |
| 4,300                                | Only hospital/<br>homebound   | 6-12<br>(courses are 9-12)                   | 78; 0%                   | Rolling start<br>dates, set end<br>dates | 120 pt                   |
| 1,350                                | ND                            | 6-12   | 78                       | ND                                       | 48 pt                    |
| 3,682                                | Very few                      | 7-12   | 85, 1%                   | Set dates                                | 65 pt                    |
| 2,750                                | Very few, mostly<br>homebound | 6-12   | 114, 42%                 | Set dates                                | 75 pt                    |
| 5,605                                | No                            | 6-12   | 36, 0%                   | Set dates                                | 16 ft, 41 pt             |
| About 1,000                          | No                            | 7-12, courses are 9-12                       | 43, 90%                  | Self-paced and<br>set dates              | 0 ft, 11 pt              |
| 8,587                                | No                            | 6-12   | 264, 67%                 | Self-paced and<br>set dates              | 100 pt                   |
| About 13,000 (in<br>Fall 2007)       | Yes, a significant<br>number  | K-5 and 9-12 (6-8 to be<br>added in 2008-09) | 100% licensed            | Self-paced                               | ND                       |
| 3,000                                | No                            | 9-12   | 27, 100 %                | Set dates                                | 0 ft, 73 pt              |
| 4,416                                | ND                            | 6-12   | 31, 50%                  | Set dates                                | 18 ft, 16 pt             |
| Between 2,000<br>and 3,000           | No                            | 6-12   | 158, 98%                 | Self-paced and<br>set dates              | 2 ft, 17 pt              |

<sup>15</sup> # course registrations is from summer 2006 through spring 2007. One course registration is one student taking one semester-long course. Because state-led programs are primarily supplemental, the number of course registrations is typically in the range of 20-35% higher than the number of unique students.

<sup>16</sup> Options are self-paced or with one or more set start and end dates

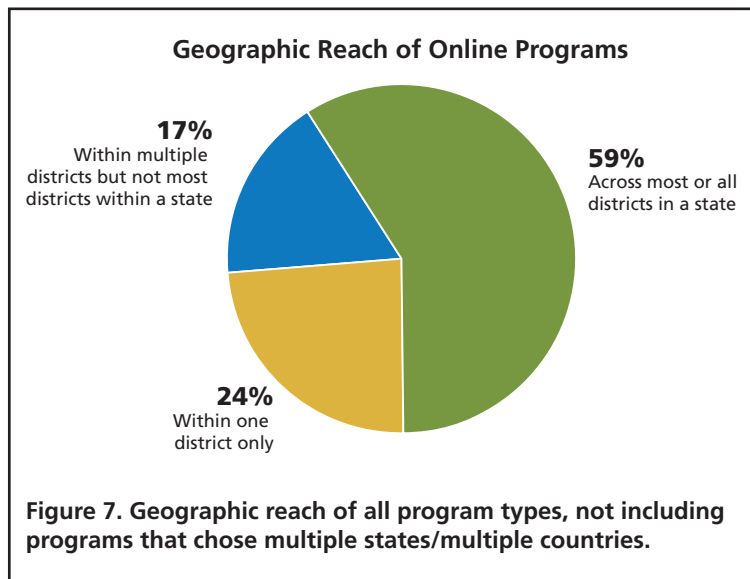
<sup>17</sup> PT=part-time, FT=full-time

<sup>18</sup> ND=data are not available

## 3.3 Geographic reach of online programs

One main reason that online programs (all programs, not just state-led) are challenging education policy is that many policies do not anticipate schools that operate across an entire state, or beyond. The program survey results demonstrate that many programs are doing so, as shown in Figure 7. In addition to these programs, 10% of programs said they operate across multiple states, and 8% operate across multiple countries.<sup>20</sup>

The breakdown of geographic reach by program type reveals that 15 of 19 online charter schools operate statewide, and only 4 of 22 district programs operate statewide. Not surprisingly, state-led programs operate across their states, and in some cases beyond.



### 3.3.1 Policy issues related to geographic reach

Within most states and for most programs, the type of program determines its geographic reach; few, if any, policy restrictions exist. One exception is in California, where charter schools are restricted to serving only students in the county in which the school is authorized and contiguous counties. In most other states the key

issue is whether students are allowed to enroll in a district other than where they reside. In most states they are allowed to cross district lines.

Funding issues are tied to geographic reach in states in which funding differs by location. These states must decide whether online students are funded at the rate of their “home” district, where they reside; at the rate of the district in which the program is located; or at some other rate that may be specific to charter schools, to online programs, or to online charter schools.

Across states there are policy barriers related to geographic reach. The main one is the requirement that the online teacher be certified in the state in which the program and/or student resides. Although some states have provisions to recognize teacher certifications in other states, procedures to recognize certifications across states can be cumbersome. In North Dakota, a law passed in 2007 recognizes that online teachers may be from out of state and requires that online teachers “meet or exceed the qualifications and licensure requirements placed on the teachers by the state in which the course originates.”

<sup>20</sup> The accompanying graph leaves out the responses for multiple states or countries because the survey mistakenly allowed programs to choose more than one option, so the number of responses including all possible answers is greater than N.

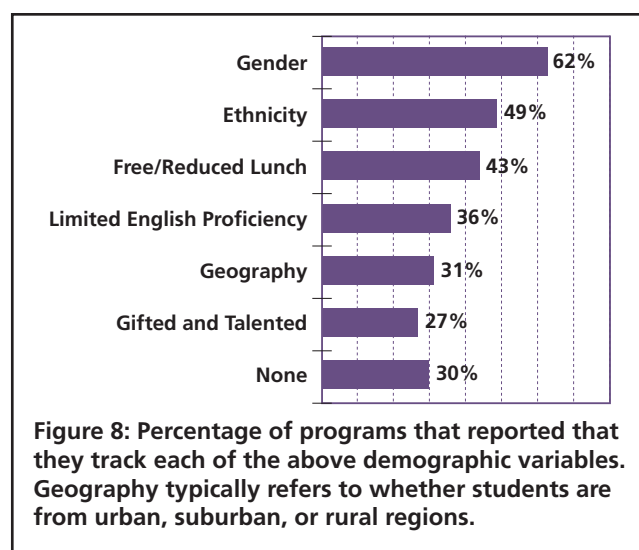
## 3.4 Student demographics

There is a lingering perception that most students in online programs are honors or Advanced Placement students. The data in the program survey do not support this view, as 81% of responses from programs with high school level courses reported that 15% or fewer of their course registrations were for AP courses. Only 9% reported that more than 45% of their course registrations were for AP courses.<sup>21</sup>

Conversely, the survey also asked each program the percentage of course registrations for credit recovery classes. The number of programs responding was low, and 22% of the respondents said they did not know. Of the ones who did know, 59% had 15% or less of their course registrations in credit recovery courses, while nearly one third (31%) had 31% or more in credit recovery.

For supplemental programs, which register students who are enrolled in another school, tracking student types and reasons that students are taking online courses is often beyond their data-tracking capability. AP course registrations are an exception to this, because Advanced Placement is a formal designation that is tied to the *course*, not to the *student*; therefore every student in an AP course is by default an AP student. With credit recovery in most cases the designation is tied to the student, not to the course, and for most supplemental programs the only way to know if the student is a credit recovery student is if the student or administrator at the student’s home school communicates this to the online program. An exception to this rule is supplemental programs offering online courses in summer that are explicitly for credit recovery.

Beyond credit recovery and AP courses, there are relatively limited student demographic data in online courses and programs, even among the few states that track online programs. Tracking demographics nationally is made more challenging by a lack of common measures. For example, the term “at-risk” is commonly used, but there is no single definition at the national level or even among some states. The Colorado audit of online programs noted that although programs often reported a certain percentage of at-risk students, the method of measuring at-risk was not consistent among programs.



Despite the lack of common definitions for some terms, having programs track demographics of their own students is a starting point to tracking demographics at the state or national level. The *Keeping Pace* survey asked programs what demographics they record. The only demographic tracked by more than half the programs was gender; the rates of other demographic measures are shown in Figure 8 to the left.

The *Keeping Pace* survey was not large enough to extrapolate to national online student demographic

<sup>21</sup> The survey asked for percentage of students who took the AP exam and how well those students did on the exam. However, because the number of programs reporting significant numbers of AP course registrations was low, and because about 1/3 of these programs did not have information on the percentage of their students who took the AP exam or their students’ AP exam scores, the data resulting from these questions are too limited to be useful.



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numbers, but the results clearly demonstrate that online learning is not limited to middle class, Caucasian students, as is sometimes believed. The sixteen programs that reported free and reduced lunch data collectively had 35% of their students eligible for free or reduced lunch, with a range from 3% to 53%. Student ethnicity across all reporting programs was about 73% Caucasian, 12% African-American, and 7% Hispanic, with the remainder split between Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, multi-racial, or “other.” These data must be considered approximate because they were self-reported, and because only 20 programs reported ethnic data in a way that could be tabulated. Still, the data demonstrate that online programs and courses are being chosen by a variety of students. Perhaps not surprisingly, the few programs that reported data on students of limited English proficiency had very few LEP students.

Some supplemental state-led programs track demographics not in terms of individual students, but by the demographics of the schools in which the students are enrolled. In Illinois, for example, schools that have at least 25% free and reduced lunch students qualify for free course registrations at the Illinois Virtual High School on a sliding scale in which schools with a higher percentage of free and reduced lunch students receive more free course registrations. In 2006-2007, 50% of course registrations at IVHS were from schools that qualified for scholarships. Similarly, Florida Virtual School reported that 24% of students come from high minority schools and 18% from low performing schools.

## 3.5 Types of courses

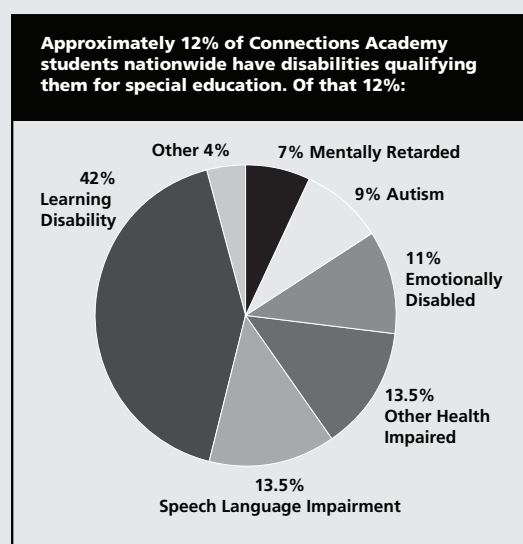
Online courses may be real-time or asynchronous, may be self-paced or on a set schedule with a start and end date, and may be developed by the online school or licensed from an outside source. In each of these areas, the survey found that:

- Most programs (65%, or 50 out of 77) use asynchronous courses primarily or entirely; 31% of programs use a mix of both real-time and asynchronous, and only 4% use synchronous courses primarily.
- For course pacing, 39% of programs have courses with set start and end dates to allow students to proceed through the course as a cohort. This includes supplemental programs that have more than one start and end date to accommodate different school schedules across a state. One-quarter of reporting programs have courses that are self-paced, and 36% offer both types of courses. At least one program with students in grades k-12 reported that the high school courses have set dates, and the elementary level courses are self-paced. This makes sense because high school students spend a greater proportion of their time online, so having a cohort of students to allow communication among students is more important at the older grade levels.
- Online programs license anywhere from none to all of their courses from outside providers, with no apparent tendencies among the 60 programs that responded to this question. Indeed, the symmetry among the percentages of courses being licensed versus being developed in-house is remarkable. Fourteen programs (23%) had licensed 100% of their courses, and 14 programs had developed 100% of their courses. Thirty-two programs (53%) had licensed 50% or more of their courses, while 33 programs (55%) had licensed 50% or less of their courses.

## Special education

By Craig Butz, Odyssey Charter Schools, and Mickey Revenaugh, Connections Academy

Whether full-time or supplemental, online learning programs around the nation attract students with special education needs who seek the individualization and flexibility that online learning offers. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), public schools have an obligation and responsibility to serve these students in accordance with their Individual Education Plans (IEPs). How public school online learning programs approach this duty varies according to the type and scope of program. A closer look at how online programs provide special education services reveals the complexities and the potential of virtual education for students with special learning needs.



Enrollment patterns of students with disabilities in full-time online schools are often representative of students with disabilities within the general community, both in numbers and in the types of disabilities served. For example, the pie chart above provides a snapshot of enrollment of students with disabilities<sup>22</sup> in Connections Academy schools across the country in October 2006.

<sup>22</sup> "Other" includes students with vision impairments, hearing impairments, traumatic brain injury, orthopedic impairments, developmental delay and multiple disabilities.

Traditional public schools typically have 10-12% of their students in special education programs and show a similar distribution of disabilities.

Full-time online public schools serving students across wide geographic areas, such as Connections Academy schools, typically provide services that include:

- screening for and identification of students with possible special learning needs, with intervention services and assessment/evaluation as needed;
- consultative support to the online school's general education staff to modify the curriculum to accommodate special learning needs;
- direct special education instruction via the telephone, Internet and web conferencing;
- provision of related services (such as speech-language therapy, occupational or physical therapy, psychological counseling) on-site at the school office, in students' homes, at neighborhood public schools, at community sites and in therapist offices near where the students live;
- parent training and parent and student support groups, including autism support and groups focusing on specific learning disabilities.

Full-time online schools whose students are in a concentrated geographic area can take a different approach to addressing special needs students, especially if they typically have some face-to-face time planned with all students. This is the case with Odyssey Charter Schools in Nevada, whose students are in greater Clark County and report to the school at least once a week. Odyssey has two distinct models of service. In kindergarten through seventh grade, teachers are assigned to monitor a caseload of approximately 22 students and supplement school-adopted curricula with other assignments as appropriate. The teachers make weekly home visits to each student to monitor student progress, advise parents concerning the weekly study routine, and provide direct instruction in areas of need. Students communicate with their teacher via email and telephone to ask questions and get clarification

on assignments. Special education support is provided either by consultation between the general education teacher and a special education teacher, direct in-home instruction by a special education teacher, or both. Odyssey Charter High School has classrooms in which students attend one day each week to work face-to-face with their teachers. Its special education facilitators and paraprofessionals work with the families and students to design IEPs to address the needs of students. They work with the students in the classrooms to ensure time on task and clarification of content work expectations. Odyssey also employs all related service providers, who work with students with special needs as dictated by the IEP.

Not all full-time programs accommodate special needs students directly. Some online schools fulfill their special education responsibilities by arranging for their students' local traditional school in their district of residence to provide all services, except for modification of the online curriculum and teaching, which is done by the online school.

Supplemental programs also often rely on the local school to provide at least some of the IEP provisions. This is often an easier approach for supplemental programs, compared to full-time programs, because

students in supplemental programs are typically enrolled in another school full-time, and the supplemental programs often have a facilitator or mentor in the physical school. The student's enrolling school will typically have the student's IEP, and the supplemental online program must make sure to request the IEP from the school when the student registers for the online course. The supplemental program may request that the person at the physical school who registers students into online courses be responsible for making sure the online program knows of the necessary accommodations for the student. In this scenario, communicating the needs of the student to both the online teacher and the mentor at the physical school is necessary in order to ensure that the provisions of the IEP are met. The special needs accommodations and services that are not specific to one particular course are handled by the student's home district.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education is currently conducting a comprehensive study of special education in full-time online charter schools. The study is expected to be released in Fall 2007 and will be available at [www.nasdse.org](http://www.nasdse.org).

## 3.6 Funding online programs

Funding is very different between most state-led programs and most other programs, and each type of funding is addressed separately below.

### 3.6.1 Funding charter schools and full-time, multi-district programs

Funding for most online charter schools and full-time, multi-district programs comes from state public education funding formulas. Online charter schools may receive charter school-specific funding at a different rate (usually lower) than the typical district rate. In some states a lower funding level is applied to online schools regardless of whether they are charter schools or not. In Colorado, for example, FTE funding (called PPR for per-pupil revenue) starts at a base rate that is adjusted upward by a number of student- and district-specific factors, and that must reach at least a state-mandated minimum funding level. Full-time online students are funded at this state minimum, regardless of the student's district of residence.

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Because some states adjust per-student funding based on district factors including the size of the district (in terms of number of students), and further because some states provide funding to districts with declining enrollments to mitigate the loss of revenue, funding is a key issue in which the influence of online students is felt across public education. The state audits done in Colorado and Kansas recognize the issues, but the complexity of school finance defies easy analysis or drawing conclusions from one state that may be applicable to others. Indeed, the Trujillo Commission in Colorado, in response to the section of the State Audit regarding online student funding, stated:

“...while the statement in the State Auditor’s report that ‘For Fiscal Year 2006 the Department determined that the State would have saved at least \$6.7 million in State Share funding if all online students attended schools within their district of residence’ is accurate, it is also potentially misleading, because the \$6.7 million applies only to the exact districts studied, in the exact time frame studied. Change any of the inputs to suggest a different situation and the predicted impact may change dramatically.”<sup>23</sup>

While some of the details of the audits in Colorado and Kansas are not applicable to other states, some of the findings regarding funding are relevant. For example, the audits point out that in both states funding is based on a single census date or short-term window. Although there are some adjustments to this process to account for how online students should be counted—Kansas, for example, has created logbooks to demonstrate student activity and implemented a second census date—there are clear limitations of counting students in ways that are based on seat time when “seats” don’t exist in the online classroom. It is widely thought by experienced online learning leaders that seat-time or time-based approaches to reporting attendance or measuring online learning is not appropriate or advisable for online learning.

In Kansas, the audit called into question whether the way in which one district handled the funding of its online students was legal. The audit found that the school district “gave” virtual students to other districts to be counted for funding purposes, and then charged the funded districts a fee for teaching those students. While making clear that these actions “didn’t appear to be intended to financially benefit either the Superintendent or the Mullinville district,” the audit did find that the district Superintendent gave several reasons for the actions, including:

- “Mullinville district didn’t need all the funding its virtual school enrollment was generating.”
- “‘Giving’ away some of the Mullinville virtual school’s ‘excess’ enrollment allowed [the Superintendent] to help other districts financially.”
- “[The Superintendent] was compensating two of the districts for not opening their own virtual schools in the area.”<sup>24</sup>

The audit concluded “Allowing districts to decide where virtual students are counted creates the risk that districts could manipulate State funding and assessment results.”

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<sup>23</sup> Trujillo Commission report, p. 19

<sup>24</sup> State of Kansas, Legislative Division of Post Audit, School District Performance Audit Report, K-12 Education: Reviewing Issues Related to Virtual Schools, p. 27-28

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## 3.6.2 Funding single-district and state-led programs

Funding for single-district and state-led programs is, in many ways, much simpler than funding full-time, multi-district programs.

In most cases, states don't distinguish between funding of online and face-to-face courses for students within a single district. This is the case explicitly in Minnesota, for example, which draws a distinction between single-district and multi-district programs. In many other states, because there is little or no online education policy, students in a single-district online program are simply counted and funded in the same way in which all students in the district are funded.

The funding model for most state-led programs is fundamentally different than funding for single-district programs, multi-district programs, and charter schools. Almost all state-led programs are funded by sources that are not tied to the number of students or number of course completions. Instead, most are primarily funded by state appropriations, and secondly by a combination of course fees paid by districts and/or other government or private grants. Although Florida Virtual School has received attention due to its funding model in which the school received funding for course completions, no other state-led programs have implemented the same model. Idaho's state-led program, the Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA), is funded by a formula that starts with a base of approximately \$400,000, then adds in about \$400 per course registration and an additional \$250,000 for every 5,000 course registrations. IDLA's funding is based on this formula, so it is automatically funded from the dollars appropriated for public schools. Missouri's Virtual Instructional Program is based on a state appropriation, but funding to school districts is reduced by 85% of the per-course, per-student funding for each student who takes a MoVIP course.

## 3.7 Accountability for student achievement

Like all other public school students in America, online students must participate in state standardized testing as required under No Child Left Behind. Accountability for student achievement is another area in which there are significant differences between program types. State-led programs, in most cases, are supplemental and do not grant credit but instead rely on the local school in which the student is enrolled to do so. In that common scenario, the state-led program is ultimately accountable to the local school that is granting the credit. The local school is responsible and accountable for its students' participation in state assessments and the results of those tests. States with end-of-course assessments have a mechanism for comparing the results of online students with students in physical classrooms, and AP exam scores can be used to compare online programs as well. District-level supplemental online programs could track scores on state assessments of students in online classes and compare them with face-to-face classes, but this does not appear to be common among these programs.

## Managing data in online learning

By Julie Young, Florida Virtual School

Since the inception of No Child Left Behind, data-driven management has received significant attention in educational circles. First and foremost, data management gives administrators a way to answer the question: “How do we know we are successful?” Good data can help measure everything from the performance of students, teachers, instructional methods, or courses, to program policies, instructional support, and administrative support.

Data gathering in the online world has a distinct advantage. Most student work, teacher-student feedback, and course content are digitized, providing unprecedented ability to track the entire learning process and look for ways to improve it. For instance, with good data systems, it is now easy to analyze course content to determine the average achievement per course—even drilling down as far as each individual lesson, making problem lessons easier to spot. A determination can then be made as to whether the lesson is challenging because of a design flaw or because of the inherent difficulty of the material. Once this is determined, program leaders can either fix the design flaw (being sure to push also for instructional interventions while the lesson is in redesign), or—in the case of content difficulty—push for the development of instructional strategies to better support students as they master the material.

This kind of data-driven decision making can be used in a variety of ways to maintain high achievement levels. Following are examples of questions that good data management can answer, followed by decision making questions that might flow from that data.

- Data questions: Where are teaching staff seeing the most success? Are there teachers who consistently struggle to see students succeed?
- ♦ Decision questions: How can the best teachers serve as models or mentors for new or struggling teachers? How can teachers best be supported?
- Data question: Which courses correlate with highest student performance?
  - ♦ Decision questions: What elements are present in these courses that could be duplicated in other courses? Is the difficulty of the material a factor? If so, how can students be better supported in more difficult courses? Is course design a factor? Does the course need to be redesigned?
- Data question: What are enrollments disaggregated by course?
  - ♦ Decision questions: Which courses are most in demand?
- Data questions: How soon are students getting feedback from their teachers? Can that data be broken down to each individual teacher? Is there a correlation between response time and student performance?
  - ♦ Decision questions: Are program requirements for feedback appropriate and consistent with student success? Are teachers meeting program requirements for feedback? If not, how can they be supported in reaching program goals?

Data do not provide all the answers, but do help leaders to ask the right questions. Good data gathering and management will also allow program leaders to provide required information to stakeholders, funding agents, or legislators, and be ready to answer questions from reporters or community members in a timely manner. In addition, with longitudinal data, leadership can properly manage growth needs, including technology, hiring, training, and staff support.

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### 3.7.1 Accountability for student achievement in full-time programs

In contrast to supplemental programs, full-time online schools are fully responsible and accountable for the results of their students' state tests, and therefore they must be sure that their students are prepared and participate at acceptable rates.

Very few states allow fully web-based, distributed testing, which means that test administration can be a complex task, especially for programs serving most or all of an entire state. This challenge is exacerbated by the need for students to travel to testing sites during the customary testing dates set by the state, leaving the best-laid testing plans vulnerable to early spring snowstorms and other weather challenges. In some states, online school students test at their local traditional public school, where cost savings and increased convenience are sometimes counterbalanced by confusion over correctly routing the students' scores. Some online schools must also combat a higher than average level of test resistance among students and parents.

Almost all full-time programs responding to the *Keeping Pace* survey question asking student NCLB assessment participation rates reported participation of 97% or higher. Because not all programs responded, these responses may reflect a reluctance among programs with lower participation rates to share those rates. At the very least, however, the results show that many programs have achieved high participation rates. If the survey results are representative of all full-time programs, this is a clear improvement over past years.

Some states have policy provisions around participation in NCLB assessments. Oklahoma's code regarding alternative instruction, which applies to all types of distance learning, requires that students of online charter schools take state assessments at the school site. Arizona and Ohio have outcomes-based requirements. In Arizona's pilot online program, if a student does not take the state assessment and the school has less than 95% participation in the assessments, the student may not continue in the online program. Ohio has a similar provision for that state's e-community schools.

### 3.7.2 Comparing assessment scores of online students with state averages

State audits in Colorado and Kansas highlighted the state assessment scores of online students in full-time programs compared to state averages. Both audits noted that the overall average scores of online students were lower than state averages, although this finding was not consistent across all online schools and subject areas. More importantly, the Kansas audit raised the question of whether the comparison is valid, noting that "assessment data for virtual students are limited, and the demographics of the two student populations may not be comparable." The Kansas audit is correct in noting the shortcomings of the comparison between online programs and state averages. An even larger issue is the way that these school performance measures under NCLB are too often based on simplistic statistical comparisons of student groups that do not take into account either the student demographics of the online programs or true individual student growth.

Tracking individual student growth to measure achievement would address the shortcomings of rating schools based on year-to-year comparisons. Online programs that are

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servicing a high proportion of at-risk or special needs students, in particular, would welcome an approach to measuring the success of their individual students over time instead of comparing them against state averages.

## 3.8 Common measures: course completion and student retention

*Keeping Pace 2006* reported that

“The rapid growth of online education programs has challenged policymakers responsible for overseeing public education in numerous ways. One of the challenges that policymakers face is the lack of common measures of outcomes and quality in online programs. Although most programs track student outcomes and other measures of quality, these measures are not consistent across programs; and a metric with the same name (e.g., course completion rate) used by two programs may not in fact measure the same thing. This lack of consistency makes measuring outcomes across programs difficult and hinders development of appropriate policies.”

The *Keeping Pace 2007* program survey explored the issue of course completion and student retention rates to attempt to determine the variability in how such rates are calculated.

### 3.8.1 Course completion rates

In exploring course completion rates the survey built on the recognition that there are three main variables in how course completion rates are calculated:

- Does the completion rate take into account a drop period for the course? (Are students who drop within a certain period not included in the calculation?)
- Is the calculation done after the course has “ended”? (Many online courses have indefinite end dates because they are self-paced or have an option to extend the end date.)
- Do students have to pass a course to be considered a completion? (Is a student who is active but failing at the end of the course considered a completion?)

Survey results suggest that there is little consistency in how programs address these issues.

- Reported course completion rates vary from 50% to “approximately 99%,” with many responses in the range of 65% to 85%.
- About 2/3 of programs (22 of 32) have a drop period that is taken into account in the course completion rate by not counting students who leave the course before the drop period closes. Most drop periods are between two and four weeks after the course begins.
- About 2/3 of programs (22 of 32) require students to have a passing grade in order to be counted as a completion.

However, only 12 of 32 programs (38%) have *both* a drop period and a requirement that students pass the course to be counted as a completion.



## Developing and managing online teachers

*This section draws partially from the Keeping Pace program survey, but also builds on the expertise of the Keeping Pace guiding group as well as guest contributors Kerry Rice and Lisa Dawley of Boise State University, and their Going Virtual! Research Series.*

### Developing effective online teachers

By Liz Pape, Virtual High School

Classroom teachers have rarely received pre-service training in online teaching, nor have they had many opportunities to develop such skills on the job. When administrators are developing a virtual school program at the school, district or state level, it is critical that the preparation of online teachers not be overlooked. It cannot be assumed that because teachers are effective classroom teachers that they will automatically be able to transfer those skills to the online medium. A professional development (PD) program that develops online teaching skills, supports and mentors teachers during their first year of teaching online, and provides ongoing opportunities to expand or deepen online teaching skills, is a critical element in a successful online initiative.

There are four components in the development of an online teacher PD program.<sup>25</sup>

- **Identify Online Teaching Standards:** Programs should identify the online teaching skills that they feel are necessary for online teachers—teaching skills that will be in alignment with the vision of program’s online course design. If the online course design is one in which students self-pace through the course, primarily working independently at a pace that they have chosen, then teachers need to develop skills in monitoring student performance, keeping students engaged in the learning through frequent check-ins, and working as a guide to the student, managing a delicate balance between supporting student self-directed learning, and knowing when to intervene because learning has come to a roadblock. If the online course design supports cohorts of students in an online classroom

environment, the development of teaching skills may instead become focused on fostering a sense of online community, and supporting online discussions. Currently, both the National Education Association and the Southern Region Education Board have published recommended standards for online teaching skills.<sup>26</sup>

- **Develop Professional Development Program Models:** Once the types of online teaching skills have been identified, the decision should be made about what types of professional development opportunities can best develop those skills. Some PD models assume that teachers learn best by doing, and so the teachers are trained online—experiencing first hand an online course as the student would, while also developing and practicing online teaching skills. Other models combine an intensive hands-on face-to-face classroom experience, with trainers in the classroom for immediate feedback and support, with an online component that continues the learning experience in the delivery medium.
- **Monitor and Evaluate Quality of Online Teacher Instruction:** Online courses provide an opportunity for greater review and evaluation of teacher effectiveness than ever before. Online courses are always “open” and available to the evaluator to monitor teacher performance, without the need to sit at the back of the classroom. Once the online teacher is teaching the online course, a method for evaluating teacher quality should be in place and should include teaching performance aligned with the online teaching standards previously developed; feedback instruments for input from students, parents, and administrators;

<sup>25</sup> Due to space constraints this discussion does not touch on one important issue: the need to discern between online teachers who create the online courses that they also teach compared to online teachers who are teaching from content that has been previously created. There is a range in the ability of the teacher to adapt online content, from content that cannot be modified except by the course designers, to content that the teacher can customize to meet individual student needs.

<sup>26</sup> [www.nea.org/technology/onlineteachguide.html](http://www.nea.org/technology/onlineteachguide.html) and [www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/pubs/PDF06T02\\_Standards\\_Online\\_Teaching.pdf](http://www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/pubs/PDF06T02_Standards_Online_Teaching.pdf)

and a process by which low-performing teachers can receive additional support in order to improve their online teaching.

- **Provide Ongoing Professional Development Opportunities:** Online education is developing at a rapid rate, and so are the tools of online education. With increased broadband access at the desktop/laptop, greater use of Internet-enabled handhelds, and the growth of Web 2.0, online teachers need a program of ongoing professional development in order to stay current and remain effective online teachers. An ongoing PD model should include opportunities for teachers to reflect on their teaching and identify areas for further training, a means for evaluation and feedback to be incorporated into the teacher's ongoing professional development plan, a variety of ongoing professional development offerings, including self-paced, just-in-time, and moderated, cohort-based offerings, and an ongoing administrative and technical support model for teachers.

### **Online programs professional development: survey results**

Data from the *Keeping Pace* program survey indicate a variety of PD models currently in use, and a range of approaches to quality assurance:

- While many programs offer professional development online, others mix face-to-face and online training. One program combines a 10-hour online orientation, a face-to-face conference of 24 hours, and 15 hours online during the school year.
- Most programs recognize that professional development should include a variety of subjects including online pedagogy, online policies and guidelines, the learning management system, the use of technology required for course delivery, and the use of state virtual school resources. Some programs rely heavily on training provided by the platform vendor.
- Virtual school programs which have been developed to support specific initiatives, such as increased participation statewide in

AP courses, often provide training in online facilitation, and also require participation in appropriate content-area training.

Program survey data also indicate that some quality assurance programs are already in place, while others are still under construction. Examples of quality assurance programs in place include

- The institution of a bonus rubric that uses student evaluations, administrative requirements, discussion board activity, feedback on assignments, and intervention strategies as a method of review for teachers.
- An extensive, well-designed review of all staff members which integrates input from parents, students, other staff and a self-review.
- Formative and summative feedback to teachers provided through multiple observations throughout the school year, by principal-supervisors.
- An evaluation program that includes four key areas of review using objective and subjective measures: academic achievement; student retention; teamwork, attitude and innovation; and professional growth

Within the four components of PD outlined above there are many ways in which successful PD can be implemented, but having some form of both formal PD and a quality assurance program to track both inputs and outcomes is critical.

## **Managing online teachers**

By Julie Young, Florida Virtual School

Managing and coaching online teachers is every bit as important as managing classroom teachers. Step one is to build a policy framework for success. Considering some key questions regarding a program's policies and the underpinning beliefs that form them will help create a cohesive approach to managing teachers:

- Is student success at the center of every policy and instructional decision?
- How often will students hear from teachers, and when can students expect to see the return of submitted work? How will

these communication requirements be confirmed by the online program?

- Are teachers using a balance of communication tools, including telephone, email, web and phone conferencing, in order to provide several channels for feedback and relationship building?
- Do the technology tools help or hinder teachers to meet the program's goals for communication, grading, and ongoing feedback?
- How will professional development help teachers to fully harness the opportunities for differentiated instruction in online learning?
- When teachers are struggling, how can they be coached and supported so that their skills are continually improving?
- How can teachers be paired to complement one another, to mentor new instructors, and to pass on the culture that the program wishes to cultivate?
- On a day-to-day level, what can a supervisor do to provide ongoing support to the instructional team?

Following is a list of sample interventions that instructional leaders at Florida Virtual School use regularly to maintain high instructional quality.

- Call teachers regularly to review progress and look for ways to assist them in making students successful.
- Monitor and review teacher call data, email, and assessments and provide input as needed, either directly or through whatever ongoing mentoring and professional development programs are required.
- Randomly call parents and students to ensure quality customer service.
- Look for gaps in policies, procedures and support strategies, and make changes as needed in order to maximize instructional time and quality.
- Walk the talk. If supervisors want teachers to reply within 24 hours to students, they should model that same policy.

- Check progress information by class or by overall program to ensure students are staying on pace. Look for trend data and figure out how to support teachers who are struggling.
- Meet regularly with the leadership team to share ideas, discuss trouble spots, and monitor overall progress.
- When areas for concern are found, communicate a response via multiple channels, such as email updates, individual or group phone conferences, through lead teachers or mentors, or during regular teacher training times.

### The status of professional development for k-12 online teachers: Results from the Going Virtual! Research Series

By Kerry Rice and Lisa Dawley,  
Boise State University

The Going Virtual! Research team has recently completed a survey (separate from the *Keeping Pace* program survey) looking into the status of professional development trends for k-12 online teachers. The research is ongoing, but this phase one report provides a national snapshot and answers two main questions: "What practices and models of teacher professional development are being used in k-12 virtual schools and programs across the country?" and "What are the contextual factors (such as school philosophy, goals, state policies) that influence the design of professional development?"

#### Response

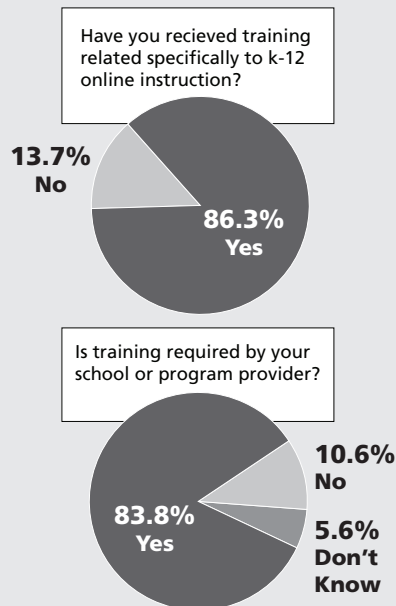
Of the 258 respondents, 167 (65%) identified themselves as teachers in an online elementary and/or secondary school program. Sixty-one (24%) were administrators or site coordinators, and 14 (5%) were teacher trainers or manager/directors of professional development for k-12 online instruction. Respondents represented over 41 schools or online programs. Many online models were represented including virtual schools, state-wide programs, charter schools, supplemental programs, district-wide programs, consortiums, and a small percent categorized as "other."

## Key findings

Highlights from this report include:

- **Experience and education of online teachers:** Sixty-three percent have five or more years of total teaching experience, with 35% reporting 10 or more years of teaching experience. Ninety-three percent have been teaching online for five years or less. Over half of the teacher respondents reported have a Master's Degree or higher.
- **Online k-12 training:** A majority of online teachers (86.3%) report having received online teacher training, and that training was required by their school or program (83.8%).

### Online k -12 Training



- **When training occurs:** The highest teacher reported period when training occurs is during the first year (61%) Thirty-eight percent of teachers also reported receiving training prior to teaching in an online

school or program (suggesting that 62% of teachers did not receive any training prior to teaching online). Ongoing professional development each year of teaching was reported by over 40% of teachers.

- **Models of training:** 68% of teachers, 82% of administrators, 85% of trainers reported the use of mentoring or peer coaching strategies.
- **Training Content**
  - ♦ Foundational knowledge: 74% of teachers received training on practice-based knowledge, 57% reported receiving training on theoretical foundations.
  - ♦ Technology tools: 91% of teachers reported receiving training in how to use learning management systems. Seventy eight percent of teachers reported receiving training in **both** synchronous and asynchronous technologies.
  - ♦ Facilitation strategies: The most reported topic under facilitation strategies was "meeting the needs of students with multiple learning styles in the online classroom" (78%).
  - ♦ Lesson design: The most reported topic under lesson design was "multimedia design principles" (55%). Over 31% of teachers reported receiving no training in online lesson design.
- **Guidelines Used in Professional Development:** 42% of administrators reported using state guidelines, and/or 42% reported using self-developed guidelines to guide professional development.

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- 59% of programs have an optional extended period at the end of the semester during which students can complete the course and still be counted as a completion. For many of these programs there is not a formal extension policy; they report that extensions are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Finally, in answer to the question “If NACOL or another national organization created and published a standard for measuring course completion rate, would your organization consider providing data using this standard?” 29 of 32, or 91%, said yes. Only two programs report that their course completion rate is based on a state law or other required external standard, suggesting that most programs would have the freedom to decide how they calculate completion rate.

### 3.8.2 Student retention rates

Course completion rate is a measure that applies primarily to supplemental courses; a similar metric for full-time programs is retention rate. In full-time online programs retention rate is defined as the percentage of students who remain in the online school throughout the year, compared to students who return to a physical school or leave the public school system. Retention rates are important for many reasons, including the funding of programs in states where monies are based on one or two census dates instead of average daily attendance, and also as an indicator of satisfaction that students and parents have with online programs. Similar to course completion rate, retention rate also lacks a commonly accepted definition.

Retention rates reported in the program survey were similar to course completion rates, in the range of 60% to 95%, with many programs reporting in the 70-85% range. However, there is very little common understanding of what “retention rate” means. While the survey intended to learn how many students in a program at the start of a year were still with the program at the end of the year, many programs interpreted the question as retention of students from one year to the next. Responding programs indicated great interest in reporting retention rate based on a national standard, with 36 of 37 programs indicating that they would consider using such a standard.

## 3.9 Looking ahead: recommendations for practitioners and policymakers

The continued growth of online learning, the proliferation of program types, and the many ways in which states are responding with policies addressing online learning (including states that are taking a hands-off approach) suggest that k-12 online learning is still in its very early stages of development.

Key findings of the *Keeping Pace* research include:

- The number of students in online programs continues to grow rapidly, often between 10% and 50% annually.
- New online programs are being developed every year, and the total number of online programs is increasing quickly.

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- Myriad types of programs exist, mixing and matching among variables that include type of governance (state-led, charter, district, etc.); amount of instruction online (fully online, hybrid); course types; student types; geographic reach, and other variables.
  - Promising practices, with demonstrated success, are being developed in teacher professional development, teacher management, communication between teachers and students, data management, course development, and other areas of practice. Because of the variation in program types, it is too early to call any specific methods “best practices” without tying the “best practice” to particular program types, student demographics, methods of instruction, and similar variables.
  - A small number of programs have attracted attention from policymakers due to questions about finances, quality, and ways in which the programs adhere to existing laws and regulations. There has been increased scrutiny of online programs, particularly full-time programs, in a few states, and programs that do not adhere to quality standards risk creating a backlash that could impair all online programs.
  - Data to evaluate online programs against face-to-face education are lacking, in part because of shortcomings of state data systems and in part because online student populations are at most only 1-2% of the total.
  - Data to compare online programs to one another are insufficient because of a lack of common measures in calculating and reporting student achievement.

In summary, online programs continue to grow and provide new educational opportunities for students, and state policymakers continue to be challenged to find the most appropriate ways to oversee these new programs. While most programs appear to be offering a high-quality educational option for students and parents, the lack of transparency and data in many states, and questionable practices from a few programs—as shown by the state audits—may threaten the sustainability of online learning for all. In light of this threat, many online programs believe that some regulation of online learning is appropriate, as long as it relies on transparency, primarily measures outcomes data instead of mandating inputs, and is flexible enough to allow for innovation and developing practices.

The fact that so many programs are operating at a multi-district or statewide level suggests that, in these cases at least, oversight must be at a higher plane than the local level. However, given that the U.S. has historically had little involvement in education at the national level, the federal government role is likely to be narrow, and appropriately so. However, national government or organizations can assist with oversight by:

- Creating standards for data and reporting so that programs can be compared across states
- Disseminating best practices across states
- Helping to craft policies across state lines, such as for online teachers.

Beyond the role of national organizations and the federal government, it is possible that appropriate oversight can be handled at either the state or local level. The appropriate level of oversight may depend at least to some extent on the type of program, as shown by both Minnesota and Colorado, which have more extensive requirements for multi-district programs than for single-district programs. Multi-district programs may be governed by a

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single small district without the necessary resources and expertise to do so effectively, and the evidence that they should be subject to some higher-level oversight has been provided several times over by the experience of numerous states including Kansas, Washington, Colorado, and Pennsylvania. Single-district programs, on the other hand, may be appropriately regulated by the local school board. Statewide programs, because they are often high profile, created by legislation, housed within the state education agency, and/or subject to local school districts granting credit for the online courses, are likely to have oversight built into the program.

Regardless of the body providing oversight to an online program, the categories to be reviewed in the online program are the same, and include:

- Student achievement outcomes
- Student participation in state assessments
- Student demographics
- Curriculum development procedures
- Teacher training, supervision, and evaluation, including communication requirements
- Tracking of attendance and activity in the course
- Special education services.

Oversight should be flexible and allow for innovation. State agencies overseeing online programs, for example, might provide guidelines for each category and then build reporting requirements for online programs that are tied to those standards. With the many approaches to online learning that are in place, it would not make sense to be overly prescriptive, for example by setting a required student-teacher ratio. However, it does make sense for a state to require that each online program report its student-teacher ratio in a way that can be evaluated against student outcomes by administrators, parents, researchers, and policymakers.<sup>27</sup>

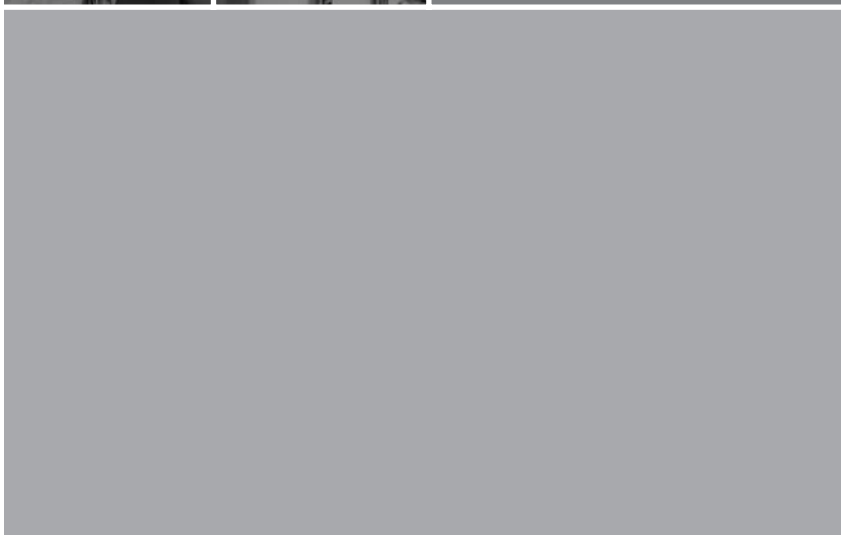
The *Keeping Pace* research demonstrates that successful, high quality online programs are being developed and delivered at many different levels, from national programs to single-district programs, as well as state-led, multi-district, and consortium programs. The most important variable is not the level at which the program is being offered, but whether the program is able to deliver and ensure a quality education offering for students. Given that state policies have not yet caught up to the online learning landscape, and the possibility that the actions of a few programs could threaten the larger online learning landscape, the need of online programs to *assure* quality (to policymakers and other stakeholders) is as important as their ability to *ensure* quality. By demonstrating quality outcomes, online education will continue to grow and provide educational opportunities for students and parents.

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<sup>27</sup> This approach is suggested by *A National Primer on K-12 Online Learning*, published by the North American Council for Online Learning, April 2007; retrieved August 10, 2007, from [http://www.nacol.org/docs/national\\_report.pdf](http://www.nacol.org/docs/national_report.pdf)



**Section 2:  
Program  
profiles**





# Program Profiles

This section explores the breadth and depth of types of online programs by profiling several online programs in several categories of programs and initiatives. Information in the following profiles is for the 2006-2007 school year, including Summer 2006.

| Program type                   | Program name   |
|--------------------------------|--|
| State-led programs             | Colorado Online Learning   |
|                                | Florida Virtual School   |
|                                | Georgia Virtual School   |
|                                | Idaho Digital Learning Academy                                   |
|                                | Illinois Virtual High School                                     |
|                                | Michigan Virtual School  |
|                                | Mississippi Virtual Public School                                |
|                                | Virtual Virginia   |
| State-led initiatives          | Digital Learning Commons (Washington State)                      |
|                                | MassONE (Massachusetts)  |
| District-level programs        | Clark County School District Virtual High School (Las Vegas, NV) |
|                                | Fairfax County Public Schools Online Campus (Virginia)           |
|                                | Hamilton County Virtual School (Tennessee)                       |
|                                | Los Angeles Virtual Academy                                      |
|                                | Newport-Mesa Online (California)                                 |
|                                | Spokane Virtual Learning (Washington)                            |
| Consortium or network programs | Connecticut Adult Virtual High School                            |
|                                | DIAL Virtual School (South Dakota)                               |
|                                | Indiana Virtual Academy  |
|                                | Virtual High School Global Consortium (Massachusetts)            |
|                                | Wisconsin eSchool Network  |
| Charter schools                | Capistrano Connections Academy (California)                      |
|                                | Minnesota Online High School                                     |
|                                | Odyssey Charter School (Las Vegas, NV)                           |
|                                | Ohio Virtual Academy   |

## Colorado Online Learning

Summary: Supplemental, state-funded program serving students in grades 6-12 across Colorado and several other states

| Program background  |   |
|---|---|
| Year started  | Fall 1998   |
| Program/Organization type                                   | Supplemental, state-funded, non-credit granting program serving students across Colorado  |
| Grade levels  | Grades 6-12   |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Courses have set start/end dates; asynchronous.   |
| Geographic region   | Across Colorado, some students across multiple states   |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | Colorado law – Supplemental Online Education HB 07-1066   |
| Funding sources   | State appropriation, course fees, and some small government grants  |
| Student information   |   |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | 1,227 course registrations  |
| Change from prior year                                      | No change (within 5% of the previous year)  |
| Number of full-time students                                | None  |
| Course completion rate                                      | 91%   |
| How completion rate is defined                              | Rate excludes both students dropping during the drop period (four weeks after the start date of the course) and students who have not accessed the course at least 20 days during the semester.   |
| Course types  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 0-15% of overall registrations are for AP courses</li> <li>▪ 0-15% of overall registrations are for credit recovery</li> </ul>   |
| Student demographics  |   |
| Geography (urban/suburban/rural)                            | 77% rural; 12% urban; 11% suburban  |
| Courses and teachers  |   |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 68 courses, 10% licensed. (All licensed courses are owned by the teachers who developed them, no courses from other sources)  |
| Number of teachers  | 32 part-time teachers; no full-time teachers  |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | Yes   |
| Student load per teacher                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Average 10 students per section</li> <li>▪ Maximum course load = 20, unless the instructor agrees to more</li> </ul>   |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Require new instructors to participate in at least one full day of training at our facility</li> <li>▪ Support for both new and existing instructors through Technical Services and Student Services groups</li> <li>▪ Professional development gathering for instructors every two years</li> </ul> |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?                     | Yes, as part of an extensive quality assurance program  |
| Teacher communication requirements?                         | Teachers respond to any inquiries from students, parents or schools within one business day.  |
| Is online PD offered to teachers NOT in your program?       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Yes, focused on the integration of technology in physical classrooms</li> <li>▪ Beginning Fall 2007, online professional development for middle school math and science teachers will be offered.</li> </ul>   |

## Florida Virtual School

Summary: Supplemental program serving students grades 6-12, largest in the country with over 100,000 course registrations and an estimated 90,000 completions in 2006-2007<sup>28</sup>, only state-led program funded solely through public education FTE funding, with funding based on course completions.

| Program background  |  |
|---|--|
| Year started  | August 1997  |
| Program/organization type                                   | Primarily supplemental, non-credit granting, organized as a special school district  |
| Grade levels  | Grades 6-12  |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Self-paced, asynchronous   |
| Geographic region   | Across all districts in Florida  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | State funding formula that is specific to online students  |
| Funding sources   | Public education funds – FTE is same as physical schools, specified in Florida Statute 1002.37   |
| Student information   |  |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | About 90,000 course completions and about 52,000 unique students   |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase 25-50%  |
| Number of full-time students                                | Defining full time as earning six or more full credits a year, 477 were full-time  |
| Course completion rate                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The 2005-2006 completion rate was 83%</li> <li>▪ 2006-2007 rate expected to be the same or higher, had not been determined as of July 2007</li> </ul>   |
| How completion rate defined                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rate excludes students dropping in the first 28 calendar days;</li> <li>▪ Must pass the course to be funded by the state or counted as a completion</li> </ul>  |
| Course types  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 31-45% of registrations are for credit recovery</li> <li>▪ 0-15% of overall registrations are for AP courses</li> </ul>   |
| Student demographics  |  |
| Gender  | 41% male; 59% female   |
| Ethnicity   | 34% minority; 66% Caucasian/White  |
| Qualify for free or reduced lunch                           | 11,586 students self-reported that they qualify.   |
| Limited English proficiency                                 | 729 students self-reported that they are LEP.  |
| Geography   | 41% of the unique students in the system come from one or more of the following types of schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 24% from high minority school</li> <li>▪ .001% are hospital or homebound</li> <li>▪ 18% from low performing schools</li> <li>▪ 7% from rural schools</li> </ul> |
| Gifted and talented   | 1,936 IEP gifted students  |

<sup>28</sup> As of July 2007 the exact number of course completions was unknown because 10,000 course registrations were still active; but 82,000 courses had been completed.

| Courses and teachers                                  |   |
|---|---|
| Number of courses, % licensed                         | 90, 3% licensed   |
| Number of teachers                                    | 320 full-time teachers; 175 part-time teachers  |
| Dual enrollment program?                              | No  |
| Student load per teacher                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Average 110 students per section</li> <li>▪ Each teacher is responsible for 110 students on average</li> <li>▪ Maximum loads vary from 90 – 150</li> </ul>   |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A mentoring program is an integral part of the new hire training program.</li> <li>▪ School house meetings, conducted two to three times per year, and an annual staff conference, provide in-depth training on topics such as cultural awareness, motivating students, measuring student performance through oral assessments, and managing student progress in a virtual environment.</li> <li>▪ Peer coaching program to provide instructors with the opportunity to pair with an instructor from a different subject area and to give and obtain feedback on one aspect of their craft</li> <li>▪ Classes for ESOL endorsement</li> <li>▪ Classes for Reading endorsement</li> <li>▪ Leadership Training program with three tracks for Aspiring, Accomplished, and Exemplary leaders</li> </ul> <p>All professional development activities are developed and administered in compliance with the Florida DOE standards and are accepted by the state to address professional certification CEUs.</p> |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?               | Annual Performance Review based on school goals and the credit goal of the individual teacher; formalized document with three meeting periods identified, covering business goals, leadership skills, and professional development goals  |
| Teacher communication requirements?                   | Monthly communication, oral assessments in courses, 24-hour return call/email requirement   |
| Is online PD offered to teachers outside the program? | No, but soon to be offered  |

# Georgia Virtual School

Summary: Supplemental, non-credit granting program serving students across Georgia

| Program background  |  |
|---|--|
| Year started  | Summer 2005  |
| Program/Organization type                                   | Supplemental, non-credit granting program run by the state of Georgia  |
| Grade levels  | Full curriculum for grades 9-12, with enrollees in grades 6-12   |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Courses have rolling start dates and set end dates; asynchronous.  |
| Geographic region   | Across most or all districts within Georgia  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | Georgia online learning regulations - O.C.G.A. 20-2-31   |
| Funding sources   | Public FTE funds, course fees  |
| Student information   |  |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | 4,000-4,999 course registrations; 3,000-3,999 unique students  |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase more than 50%   |
| Number of full-time students                                | GAVS rules allow hospital/homebound students to take all of their courses online. The program had approximately 20 students taking all courses online.   |
| Course completion rate                                      | 84%  |
| How completion rate is defined                              | GAVS defines course completion as those students who are enrolled in a course after the initial drop period and complete the final exam.   |
| Course types  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 0-15% of registrations are for credit recovery</li> <li>▪ 0-15% of overall registrations are for AP courses</li> </ul>  |
| Student demographics  |  |
| Ethnicity   | 8 unique students are American Indian or Alaskan Native; 109 unique students are Asian/Pacific Islander; 645 unique students are Black, non-Hispanic; 1,690 unique students are Caucasian, non-Hispanic; 88 unique students are Hispanic; 125 unique students are multi-racial |
| Courses and teachers  |  |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 78 unique courses/none are licensed  |
| Number of teachers  | Seven part-time faculty; approximately 165 adjunct faculty   |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | No   |
| Student load per teacher                                    | No set limits  |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?                  | GAVS holds two teacher retreats each year as well as a series of synchronous online courses over the course of the year.   |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?                     | Yes  |
| Teacher communication requirements?                         | Yes  |
| Is online PD offered to teachers NOT in your program?       | GAVS is currently developing courses that will be delivered to anyone and will lead to a certification add-on endorsement for online instruction.  |

# Idaho Digital Learning Academy

Summary: State-led, supplemental program serving students across Idaho in grades 7-12

| Program background  |   |
|---|---|
| Year started  | Fall 2002   |
| Program/organization type                                   | Supplemental, non-credit granting, state virtual school, run by a Board of Directors as outlined in Idaho statutes  |
| Grade levels  | Grades 7-12   |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Courses have set start/end dates; asynchronous.   |
| Geographic region   | 87% of Idaho districts had a student in an IDLA course 2006-2007  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | State online learning law and funding formula that is specific to online students enrolled in IDLA  |
| Funding sources   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ State appropriation per enrollment, \$1.1 million in 2006-2007</li> <li>▪ Course fees</li> </ul>   |
| Student information   |   |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | 3,682 course registrations; 2,760 unique students   |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase 25-50%   |
| Number of full-time students                                | A few, but a very small percentage  |
| Course completion rate                                      | 70%   |
| How completion rate defined                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Excludes drops during first three weeks in a 16-week course</li> <li>▪ Successful completion requires at least a grade of 60% in the course.</li> </ul>  |
| Course types  | 0-15% are AP courses, 16-30% are credit recovery  |
| Courses and teachers  |   |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 85; 1% licensed   |
| Number of teachers  | 65 part-time teachers, 0 full-time, 2 full-time curriculum specialists  |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | Yes, with 143 students  |
| Student load per teacher                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Average 25 per section, maximum course load = 35 students</li> <li>▪ Most teachers teach one section, a few teach two sections</li> </ul>  |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New teachers are required to participate in an online orientation which is approximately 10 hours, a face-to-face conference of 24 hours, and an online three-credit course of approximately 45 hours.</li> <li>▪ All faculty are required to participate in a summer face-to-face conference of 24 hours, plus 15 hours online during the school year.</li> </ul> |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ IDLA instituted a bonus rubric that uses student evaluations, administrative requirements, professional development, discussion boards, feedback on assignments, and intervention strategies as a method of review for faculty.</li> <li>▪ Online principals supervise all faculty through multiple observations.</li> </ul>                                       |
| Teacher communication requirements?                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teachers are required to respond to all communications within 24 hours and grade assignments in 72 hours for the bonus.</li> <li>▪ A communication log is required and is reviewed by the principals.</li> <li>▪ IDLA has a set of Online Teacher Guidelines which provides specific expectations to teach online for IDLA.</li> </ul>                             |
| Is online PD offered to teachers NOT in your program?       | An online site coordinator course is offered free of charge to interested individuals in a school district to help support online students. This is offered for university credit for recertification if needed.  |

# Illinois Virtual High School

Summary: State-led, supplemental program serving students across Illinois in grades 6-12

| Program background  |   |
|---|---|
| Year started  | Spring 2001   |
| Program/organization type                                   | Primarily supplemental, non-credit granting, run by a state agency  |
| Grade levels  | Grades 6-12   |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Courses have set start/end dates; asynchronous.   |
| Geographic region   | Across all districts in Illinois  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | None; the program is governed by the same laws and rules that govern physical schools.  |
| Funding sources   | State appropriation (\$1.45 million for 2006), course fees, and limited federal funds   |
| Student information   |   |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | 2,753 course registrations; 1,981 unique students   |
| Change from prior year                                      | No change (within 5% of the previous year)  |
| Number of full-time students                                | A few students take all their courses through IVHS; these typically are in unusual situations, often related to a student being homebound.  |
| Course completion rate                                      | 77%   |
| How completion rate is defined                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rate excludes students dropping during the drop period, which is five weeks during the regular school year and two weeks in summer</li> <li>▪ A student must receive a minimum grade of 60%</li> </ul> |
| Course types  | 0-15% of overall registrations are for AP courses   |
| Student demographics  |   |
| Gender  | 45% male; 55% female, gender data self-reported by 87% of students  |
| Ethnicity   | Ethnicity data is self-reported and 72% of the enrollments chose to provide data: 1% American Indian or Alaskan; 4% Asian or Pacific Islander; 22% Black, Non-Hispanic; 54% Caucasian, non-Hispanic; 14% Hispanic; 5% other                     |
| Qualify for free or reduced lunch                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Schools that have at least 25% free and reduced lunch students qualify for some free enrollments on a sliding scale</li> <li>▪ 50% of enrollments were from schools that qualified</li> </ul>          |
| Courses and teachers  |   |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 114; 42% licensed   |
| Number of teachers  | 75 part-time teachers; no full-time teachers  |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | Very limited, with the University of Illinois for two courses   |
| Student load per teacher                                    | Average 13 students per section, maximum load is 50 students  |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?                  | Teacher applicants complete a four- to six-week online course and a three day in-person training; current teachers participate in five days of in-person PD each year and are assigned an online mentor.  |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?                     | Each teacher completes a self-assessment and is evaluated by a mentor teacher based on expectations stated in the Teacher Handbook. This information is reviewed by the Coordinator of Instructors.   |
| Teacher communication requirements?                         | Respond to all inquiries within 48 hours, talk with parents once/ month, synchronous interaction with students at least twice/month   |

# Michigan Virtual School – a division of Michigan Virtual University

Summary: State-led, supplemental program serving students grades 6-12 across Michigan

| Program background  |   |
|---|---|
| Year started  | Spring 1999   |
| Program/organization type                                   | Supplemental, non-credit granting, private non-profit corporation that works in partnership with Michigan schools to grant credit   |
| Grade levels  | Grades 6-12   |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Both self-paced courses and courses with set start/end dates offered; asynchronous.   |
| Geographic region   | Across most or all districts in Michigan, and in a few other states   |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | State online learning law and regulations   |
| Funding sources   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ \$2,250,000 appropriation from the state for 2006-2007</li> <li>▪ \$1,000,000 Federal Title II (D) Education Technology Competitive Grant</li> <li>▪ Course fees</li> <li>▪ Private grants and revenue from the sale of products and services</li> </ul> |
| Student information   |   |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | 8,587 course registrations; 6,954 unique students   |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase 10-25%   |
| Number of full-time students                                | None  |
| Course completion rate                                      | Approximately 75%   |
| How completion rate is defined                              | Rate excludes students dropping during the first twenty-five days from time of enrollment.  |
| Course types  | 0-15% of overall registrations are for AP courses   |
| Student demographics  |   |
| Not reported  |   |
| Courses and teachers  |   |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 264; 67% are licensed or purchased from outside sources. MVS offers more than 150 semester-length courses including math, science, social studies, English language arts as well as world language courses.   |
| Number of teachers  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 100 part-time teachers; no full-time teachers</li> <li>▪ MVS has trained more than 400 educators to be online instructors.</li> </ul>  |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | None  |
| Student load per teacher                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Average 20 students per section</li> <li>▪ Maximum course load = 30 students per course section</li> </ul>   |



|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>Are teaching online skills provided in PD?</p>            | <p>The MVS provides several opportunities for its instructors to receive professional development and training:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All MVS instructors must complete MVU’s Online Instructor Training Course prior to teaching for the MVS.</li> <li>▪ A Summer Institute for online instructors and staff is held annually and the agenda is designed to serve as both a communications and an instructor capacity building opportunity.</li> <li>▪ MVS instructors and staff are eligible to apply for funding to attend conferences or workshops to enhance their growth and development.</li> <li>▪ MVS is also working with the College of Education at Michigan State University to implement a graduate level online course open only to MVS instructors and staff to assist them in identifying “best practices” in their online teaching and developing a Web-based portfolio to showcase their accomplishments. MVS will cover the tuition costs for this online course.</li> <li>▪ MVS instructors also benefit from the online courses, workshops and resources available through MVU’s professional development portal, Michigan LearnPort®.</li> </ul> |
| <p>Formal evaluation process for teachers?</p>               | <p>The MVS has adopted a three-step process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Each instructor completes a self-assessment and returns it to MVS.</li> <li>▪ MVS personnel complete an annual assessment of each instructor’s performance.</li> <li>▪ MVS students complete an end of semester online survey upon completion of each course.</li> </ul>   |
| <p>Teacher communication requirements?</p>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MVS requires communication with each student within two business days after course registration.</li> <li>▪ Required response to all student, mentor, parent or staff e-mails within 24 hours.</li> <li>▪ MVS personnel periodically monitor the status of teacher log-ins and response time to student questions.</li> </ul>   |
| <p>Is online PD offered to teachers NOT in your program?</p> | <p>Since 2003 MVU and the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) have been working collaboratively on a multi-year partnership known as Michigan LearnPort® to plan, develop and implement an online system of professional development for Michigan’s teachers and educators. Both MVU and MDE have been directed by state statute to “develop and assist districts in the development and use of proven, innovative strategies to deliver intensive professional development programs that are both cost-effective and easily accessible, such as strategies that involve delivery through the use of technology, peer networks and distance learning.” The Michigan LearnPort catalog contains more than 175 online courses and over 30 courses that are available for graduate credit or continuing education units. Approximately 33% of the courses are available at no cost.</p>  |

## Mississippi Virtual Public School

Summary: Supplemental state-led program with significant funding from private grants, serving students grades 9-12

| Program background  |   |
|---|---|
| Year started  | Fall 2006   |
| Program/organization type                                   | Primarily supplemental, non-credit granting, run by a state agency  |
| Grade levels  | Grades 9-12   |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Courses have set start/end dates; asynchronous.   |
| Geographic region   | Across most or all districts in Mississippi   |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | State online learning law Senate Bill 2602 Section 16   |
| Funding sources   | State appropriation (\$1 million) and private grants (\$962,475)  |
| Student information   |   |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | 3,000-3,999 course registrations  |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase more than 50%  |
| Number of full-time students                                | None  |
| Course completion rate                                      | 88%   |
| How completion rate defined                                 | Rate excludes students dropping in the first 10 calendar days.  |
| Course types  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 0-15% of registrations are for credit recovery</li> <li>▪ 0-15% of overall registrations are for AP courses</li> </ul> |
| Student demographics  |   |
| Not reported  |   |
| Courses and teachers  |   |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 27; 100% licensed   |
| Number of teachers  | 73 part-time teachers   |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | No  |

# Virtual Virginia

Summary: Supplemental, state-funded program serving students across Virginia

| Program background  |  |
|---|--|
| Year started  | Fall 2004  |
| Program/Organization type                                   | Supplemental, non-credit granting program run by the state of Virginia   |
| Grade levels  | Grades 6-12  |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Courses have set start/end dates; asynchronous.  |
| Geographic region   | Across Virginia, multiple states, and countries  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | None-the program is governed by the same laws and rules that govern physical schools   |
| Funding sources   | State appropriation of \$2.75 million, course fees   |
| Student information   |  |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | 6,400 course registrations; 2,000-2,999 unique students  |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase 25-50%  |
| Number of full-time students                                | Unknown  |
| Course completion rate                                      | 69%  |
| How completion rate is defined                              | Rate excludes students dropping during the 21-day drop period.   |
| Course types  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 0-15% of registrations are for credit recovery</li> <li>▪ 46-60% of overall registrations are for AP courses</li> </ul>   |
| Student demographics  |  |
|   | Not reported   |
| Courses and teachers  |  |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 31 courses; 50% licensed or purchased from others  |
| Number of teachers  | 18 full-time; 16 part-time   |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | No   |
| Student load per teacher                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Average 25 students per section</li> <li>▪ Maximum course capacity = 35 students per section</li> <li>▪ Full-time teachers are responsible for an average of 100 students.</li> </ul>   |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All instructors take a seven-week facilitation course and are also required to attend appropriate professional development in their content area.</li> <li>▪ AP instructors must attend a College Board Institute every five years and a workshop every two years in their content area.</li> <li>▪ Ongoing professional development is offered several times a month as well as a one-week institute specific to Virtual Virginia policies and regulations which is held once a year.</li> </ul> |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?                     | Evaluation system is based on SREB standards.  |
| Teacher communication requirements?                         | Daily/weekly/monthly communication requirements via a range of technologies are stated in the Teacher Handbook.  |
| Is online PD offered to teachers NOT in your program?       | Professional development provided to instructional content specialists and occasionally prospective online teachers to attend the professional development workshops.  |

## Digital Learning Commons (Washington)

Summary: The Digital Learning Commons (DLC) is a nonprofit organization that provides online resources, including library databases, teaching resources, assistance from online student mentors and implementation and training support, as well as courses from online course providers, to member school districts across Washington. It was established in 2003 with support from the Washington State Legislature and private foundations.

Like other state-led online programs, the DLC is not a school and, therefore, does not award credits or diplomas. Unlike most other state-led programs, it also does not have its own courses or teachers. It offers over 300 online courses in a variety of subjects, including foreign languages and advanced-level courses, from six course providers: Apex Learning, Aventa Learning, Virtual High School, Federal Way Internet Academy, Spokane Virtual Learning, and University of Washington Extension. The DLC also provides reference materials, supplemental curricula to enhance instruction, and professional development for teachers.

DLC staff works closely with participating schools to assist with the development of local online course-taking policies and trains school staff members supporting students taking DLC online courses. With an integrated course catalog and registration system, the DLC offers a one-stop-shopping experience for schools offering online courses to their students.

Public schools can join the DLC for \$6 per student; private schools and programs can join for \$8 per student. This price does not include the cost of online courses. The DLC serves as a broker of online courses, and course providers set fees, an average of \$260 per course.

| Program background  |  |
|---|--|
| Year started  | 2003   |
| Program/Organization type                                   | Non-profit organization that provides online tools and resources and aggregates courses for member schools |
| Grade levels  | Grades 6-12  |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Varies, depends on course provider but the DLC states that it prefers courses be asynchronous.             |
| Geographic region   | Across Washington state  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | Member schools providing online courses are governed by Alternative Learning Experience rules.             |
| Funding sources   | State appropriation, private foundations, and school membership fees                                       |
| Student information   |  |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | None; the DLC registers students from participant schools in courses offered by third party providers.     |
| Number of full-time students                                | None   |
| Courses and teachers  |  |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | Over 300 courses are offered through six course providers, 100% licensed.                                  |
| Number of teachers  | None   |
| Teacher communication requirements?                         | Depends on the course provider   |
| Is online PD offered to teachers NOT in your program?       | Online professional development is offered to DLC member schools using DLC resources.                      |

## Massachusetts Online Network for Education (MassONE)

Summary: Through MassONE, the Massachusetts Department of Education provides a set of web-based tools and resources to support k–12 standards-based teaching and learning in Massachusetts schools.

In 2006, the Massachusetts Department of Education began using MassONE’s online tools to deliver online professional development courses. The Department has started to pilot the use of Moodle to deliver these courses in 2007. These courses offer professional development points for teachers’ recertification. The courses also provide the opportunity for college credits.

MassONE is a leading example of a state-led initiative that promotes blended learning (combining online tools and resources with classroom-based learning). It provides online tools for teachers and students to use, e.g. virtual hard drive space and discussion forums for in-school and after-school use. It is different than most other programs profiled in this report because the Department does not provide all the online courses. K-12 teachers and educators can also use these MassONE tools to develop their own courses for students and teachers in their local schools or other schools across the state.

| Program background  |   |
|---|---|
| Year started  | 2006 began to offer “Partnership for Online Professional Development” (POPD) Courses  |
| Program/Organization type                                   | Run by the Massachusetts Department of Education to provide online standards-based professional development courses to teachers across the state  |
| Grade levels  | Grades k-12   |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Both self-paced and with set start and end dates  |
| Geographic region   | Across Massachusetts  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | There are no online learning regulations but the state has recommended criteria for distance learning courses.  |
| Funding sources   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Approximately \$1 million to support the MassONE system from the state</li> <li>▪ Approximately \$800,000 to provide online courses sponsored by the Department using federal funds, EETT (NCLB Title IID) competitive grants</li> </ul> |
| Student information   |   |
| Number of course registrations/unique students              | More than 100,000 educators and students used MassONE online tools and resources. Approximately 800 educators had participated or will participate in the online courses sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Education.  |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase 25-50%   |
| Number of full-time students                                | None  |

# Clark County School District Virtual High School

Summary: District-run supplemental credit-granting program serving multiple districts in Nevada, with approximately 6,700 course registrations including some synchronous courses

| Program background  |   |
|---|---|
| Year started  | Fall 1998   |
| Program/Organization type                                   | Credit granting, run by a school district   |
| Grade levels  | Grades 9-12   |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Courses have start and end dates; both synchronous and asynchronous.  |
| Geographic region   | Within multiple districts but not most districts within Nevada  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | State funding formula and independent study or alternative learning law that is specific to online learning   |
| Funding sources   | Public FTE funds, course fees, and federal funds  |
| Student information   |   |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | About 6,706 course registrations; 2,000 unique students   |
| Change from prior year                                      | Decline 10-12%  |
| Number of full-time students                                | 100 to 250  |
| Student demographics  |   |
| Gender  | Male 37%; female 63%  |
| Ethnicity   | 7.9% Asian/Pacific Islander; 8.6% Black, non-Hispanic; 9.3% Hispanic; 74% White, non-Hispanic   |
| Limited English proficiency                                 | Three students  |
| Geography   | Majority of students are urban.   |
| Gifted and talented   | 115 gifted and talented students  |
| Courses and teachers  |   |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 152 courses but only 123 were offered during 2006-2007 school year, 11% licensed or purchased from outside sources.   |
| Number of teachers  | 52 part-time; 11 full-time  |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | No  |
| Student load per teacher                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Average 25 per section</li> <li>▪ Each teacher is responsible for average of 119 students</li> <li>▪ Maximum capacity/course = 35 in online courses, 50 in DVD courses</li> </ul>  |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New teachers are required to attend 35 hours of PD.</li> <li>▪ Teachers building an online course have an additional 155 hours.</li> <li>▪ Several ongoing PD opportunities for online teachers offered throughout the year in addition to the required trainings</li> </ul>   |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All full-time teachers are evaluated according to the district's rubric.</li> <li>▪ CCSD Virtual HS teachers are evaluated based on this rubric annually. (First year teachers are evaluated three times a year.)</li> <li>▪ Part-time teachers are not formally evaluated; however, a note can be placed in their district personnel file if they are doing an outstanding job or if there are concerns with their online teaching skills.</li> </ul> |
| Teacher communication requirements?                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teachers are required to communicate with their students to discuss academic progress once a week per Nevada Revised Statutes.</li> <li>▪ Teachers respond to students within 24 hours.</li> </ul>   |

## Fairfax County Public Schools Online Campus

Summary: Supplemental, district-funded program serving students across Fairfax County, Virginia

| Program background  |   |
|---|---|
| Year started  | Spring 2000   |
| Program/Organization type                                   | Supplemental, credit granting program run by a school district  |
| Grade levels  | Course grade levels 9-12; student enrollees are 5-12 (gifted students as young as fifth grade are taking Algebra 1)   |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Courses have set start/end dates; asynchronous and synchronous.   |
| Geographic region   | Across one school district: Fairfax County, Virginia  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | Formal district online learning rules   |
| Funding sources   | School district funds, course fees  |
| Student information   |   |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | 1,000-1,999 course registrations; 750-999 unique students   |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase 10-25%   |
| Number of full-time students                                | Five  |
| Course completion rate                                      | 87%   |
| How completion rate is defined                              | Rate excludes students dropping during the 3-4 week drop period, students must meet minimum performance standards   |
| Course types  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 16-30% of registrations are for credit recovery</li> <li>▪ 16-30% of overall registrations are for AP courses</li> </ul>   |
| Student demographics  |   |
| Gender  | 50% male;50% female   |
| Other   | 20% special education   |
| Courses and teachers  |   |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 46; 15-20% licensed   |
| Number of teachers  | 75 part-time; four full-time  |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | No  |
| Student load per teacher                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Average 20 students per section</li> <li>▪ Maximum course capacity = 20 students</li> </ul>  |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Non-credit course in teaching online is offered each semester</li> <li>▪ Six meetings of online teachers are held with training tips yearly</li> <li>▪ Paid conference fees for online teachers</li> </ul> |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?                     | No  |
| Teacher communication requirements?                         | Teachers are required to respond to students and parents within 24 hours.   |
| Is online PD offered to teachers NOT in your program?       | Yes, online professional development courses are offered to all teachers in the district.   |

## Hamilton County Virtual School

Summary: District-run, credit granting, supplemental program serving students grades k-12 across Tennessee, and developing courses for the state-led e4TN program

| Program background  |   |
|---|---|
| Year started  | Summer 2004   |
| Program/Organization type                                   | Credit granting, run by a school district   |
| Grade levels  | Grades k-12   |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Rolling enrollment with 9 weeks to complete each half credit; asynchronous  |
| Geographic region   | Across most or all districts in Tennessee   |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | Formal district online learning rules   |
| Funding sources   | Course fees, and federal funds  |
| Student information   |   |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | 1,000-1,999 course registrations; 500-749 unique students   |
| Change from prior year                                      | Decline 10-25%  |
| Number of full-time students                                | None  |
| Course completion rate                                      | 75%   |
| How completion rate defined                                 | Rate excludes students dropping during the first ten days from registration in the course   |
| Course types  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 0-15% of overall registrations are for AP courses</li> <li>▪ 75-90% of overall registrations are for credit recovery</li> </ul>              |
| Student demographics  |   |
| Gender  | Male 48%; female 52%  |
| Ethnicity   | 29% Black, non-Hispanic; 69% White, non-Hispanic; 2% other  |
| Qualify for free or reduced lunch                           | 32% qualified for free and reduced lunch  |
| Limited English proficiency                                 | 5% English language learners  |
| Geography   | 10% rural; 90% urban  |
| Gifted and talented   | 6% of students are classified as gifted and talented  |
| Courses and teachers  |   |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 49, 100% licensed or purchased from outside sources   |
| Number of teachers  | 52 part-time; none full-time  |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | No  |
| Student load per teacher                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Average 15 students per section</li> <li>▪ Maximum capacity per course = 20 students</li> </ul>  |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?                  | Teachers participate in an initial face-to-face or WebEx training and continue with periodic webinars focused on the LMS or other content areas under the guidance of a lead teacher. |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?                     | Teachers are evaluated weekly by lead teacher according to an established set of criteria.  |
| Teacher communication requirements?                         | Teachers required to contact students weekly, parents monthly, post new announcements weekly, keep synchronous office hours (10 hours per week), respond to messages within 24 hours  |



## Indiana Virtual Academy

Summary: Supplemental, privately-funded program serving students across multiple districts in Indiana

| Program background  |  |
|---|--|
| Year started  | Spring 2003  |
| Program/Organization type                                   | Run by a consortium of districts and LEAs, non-credit granting   |
| Grade levels  | Grades 6-12  |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Both self-paced courses and courses with set start/end dates; asynchronous   |
| Geographic region   | Within multiple districts but not most districts within Indiana  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | None; the program is governed by the same laws and rules that govern physical schools.   |
| Funding sources   | Course fees, private grants  |
| Student information   |  |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | 1,000-1,999 course registrations; 1,000-1,999 unique students  |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase 10-25%  |
| Number of full-time students                                | None   |
| Course types  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 75-90% of registrations are for credit recovery</li> <li>▪ 0-15% of overall registrations are for AP courses</li> </ul>   |
| Student demographics  | Not reported   |
| Courses and teachers  |  |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 28, 50% licensed   |
| Number of teachers  | 42 part-time; none full-time   |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | No   |
| Student load per teacher                                    | Average 20 students per section  |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?                  | A teacher must be a licensed Indiana teacher, must complete one day of in-service on the LMS, and complete an extensive review of the course to be taught followed by a quality assurance review.                          |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?                     | A formal process is in the development stages.   |
| Teacher communication requirements?                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respond in 24 hours</li> <li>▪ Communication via email and/or phone with parents and student as needed or requested</li> <li>▪ Communication with virtual office hours</li> </ul> |
| Is online PD offered to teachers NOT in your program?       | No   |

## Los Angeles Virtual Academy

Summary: Supplemental, federally-funded program serving students in the Los Angeles Unified School District

| Program background  |  |
|---|--|
| Year started  | Spring 2004  |
| Program/Organization type                                   | Supplemental, credit granting program run by a school district   |
| Grade levels  | Grades 6-12  |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Courses have set start/end dates; asynchronous and synchronous.  |
| Geographic region   | Within one district – Los Angeles Unified School District  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | No   |
| Funding sources   | Federal funds, approximately \$250,000 annually from Title IID   |
| Student information   |  |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | 672 annual registrations comprised of 320 (fall) and 313 (spring) unique students  |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase 5-10%   |
| Number of full-time students                                | None   |
| Course completion rate                                      | 90%  |
| How completion rate is defined                              | Courses are normed within four weeks of the start of the semester. Completion rate follows the same standards as regular face-to-face instruction. At the start of a student's course, there is a set rate of assignment completion. Completion is defined as the number of students receiving a passing grade in the course compared to the total number of students normed for the course.   |
| Student demographics  |  |
|   | Tracked but not reported; information is tracked by the school district and is not readily available to the Virtual Academy, which believes that online demographics mirror the demographics of the school district.   |
| Courses and teachers  |  |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 10 courses, 90% licensed   |
| Number of teachers  | None; teachers are employed by school sites providing instruction to students and by the licensing agency providing the course.  |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | No   |
| Student load per teacher                                    | Average 25 students per section  |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Online Learning Experience (OLE) course is a two-day face-to-face/ four-week online course in which participants learn how to manage an online environment to facilitate student learning.</li> <li>▪ Online Instructor Course (OIC) – two-day face-to-face/six-week online</li> <li>▪ Online Content Development (OCD) course is a semester-long course that enables LAUSD teachers to become familiar with basic course design techniques as they develop content for online delivery.</li> </ul> |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?                     | Teachers are evaluated based on traditional teaching evaluation process.   |
| Teacher communication requirements?                         | Virtual synchronous faculty meetings (monthly)   |
| Is online PD offered to teachers NOT in your program?       | Yes, the OLE and OIC courses are offered on an ongoing basis for those teachers desiring to become online teachers.  |

## Newport-Mesa Online (California)

Summary: District-run, supplemental, credit-granting program serving grades 9-12 in one school district

| Program background  |  |
|---|--|
| Year started  | Summer 2003  |
| Program type  | Supplemental, credit granting (courses meet A-G requirements), run by a school district  |
| Grade levels  | Grades 9-12  |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Courses have start and end dates; both synchronous and asynchronous.   |
| Geographic region   | Within one district only, in California  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | State independent study law that is specific to online learning.   |
| Funding sources   | Public education FTE funding (property taxes)  |
| Student information   |  |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | Not reported/550 students  |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase 25-50%  |
| # of full-time students                                     | None   |
| Course completion rate                                      | 91%  |
| Definition of completion rate                               | Initial enrollment vs. final course completion numbers   |
| Student demographics  |  |
| Gender  | 55% female; 45% male   |
| Geography (urban/suburban/rural)                            | Suburban   |
| Courses and teachers  |  |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | Four, 0% licensed  |
| Number of teachers  | Six part-time; none full-time  |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | No   |
| Student load per teacher                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Average 33 per section</li> <li>▪ Each teacher is responsible for average of 187 students</li> <li>▪ Maximum capacity per course = 35 students</li> </ul> |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?                  | A district online coordinator has the responsibility of providing professional development for all of the online teachers  |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?                     | None at present  |
| Teacher communication requirements?                         | Not reported   |

## Spokane Virtual Learning (Washington state)

Summary: Supplemental program serving students across all districts in Washington

| Program background  |   |
|---|---|
| Year started  | Fall 2005   |
| Program/Organization type                                   | Credit granting, run by a school or school district   |
| Grade levels  | Grades 6-12   |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Both self-paced courses and courses with set start/end dates; asynchronous.   |
| Geographic region   | Across all districts in Washington, the courses are available to any student regardless of location.  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | State online learning law/regulations, state funding formula specific to online students, state independent study or alternative learning law that is specific to online learning, and formal district online learning rules                                      |
| Funding sources   | Public FTE funds, course fees   |
| Student information   |   |
| Number unique students                                      | 250-499   |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase 25-50%   |
| Number of part-time students                                | 430   |
| Student retention rate                                      | 74%   |
| Student demographics  |   |
|   | Not reported  |
| Courses and teachers  |   |
| Number of teachers  | 26 part-time; one full-time   |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | No  |
| Student load per teacher                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average 15 students per section</li> <li>• Maximum course capacity = 28 students</li> </ul>  |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two days of professional development for online teachers, addressing pedagogy and covering how to utilize the learning management system</li> <li>• Three days professional development for online developers</li> </ul> |
| Is online PD offered to teachers NOT in your program?       | Yes, a course is offered on how to teach online to districts that have teachers teaching online Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) prep classes.  |

## Connecticut Adult Virtual High School

Summary: Run by a consortium of local education agencies, offers online Adult Credit Diploma Programs across the state of Connecticut

| Program background  |  |
|---|--|
| Year started  | Fall 2002  |
| Program/organization type                                   | Credit granting, run by a consortium of local education agencies   |
| Grade levels  | Grades 9-12; majority of students are 16-18 but are seeking to earn their high school diploma through Adult Credit Diploma programs.   |
| Geographic region   | Across most or all districts in Connecticut  |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Courses have set start/end dates; asynchronous.  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | No, but the program has developed official policies to support online learning.  |
| Funding sources   | State grant from federal funding source  |
| Student information   |  |
| Number of registrations/unique students                     | 250-499 registrations; 250-499 unique students   |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase 50% (students) and 100% (registrations)   |
| Number of full-time students                                | None   |
| Course completion rate                                      | 68%  |
| How completion rate is defined                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students dropping during week one of an eight-week term are excluded.</li> <li>▪ Students must receive a passing grade.</li> </ul>        |
| Course Types  | 0-15% registrations are for AP courses   |
| Student demographics  |  |
| None reported   |  |
| Courses and teachers  |  |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 22; 45% licensed or purchased from outside source  |
| Number of teachers  | Eight part-time  |
| Student load per teacher                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Average of 16 students per single section</li> <li>▪ Maximum course capacity = 24 students</li> </ul>                                     |
| Professional Development offerings/requirements             | A combination of online, face to face trainings and mentoring from a teacher that is already working in the program  |
| Teacher communication requirements?                         | Teachers are required to respond to students and mentors within 36 hours, and correct assignments within three days. A progress report is required if a student is not doing well. |

## DIAL Virtual School (South Dakota)

Summary: Supplemental program funded by the state and private grants, serving South Dakota students grades 6-12

| Program background  |  |
|---|--|
| Year started  | Fall 2002  |
| Program/organization type                                   | Primarily supplemental, non-credit granting, run by a consortium of districts or LEAs  |
| Grade levels  | Grades 6-12  |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Courses have set start/end dates; synchronous.   |
| Geographic region   | Within multiple districts but not most districts within South Dakota   |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | State online learning law/regulations - Rule 24:43:12  |
| Funding sources   | Course fees, state-funded grants, and private grants   |
| Student information   |  |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | 500-999 course registrations; 250-499 unique students  |
| Change from prior year                                      | No change (within 5% of the previous year)   |
| Number of full-time students                                | None   |
| Course completion rate                                      | 90%  |
| How completion rate defined                                 | Rate excludes students dropping in the first two weeks.  |
| Course types  | 0-15% of registrations are for credit recovery.  |
| Student demographics  |  |
|   | Not reported   |
| Courses and teachers  |  |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 22; 0% licensed  |
| Number of teachers  | Nine part-time; three full-time  |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | No   |
| Student load per teacher                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Average 14 students per section</li> <li>▪ Full-time teachers responsible for average of 75 students</li> <li>▪ Maximum course capacity = 25 students</li> </ul>  |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Online teachers complete the Online Teaching Facilitation Course (OTFC) from Learning Point Associates.</li> <li>▪ Summer professional development opportunities provided for all teachers</li> <li>▪ Events scheduled during the school year involving all teachers</li> </ul> |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?                     | Yes, annual performance review mandated by consortium policies   |

## Virtual High School Global Consortium

Summary: Non-profit organization running a consortium of schools providing supplemental online courses, grades 6-12, to students across 30 states and 23 countries

| Program background  |  |
|---|--|
| Year started  | Fall 1996  |
| Program/organization type                                   | Supplemental, non-credit granting, non-profit  |
| Grade levels  | Grades 6 - 12  |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Course have set start/end dates; asynchronous.   |
| Geographic region served                                    | Students come from multiple states and countries.  |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | None; the program is governed by the same laws and rules that govern physical schools.   |
| Funding sources   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Course fees, federal funds, and school membership</li> <li>▪ Federal grant funds from AP IP grant were approximately \$400,000 for 2006-2007.</li> </ul>  |
| Student information   |  |
| Number of course registrations/ unique students             | 9,250 course registrations; 7,800 unique students  |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase 10-25%  |
| # of full-time students                                     | None   |
| Course completion rate                                      | 77%  |
| How completion rate defined                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rate excludes students dropping in the first 3 weeks (15 class days).</li> <li>▪ Students must achieve a passing grade (60 or above) to be counted as a completion.</li> </ul>  |
| Course types  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 0-15% of registrations are for credit recovery</li> <li>▪ 0-15% of overall registrations are for AP courses</li> </ul>  |
| Student demographics  |  |
| Gender  | 43% male; 57% female   |
| Courses and teachers  |  |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 155, 0% licensed   |
| Number of teachers  | 297 part-time teachers; no full-time teachers  |
| Dual enrollment program?                                    | No   |
| Student load per teacher                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Average 20 students per section</li> <li>▪ Maximum section capacity = 25 students</li> </ul>  |
| Are teaching online skills provided in PD?                  | Each VHS teacher must graduate from VHS's online training program, which is a minimum 10-week online professional development course, requiring from 15-20 hours per week of course work. Six graduate credits are available upon successful completion of the course. |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?                     | Teachers are evaluated weekly by their Faculty Advisor. Review includes: attendance, feedback to students, assessments and assessment results, support of online discussions, and support of online group activities.  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Teacher communication requirements?                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teachers must respond to student questions within 24 hours.</li> <li>▪ Teachers must log in to the online course at least daily.</li> <li>▪ Teachers must communicate to students' schools with current grade averages every other week.</li> </ul>   |
| Is online PD offered to teachers NOT in your program? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ VHS is offering a five-course series for classroom teachers who want to incorporate online components into their classroom instruction, as well as teachers who want to learn how to teach online outside of VHS.</li> <li>▪ Teachers who complete the five-course series are eligible for a Certificate in Online Teaching and Learning once the capstone project is completed, which is an online student teaching internship.</li> </ul> |

## Wisconsin eSchool Network

**Summary:** A network of online schools and programs serving students across Wisconsin with both full-time and supplemental online courses

| Program background  |  |
|---|--|
| Year started  | Spring 2002  |
| Program/organization type                                   | A network of programs and charter schools, credit granting                           |
| Grade levels  | Grades 7-12  |
| Geographic region   | Within multiple districts throughout Wisconsin                                       |
| Course timing and pacing                                    | Set start/end dates and self-paced courses; asynchronous.                            |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | No, the program is governed by the same laws and rules that govern physical schools. |
| Funding sources   | Primarily public FTE, some federal funds for charter school start-up                 |
| Student information   |  |
| Number of full-time students                                | 65-70  |
| Number part-time students                                   | Approximately 800  |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase 10-25%  |
| Student retention rate                                      | 90%  |
| Student demographics  | None reported, data collection began in 2006-2007 and is not yet available.          |
| Courses and teachers  |  |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 65; 95% licensed or purchased from outside source                                    |
| Number of teachers  | 20 part-time; one full-time  |



|   |   |
|---|---|
| Professional Development offerings/requirements       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Online Teacher Facilitation Course (Learning Point Associates)</li> <li>▪ Management of Online Learning 1 and 2 (LPA's)</li> <li>▪ Illuminate Sessions on various topics</li> <li>▪ Virtual School Administrator training (Provided by Florida Virtual School, face-to-face)</li> <li>▪ Ucompass Educator Course Management System F2F</li> <li>▪ Virtual Leadership Training (FLVS)</li> <li>▪ Mentors for new teachers (1-1)</li> <li>▪ Various workshops</li> <li>▪ Monthly online teacher training sessions</li> </ul> |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?               | Some districts use a separate teacher evaluation that mirrors their job description; other districts use their local Performance Appraisal System incorporating information from online performance.  |
| Teacher communication requirements?                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Welcome calls, first day of class sessions</li> <li>▪ Progress reports (at least monthly)</li> <li>▪ Teachers log contacts in the Virtual School Administrator system</li> <li>▪ Expectation that emails and phone messages are answered within 24 hours on business days</li> <li>▪ Assignments graded within 48 hours on business days</li> <li>▪ Parents are provided 24/7 access to student gradebook and progress information.</li> </ul>   |
| Is online PD offered to teachers NOT in your program? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Online Teacher Facilitation Course and Management of Online Learning courses are made available to others in our districts and to districts that are not currently part of the Network.</li> <li>▪ Other professional development options from individual topic sessions to full courses are in development.</li> </ul>  |

## Capistrano Connections Academy

Summary: Full-time charter school serving students k-12 in contiguous counties in California

| Program background  |   |
|---|---|
| Year started  | Fall 2004   |
| Program/organization type                                   | Credit granting, full-time charter school   |
| Grade levels  | Grades k–11 (k-12 by 2008-2009)   |
| Geographic region   | Five counties in Southern California (Orange, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Diego), charter allows enrollment in the authorizing county and all contiguous counties |
| Is program governed by online specific laws or regulations? | Laws and regulations regarding both charter schools and non-classroom based independent study   |
| Funding sources   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public FTE (Average Daily Attendance) funds</li> <li>▪ Federal funds</li> <li>▪ Private grants, local funds, charter loan</li> </ul>     |
| Course types  | Both self-paced and courses with set start/end dates; asynchronous  |
| Student information   |   |
| Number of full-time students                                | 500-749   |
| Change from prior year                                      | Increase more than 50%  |
| # of part-time students                                     | None  |
| Student retention rate                                      | 73%   |
| How retention rate is calculated                            | Withdrawals are counted after the first 7-day drop period.  |
| Student demographics  |   |
| Gender  | 49% female; 51% male  |
| Ethnicity   | 5% Asian/Pacific Islander; 11% Black, non-Hispanic; 48% Caucasian, non-Hispanic; 13% Hispanic; 15% multi-racial; 1% Native American ; 7% not reported                             |
| Qualify for free or reduced lunch                           | 16% reduced; 21% free   |
| Gifted and talented   | Less than 1%  |
| Other   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 11% special education (IEP)</li> <li>▪ 1% 504 Plan</li> </ul>  |
| Courses and teachers  |   |
| Number of courses, % licensed                               | 311; 63% licensed or purchased from outside source  |
| Number of teachers  | 22 full-time teachers; two part-time (2006-2007)  |
| Student load per teacher                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 25:1 Student ratio</li> <li>▪ Secondary content teachers responsible for an average of 120 students.</li> </ul>                          |
| Professional Development offerings/ requirements            | Two-part graduate level online course, ongoing training provided in-house throughout the year, funding also available for external professional development activities.           |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?                     | Performance based program which includes individual and school goals and competency ratings, all of which combine to determine eligibility for bonus and merit                    |
| Teacher communication requirements?                         | Real-time conference (usually by phone) minimum every two weeks with students; communication with parents varies by grade level   |

# Minnesota Online High School

Summary: Online charter school serving students across Minnesota

| Program background                      |  |
|---|--|
| Year started                            | Fall 2005  |
| Program/organization type               | Charter school, credit granting  |
| Grade levels                            | Grades 9-12  |
| Geographic region                       | Across most or all districts in Minnesota  |
| Course timing and pacing                | Courses have set start/end dates; asynchronous.  |
| Online specific laws?                   | State online learning law and regulations  |
| Funding sources                         | Public FTE funds, and federal funds (Charter School Planning and Implementation grants—\$480,000 total for the first three years)  |
| Student information                     |  |
| Number full-time students               | 186  |
| Change from prior year                  | Increase more than 50%   |
| Number part-time students               | 42   |
| Student demographics                    |  |
| Gender                                  | Male 46%; female 54%,  |
| Ethnicity                               | 3% Asian/Pacific Islander; 3% Black, non-Hispanic; 2% Hispanic; 3% Native American; 89% White, non-Hispanic  |
| Qualify for free/reduced lunch          | 4%   |
| Limited English proficiency             | 0%   |
| Geography                               | 42% rural; 50% suburban; 8% urban  |
| Enrollment status                       | 81.6% MNOHS only (comprehensive), 18.4% supplemental, 8.3% special ed  |
| Courses and teachers                    |  |
| Number of courses, % licensed           | 56; 2% licensed or purchased from outside source   |
| Number of teachers                      | 19 part-time   |
| Dual enrollment?                        | No   |
| Student load per teacher                | Maximum capacity = 40 students   |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New teachers complete 60 hours in developing and teaching online.</li> <li>▪ Year-round PD, reflective practice, and peer review activities</li> <li>▪ Formal annual performance review of teachers, conducted by the Directors of Curriculum and Teaching with input from others</li> <li>▪ Formal course evaluation rubric used in evaluation and peer review</li> </ul>  |
| Teacher communication requirements?     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is online daily (M-F), is available by cell phone daily (M-F)</li> <li>▪ Acknowledges submitted work, and responds to student or parent communications within 24 hours (M-F)</li> <li>▪ Returns manually graded assignments within 48 hours (M-F), or makes other arrangements in writing</li> <li>▪ Initiates friendly phone contact with individual students and parents to welcome students to the course</li> <li>▪ Initiates frequent written and phone contact with individual students and parents to foster accountability and success</li> <li>▪ Initiates phone contact with students to assess student learning</li> <li>▪ Shares information about students on a weekly basis in the Contact Log (accessible to other staff)</li> </ul> |

# Odyssey Charter School

Summary: Full-time charter school serving students in one district, Clark County, Nevada

| Program background                              |  |
|---|--|
| Year started                                    | Fall 1999  |
| Program/organization type                       | Charter school, credit granting  |
| Grade levels                                    | Grades K-12  |
| Geographic region                               | Within one district only, Clark County School District   |
| Course timing and pacing                        | Both self-paced and with set start/end dates, asynchronous   |
| Online specific laws/regulations?               | State online learning law and regulations (NRS 388 NAC 388)  |
| Funding sources                                 | Public FTE funds   |
| Student information                             |  |
| Number of full-time students                    | 1,425 full time students k-12  |
| Change from prior year                          | No change (within 5% of previous year)   |
| Number of part-time students                    | None   |
| Student retention rate                          | Unknown  |
| Student demographics                            |  |
| Gender  | 50% male ; 50% female  |
| Ethnicity                                       | 5% Asian/Pacific Islander; 10% Black, non-Hispanic; 20% Hispanic; 65% White, non-Hispanic  |
| Qualify for free or reduced lunch               | 40%  |
| Limited English proficiency                     | 5%   |
| Courses and teachers                            |  |
| Number of courses, % licensed                   | 80, 20% licensed or purchased from outside source  |
| Number of teachers                              | 75 full-time; none part-time   |
| Student load per teacher                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Average of 22 students per single section</li> <li>▪ Each teacher responsible for 80-100 students on average</li> </ul>   |
| Professional Development offerings/requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Intensive teacher training on all aspects of online teaching before each school year, including CMS, online curriculum, etc.</li> <li>▪ Teachers go to many national conferences over the course of the year on both online and curricular area.</li> </ul> |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers?         | Monitoring of online courses and face-to-face sessions with students, at least annually, and three times annually for probationary teachers  |
| Teacher communication requirements?             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ At least weekly contact with students, usually face-to-face</li> <li>▪ Email question response time is 24 hours during work week and assignments returned within 72 hours</li> </ul>  |

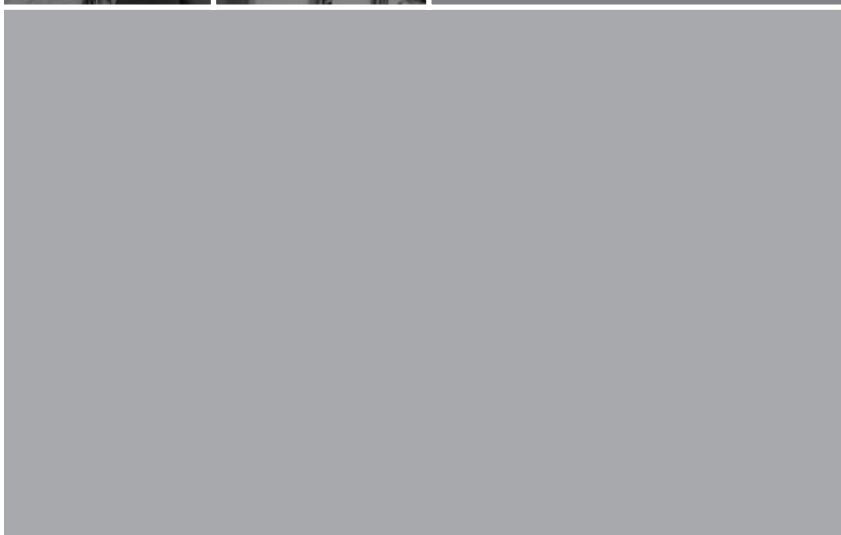
# Ohio Virtual Academy

Summary: Online charter school serving students across Ohio

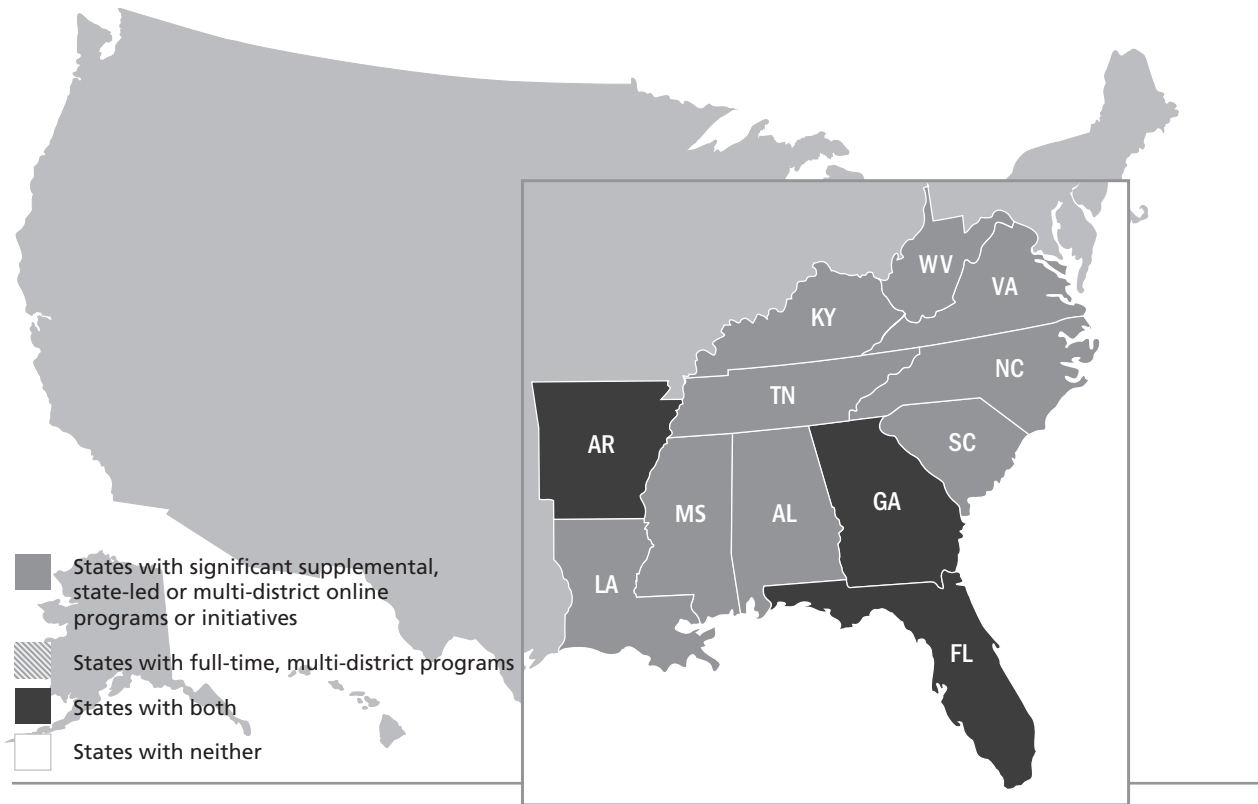
| Program background                      |  |
|---|--|
| Year started                            | Fall 2002  |
| Program/organization type               | Charter school, credit granting, CITA and NCA accredited   |
| Grade levels                            | Grades k-12  |
| Geographic region                       | Across all 615 public school districts in Ohio   |
| Course timing and pacing                | Self-paced, mastery based courses (grades k-8); asynchronous learning with specific due dates for homework submission and teacher graded assignments (grades 9-12); additional synchronous learning opportunities across all grades  |
| Online specific laws/regulations?       | State online learning law/regulations, and funding formula that is specific to online students   |
| Funding sources                         | Public FTE funds, and Federal Title Program funds (approximately \$1.5 million), mostly Title I (\$906,000) and IDEA-B (\$590,00)  |
| Student information                     |  |
| Number full-time students               | 4000-4,999   |
| Change from prior year                  | Increase 10-25%  |
| Number part-time students               | 0  |
| Student retention rate                  | 82%  |
| Student demographics                    |  |
| Gender                                  | 52% male; 48% female   |
| Ethnicity                               | 0.2% American Indian or Alaskan; 0.7% Asian/Pacific Islander ; 7.9% Black, non-Hispanic; 1.6% Hispanic; 2.2% multi-racial; 87.4% White, non-Hispanic   |
| Limited English Proficiency             | 0.2%   |
| Courses and teachers                    |  |
| Number of courses, % licensed           | 125 courses grades k-12 purchased from K12 Inc.; 100% of teachers licensed   |
| Number of teachers                      | 112 full-time; two part-time   |
| Dual enrollment?                        | No, however, qualifying students in grades 8-12 may participate in Ohio's Post-Secondary Enrollment Options Program.   |
| Student load per teacher                | Full-time teachers are responsible for and average 55 students   |
| Formal evaluation process for teachers? | Four key areas of review using objective and subjective measures: 1) academic achievement 2) student retention 3) teamwork, attitude, and innovation 4) professional growth  |
| Teacher communication requirements?     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communication requirements include regular telephone, email and live web-conferencing for parents and students alike.</li> <li>▪ Parents, students, and teachers share feedback in regularly scheduled conferencing opportunities centered on academic achievement and progress towards meeting articulated goals.</li> <li>▪ Teachers maintain daily office hours and have school-based expectations regarding timely responses to parent phone calls and email.</li> <li>▪ Ohio Virtual Academy's Personalized Instruction Plan (PIP) for each student maintains a focus for parent/student/teacher calls and formalizes the documentation of ongoing student achievement and academic progress through the k-12 curriculum.</li> </ul> |



**Section 3:  
State  
profiles**



# Southeastern states



## Alabama

Alabama ACCESS is a state-led program program that combines course development with technology infrastructure; no charter school law.

## Arkansas

State-led AR Virtual High School; state code has rules governing distance learning.

## Florida

FL Virtual School is largest in the country, also k-8 Virtual School Program; both created/governed by legislation.

## Georgia

GA Virtual School and several suburban Atlanta districts have online programs; online charter schools allowed via 2006 amendment to charter school law but none have been authorized as of 2007.

## Kentucky

KY Virtual High School; district program in Jefferson County.

## Louisiana

LA Virtual School; LA Department of Education has rules on distance education.

## Mississippi

2006 legislation authorized Mississippi Virtual Public School Program to replace/expand previous Mississippi Online Learning Institute among other initiatives, program is supplemental high school as of 2007 and considering expanding to other grade levels and full-time.

## North Carolina

NC Virtual Public School is new state-led program created by legislation in 2006 that had its first students in summer 2007; other district programs exist as well.

## South Carolina

Legislation passed in 2007 formalizes SC Virtual School and creates possibility of online charters.

## Tennessee

e4TN is a state program funding development of online courses in eight school districts, including Hamilton County Virtual School.

## Virginia

Virtual Virginia is state-led program; several single-district programs.

## West Virginia

WV Virtual School is state-led program; no other significant programs.

## 5.1 Alabama

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | Yes    | ACCESS Distance Learning   |
| Other online programs | No     | No charter school law  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | State code includes numerous provisions regarding online courses; these provisions govern ACCESS |

Essentially all the online education activity in Alabama is through ACCESS (Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators, & Students Statewide), a state-sponsored distance learning initiative. Alabama does not have a charter school law.

### Online Programs

ACCESS is a non-credit granting, supplemental program started in Fall 2005. In 2006-2007, the program had between 8,000 and 9,000 registrations in 39 one-credit courses and five half-credit courses. Five remediation modules for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam were also available to students. Approximately 57% were purchased from out-of-state vendors and aligned with state standards; approximately 43% were developed in state to meet state standards.

The program provides access to instruction and coursework for grades 9-12 by providing courses via the Internet and interactive videoconferencing (IVC) as well as the technical infrastructure to deliver these courses. ACCESS blends Internet- and video-based coursework with Alabama certified teachers from delivery school sites and delivers to receiving school sites that otherwise would not have an Alabama certified teacher to instruct the course. The main difference between ACCESS and other state-led programs is the focus of ACCESS on development of the technology infrastructure for receiving online and video courses at school sites throughout the state, which means in part that a significant portion of the relatively high level of funding (compared to other state-led online programs) is going towards technology infrastructure. ACCESS also has a blended learning component, as one of its objectives is to provide teachers with additional multimedia and technology tools to enhance instruction.

Another key distinction of ACCESS is that it provides online courses to students in public school classrooms, during a set school period, not primarily at home. The funding to pilot and expansion site high schools includes bandwidth, tablet computers, IVC equipment, and other technology needed for a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment. ACCESS also provides funding for professional development.

### State policies

State code includes a section on online education that governs ACCESS; policies listed below are from this code, the *Alabama Administrative Code (AAC) Rule 290-3-1-.02(12) for Online Courses*.<sup>30</sup>

### Funding

- \$10.3 million in state appropriation for FY 2007 for ACCESS, plus federal funding of \$1 million was awarded by the Appalachian Regional Commission

<sup>30</sup> Section 12 of Alabama Code 290-3-1-.02; retrieved August 5, 2007, from <http://www.alabamaadministrative.code.state.al.us/docs/ed/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203ED1.pdf>



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## Governance, tracking, and accountability

Because all activity is through ACCESS, there is no need for additional tracking.

## Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- Courses must be from institutions accredited by one of several accrediting organizations.
- Students must take complete lessons, tests, and labs “during a regular class scheduled within the normal school day.”
- “Class size regulations shall be the same as for courses not taught online.”
- “All on-line courses shall have an adult facilitator who has completed professional development in on-line methodology and technical aspects of web-based instruction and serves as a liaison to on-line teachers and providers.”
- Teachers must be certified, or must be “faculty members of an institution of higher education” and “must have participated in in-service education, sponsored by the providing institution, pertaining to instructional methodology and technical aspects of on-line delivery.”
- Core courses must be “approved and registered” by the state Department of Education; elective courses do not need to be approved but must be registered.
- “On-line courses qualifying for credit in required courses must contain all required content identified in Alabama courses of study.”
- Course credits are based on “clock hours”—at least 140 hours for a one credit course.

## 5.2 Arkansas

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments                     |
|-----------------------|--------|------------------------------|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Arkansas Virtual High School |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Arkansas Virtual Academy     |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | Formal rules covering AVHS   |

Arkansas has a state-led program, the Arkansas Virtual High School (AVHS), and one full-time, multi-district charter school, the Arkansas Virtual Academy. AVHS is a supplemental program that was started in Spring 2000 that serves high school students. It had more than 3,000 course registrations in 2006-2007, an increase of more than 25% from the previous year, in 35 courses. AVHS is funded at \$500,000 per year by the Arkansas Distance Learning Development Program.

In 2007 the legislature considered but ultimately did not pass HB2481, which would have allowed for “blended” online charter schools. The proposed law would have defined “blended school” as a “program offered by a public school district or charter school in which students receive curriculum instruction on-site for a designated period of time and receive instruction in a virtual or remote setting via Internet-based curriculum.”

## 5.3 Florida

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Florida Virtual School                          |
| Other online programs | Yes    | The K-8 Virtual School Program has two schools  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | Legislation creating the Virtual School Program |

Florida has a large online supplemental program, Florida Virtual School (FLVS), and two full-time k-8 online schools, Florida Virtual Academy and Florida Connections Academy. Online education legislation in Florida pertains to either FLVS or the K–8 Virtual School program, under which the two online schools operate. In 2000, legislation established FLVS as an independent education entity. Legislation enacted in 2002 and 2003 granted parental right for public school choice, listed FLVS as an option, and defined full-time-equivalent (FTE) students for FLVS based on “course completion and performance” rather than on traditional seat time. FLVS is funded through a state FTE public education formula.

In 2003, the Florida Legislature funded the K–8 Virtual School Pilot Program. Legislation in 2006 removed the “pilot” designation and provided for the continued participation of the two schools already in the Virtual School Program for the 2006-2007 school year, with full program implementation in the following school year. The legislative appropriation has since been increased, therefore increasing the number of students in the program for the 2007-2008 school year.

Although there are state policies and legislation pertaining to both Florida Virtual School and the K-8 Virtual School Program, for clarity, the following section discussing state policies details the K-8 Virtual School Program. Policies and legislation specific to FLVS are covered in the FLVS program profile elsewhere in this report.

### Online programs

- Florida Virtual School, profiled in section 2
- Two full-time schools in the K-8 Virtual School Program, Florida Virtual Academy and Florida Connections Academy
- Seven district franchises of FLVS, including Broward Virtual School and Miami Dade Virtual School, with a total of about 12,500 course registrations and 6,500 students
- The University of Miami Online High School, a private college preparatory school with approximately 300 students in the 2006-2007 school year

### State policies

#### Funding

K–8 Virtual Schools are funded by legislative line item appropriation. For the 2007-2008 school year total funding has increased to \$9.5 million, up from \$7.2 million in 2006-2007. However, per student funding has decreased from \$5,200 to \$5,050 for the coming school year and enrollments have been increased from just short of 1,400 to 1,880.

## Teaching and curriculum

- Public schools, including the virtual schools, must ensure that online content meets Sunshine State Standards, online teachers must be licensed to teach in Florida.

## Governance and tracking

- The K-8 Virtual Schools Program schools are under contract with the Florida Department of Education and are required to provide regular reports.

## Accountability for student achievement

- Students at K-8 Virtual Schools must take the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). To accomplish this, the K-8 Virtual Schools provide the list of students taking the FCAT to school district coordinators of assessment, and the districts assign and test these students. FCAT participation rates among the K-8 Virtual Schools ranged between 95% and 98% in 2007.
- The two virtual schools participate in the state's accountability system and receive school grades. They both received an A for the 2006-2007 school year. They also participate in the federal system: Florida Virtual Academy met 97% of the criteria and Florida Connections Academy met 90% of annual yearly progress (AYP) criteria.

## 5.4 Georgia

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Georgia Virtual School   |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Several suburban Atlanta districts have online programs. Online charter schools were allowed via a 2006 amendment to charter school law, but no new online charter schools have been approved by local chartering authorizers. |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | Legislation creating Georgia Virtual School and allowing online charter schools  |

Georgia has had several prominent district online programs, primarily in suburban Atlanta, and the Georgia Virtual School (GAVS), profiled in section 2. GAVS was created by legislation in 2005,<sup>31</sup> and in 2006 the State Board of Education created the rule that governs the school.<sup>32</sup> GAVS is unusual in that its students take end-of-course exams that are common across the state, and tracked by the state, allowing for a comparison of test scores between students in online courses and state averages.

The Georgia legislature passed a law in 2006 that amended charter school law to allow for online charter schools.<sup>33</sup> There are no other policy provisions in the amended charter school law, or other Georgia policy, that are specific to online education, with one exception: the State Board rule calls for the Department of Education to “develop criteria for schools or local school systems to become a Georgia Virtual School Approved Entity” in order to offer an online program. In July 2007, the GA Virtual Academy, operating in conjunction with the state-approved, brick-and-mortar Odyssey School, was approved to enroll 500 students grades k-8 by the GA State Board. As of September 2007 no new, full-time online charter schools have been approved by local chartering authorities.

<sup>31</sup> O.C.G.A. 20-2-31 (Senate Bill 33); retrieved September 5, 2007, from [www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2005\\_06/versions/sb33\\_AP\\_16.htm](http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2005_06/versions/sb33_AP_16.htm)

<sup>32</sup> 160-8-1-.01; retrieved September 5, 2007, from [www.doe.k12.ga.us/\\_documents/doe/legalservices/160-8-1-.01.pdf](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/_documents/doe/legalservices/160-8-1-.01.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Senate Bill 610; retrieved September 5, 2007, from [http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2005\\_06/versions/sb610\\_AP\\_6.htm](http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2005_06/versions/sb610_AP_6.htm)

## 5.5 Kentucky

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Kentucky Virtual High School  |
| Other online programs | Yes    | No charter school law, prominent supplemental program in Jefferson County |
| State-level policy    | No     |   |

The Kentucky Virtual High School (KVHS), which was created by the state governor in January 2000 and is operated by the state Department of Education, is the main online learning program in Kentucky. The state does not have charter schools or charter school legislation, and therefore no online charters. There is a prominent district online program in Jefferson County, but there are no state online education policies governing that program.

KVHS is one part of a state-wide P-20 virtual learning initiative, Kentucky Virtual Schools (KyVS) that includes the Kentucky Virtual High School, eLearning Kentucky (online professional development), Area Technology Centers (ATCs) and other state agency partners. Currently in its second year, the initiative supports collaboration of all statewide online learning initiatives. The Kentucky Virtual Schools will continue to offer all of the services previously offered by the KVHS, but will expand its focus to supporting hybrid or blended learning environments in traditional classrooms. In this capacity, KyVS will provide local schools with access to high-quality online content, and supports to help teachers integrate online learning. These online education programs are all in a shared course management system, allowing them to collaborate on teacher professional development, content development, content repositories, technical support and training, and program evaluation. The Kentucky Virtual High School continues to provide a range of high school courses, including 23 Advanced Placement (AP) courses and credit recovery courses.

### Online programs

Kentucky Virtual High School is the main program in the state, operated by the state Department of Education. Started in Spring 2000, KVHS currently enrolls between 2,000-3,000 students, and offers some 66 courses. KVHS is funded through a state legislative allocation of approximately \$500,000 as well as course fees. In addition, district grants as well as grants sought by KVHS have helped expand services and allow individual districts to enroll more students than in previous semesters.

Jefferson County Public Schools eSchool is a prominent supplemental program providing services to high school students in Kentucky and eight other states and middle school students in Jefferson and several other counties in the state. In 2006-2007 JCPS eSchool had more than 7,600 high school course enrollments and almost 2,500 middle school course enrollments. It also provides prep modules to help students prepare for state testing.

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## 5.6 Louisiana

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Louisiana Virtual School   |
| Other online programs | No     |  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | Louisiana Department of Education has published rules for distance education |

Louisiana has a state-led program, the Louisiana Virtual School (LVS). Louisiana does not have any online charter schools, but it does have charter schools and online charter schools are not prohibited. The state also has district programs offering distance learning courses, including satellite and compressed video.

### Online programs

LVS was started in Fall 2000 and is a supplemental program for grades 8-12 run by the state. The program also offers a dual enrollment program in conjunction with Northwestern Louisiana State University. In 2006-2007, LVS had over 4,000 registrations in 36 courses, all of which were developed by Louisiana teachers. The courses offered are asynchronous with set start and end dates.

Most schools utilize the LVS program due to the lack of certified/highly qualified teachers to teach the desired content area, or not having a sufficient number of students to warrant offering the course. One notable program of the LVS is its Algebra I Online Program. The program is approaching its sixth year of implementation and provides Louisiana students with a certified Algebra I instructor and a standards-based Algebra I curriculum delivered through a web-based course. The Algebra I Online Project also provides the mathematics teacher with face-to-face and online professional development opportunities that will assist with the facilitation of the in-class Algebra learning activities for students and support their efforts toward mathematics certification. Five participating classroom teachers have earned secondary mathematics certification in four years. Three participating teachers have earned middle school math certification. One participating classroom teacher has earned national board certification in secondary math.

### State policies

The Department of Education has published *State Standards for Distance Education*<sup>34</sup> that cover online learning and other types of distance education. Policies listed in this section are from these standards; many of the policies hold distance education programs to the same standards as face-to-face programs. For example, the standards state that “distance education shall comply with all policies of the *Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators*.” All quotes below are from the *State Standards*. All distance learning programs in Louisiana are supplemental, and the policies distinguish between the provider of distance education courses and the “receiving” school or local education agency (LEA). Specific, separate requirements for providers and for schools and LEAs are delineated.

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<sup>34</sup> State Standards for Distance Education, January 2000, published by the Louisiana Department of Education; retrieved August 4, 2007, from <http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/uploads/738.pdf>

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## Funding

- LVS was funded at \$3,921,545 for the 2007-2008 year, with the majority of the funds coming from the state, 10.4% coming from federal funds, and 26% from a private grant from the AT&T Foundation.

## Governance, tracking, and accountability

- Louisiana Virtual School registrations and vendor provided courses are tracked if funds flow through to districts to pay for the courses.
- Because all courses are supplemental, state assessments are handled through the local school.

## Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- Courses must incorporate state content standards.
- Schools or local education agencies with students in distance education programs must “ensure that each distance education course is provided by an institution accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting body or is authorized by the LEA.”
- “Content, instruction, and assessment” of online courses must be “comparable” in “rigor and breadth to a traditionally delivered course.”
- Schools must provide a “facilitator” for their students taking online courses; the facilitator must hold Louisiana certification.
- Distance education providers must “judiciously address issues relative to course load and student-teacher ratio as appropriate for the particular method of delivery and particular course content.”

## 5.7 North Carolina

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led program     | Yes    | North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS)  |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Eventually all public online programs are to be consolidated under the NCVPS.   |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | Session Law 2005-276 Section 7.41 <sup>35</sup> created the pilot program for North Carolina Virtual Public School in 2005 and Session Law 2006-66 Section 7.16 funded the program. <sup>36</sup> |

North Carolina is in the early stages of developing its new state-led virtual program, the North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS). State Board action in August 2005 formally created the program. Legislation in July 2006 funded it with \$2.7 million earmarked in the State Board of Education's budget as seed money for FY 2006-2007. NCVPS officially opened its doors for the Summer 2007 session, offering courses in grades 9-12, with well over 7,500 course registrations across the state. NCVPS is intended to eventually replace the DPI program of using multiple course providers, and to become a one stop resource for schools across the state. State legislation directs that "all e-learning opportunities offered by state-funded entities to public school students are consolidated under the North Carolina Virtual Public School program, eliminating course duplication."<sup>37</sup>

### State policies

Information in this section comes from Session Law 2005-276 unless otherwise noted.

### Funding

- Section 7.16(d) of Session Law 2006-66 requires the State Board of Education to develop an allotment formula based on projected ADM to fund eLearning in the future. As of August 2007, the allotment formula is still in the development.

### Governance, tracking, and accountability

- NCVPS reports to the State Board of Education

### Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- "Subsequent to course consolidation, the Director will prioritize e-learning course offerings for students residing in rural and low-wealth county LEAs, in order to expand available instructional opportunities. First-available e-learning instructional opportunities should include courses required as part of the standard course of study for high school graduation and AP offerings not otherwise available."
- "The State Board of Education shall include in the pilot program instruction on personal financial literacy. This instruction shall be designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need, before they become self-supporting, to make critical decisions regarding their personal finances."

<sup>35</sup> North Carolina General Assembly Session Law 2005-276 Senate Bill 622, Section 7.41 Plan and Funding for a Virtual High School by the State Board of Education; retrieved August 2, 2007, from <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/EnactedLegislation/SessionLaws/HTML/2005-2006/SL2005-276.html>

<sup>36</sup> North Carolina General Assembly Session Law 2006-66 Senate Bill 1741, Section 7.16 North Carolina Virtual Public School; retrieved August 2, 2007, from <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/Sessions/2005/Bills/Senate/HTML/S1741v8.html>

<sup>37</sup> Quotes in the following two sections are from Sections 7.16(b) and (c) of S1741v.8; retrieved August 2, 2007, from <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/Sessions/2005/Bills/Senate/HTML/S1741v8.html>

## 5.8 South Carolina

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led program     | Yes    | South Carolina Virtual School   |
| Other online programs | Yes    |   |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | H3097 establishes the Virtual School and allows blended charter schools |

South Carolina formally established the South Carolina Virtual School Program with the passage of H3097 in 2007. The bill makes the Virtual School available to all students under age 21, including private school and home school students, and limits students to three online credits per year and 12 throughout high school. The Virtual School had previously been operating as a pilot program that started in July 2006, with over 2,000 course registrations in 2006-2007. It will continue to operate as a supplemental middle and high school program, operated by the state education agency.

The law also allows online charter schools but restricts instruction: “no more than seventy-five percent of a student’s core academic instruction in kindergarten through twelfth grade via an online or computer instruction program.”<sup>38</sup> The law states that the 25% of non-online instruction can be accomplished through “regular instructional opportunities in real time that are directly related to the school’s curricular objectives, including, but not limited to, meetings with teachers and educational field trips and outings.”

## 5.9 Tennessee

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led initiative  | Yes    | e4TN   |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Yes, Hamilton County Virtual School plus other district programs that are offering courses in conjunction with e4TN. No online charter schools exist in TN because charter school law prohibits online charters. |
| State-level policy    | No     |  |

Tennessee has a state-led online learning initiative, e4TN, an annually renewable three-year grant-funded initiative that was awarded to the Hamilton County Department of Education in 2005. e4TN aims to develop online courses and create a teacher pool across Tennessee that has been trained and is experienced in online learning. A secondary portion of the grant was awarded to seven school districts: Bradley County, Bedford County, Dickson County, Kingsport City, Lake County, Tipton County and Wilson County. Students, teachers, and administrators in these districts are involved in courses created by Hamilton County teachers and technical staff for the online learning initiative. Hamilton County Virtual School, which is profiled in section 2, serves as the Host Membership Pilot, which is a program to pilot state-wide procedures in online learning.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> [http://www.scstatehouse.net/sess117\\_2007-2008/bills/3097.htm](http://www.scstatehouse.net/sess117_2007-2008/bills/3097.htm)

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.e4tn.org/cms/index.php?page=about>



## 5.10 Virginia

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments                               |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Virtual Virginia                       |
| Other online programs | Yes    | District programs in Northern Virginia |
| State-level policy    | No     |  |

Virtual Virginia, a program of the Virginia Department of Education, provides access to Advanced Placement, world language, and elective courses to students in schools that have too few students to justify hiring a full-time teacher or that are unable to locate a qualified teacher. Virtual Virginia emerged through the process of combining the Virginia Satellite Education Network, a program that started with video courses in 1983, and the Virginia Virtual Advanced Placement School, which began offering online courses to students in 2003. In 2006–2007, there were approximately 3,200 semester course registrations. The program receives state funding and charges course registration fees to out-of-state and non-public school students. Virtual Virginia will offer 22 Advanced Placement courses and additional elective and foundation courses in 2007-2008.

Distance learning courses are governed by the Virginia Standards of Accrediting Public Schools, which leaves most policies to the local school board. Each local school district is encouraged to establish a district distance learning policy. The Accreditation Standards indicate that the distance course should be “equivalent” to a regular school course and that the work must be under the supervision of a licensed teacher, or a person eligible to hold a Virginia teaching license and approved by the school board. Local schools are responsible for administering Virginia’s Standard of Learning (SOL) test for each course for which this test is required. The Virginia Department of Education confirms that there are no new state-level initiatives or developments in policies or legislation specific to online education.

### Online programs

In addition to the state-led program, several significant district online programs exist. These programs are supplemental and at this time there are no full-time online programs in the state. Virginia has a charter school law and several charter schools in operation; however, there are no online charter schools. A partial list of online programs in Virginia includes:

- Virtual Virginia
- Fairfax Public Schools Online Campus (see profile in section 2)
- Arlington Public Schools Distance Learning
- Prince William County Schools Virtual High School
- Halifax Virtual Academy
- Nelson Academy of Virtual Learning
- Pittsylvania County Schools K12 Virtual School Program
- York County Virtual High School

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# 5.11 West Virginia

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led program     | Yes    | West Virginia Virtual School  |
| Other online programs | No     | No major district programs, no charter school law; some small district programs |
| State-level policy    | No     | West Virginia Virtual School  |

Most of the online education activity in West Virginia is through the West Virginia Virtual School (WVVS), a supplemental program serving students in grades 7–12. WVVS was created by statute in 2000, is housed within the West Virginia Department of Education, and is governed by statute and State Board Policy 2450. Although originally created to offer AP courses, it now offers a comprehensive set of approximately 250 courses, all but three of which are provided by third-party course providers; 158 of these courses had WVVS students in 2006-2007. The West Virginia Virtual School pays for students to participate in online courses on a first-come, first-served basis; after that, students may take courses if the course fee is paid by their local school or, in some cases, by their parents. It had between 2,000 and 3,000 course registrations in 2006-2007. WVVS was funded by a state appropriation of \$458,000 for the 2006-2007 school year.

There are no other major online programs or initiatives in West Virginia, although some districts such as Kanawha County and Harrison County have online programs, and no state policies except those related to the WVVS.

# Northeastern states



## Connecticut

Consortium of local education agencies offers courses through Virtual High School; CT Adult Virtual High School offers online diploma program for adults.

## Delaware

Delaware Virtual School being planned, no online charters, some districts use vendor courses and about 20 high schools participate in the University of Delaware's Online High School.

## Maine

Maine Distance Learning Project uses videoconferencing, not Internet.

## Maryland

Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities is state-led program; online charter schools are effectively prohibited by charter school law.

## Massachusetts

MassONE is a state-led initiative to provide online professional development and tools to teachers across the state; over 100 high schools (33%) offer courses via Virtual High School.

## New Hampshire

State has formal rules on distance learning and has about two dozen schools offering courses through Virtual High School. A blended online charter school is operating and a full-time, statewide online high school is beginning operations in 2008.

## New Jersey

Distance learning is primarily through video, although at least one district has an online school.

## New York

AccelerateU is a consortium offering online courses; charter cap and past charter denials currently blocking online charter development.

## Pennsylvania

Eleven online charter schools and extensive state oversight.

## Vermont

A couple of independent schools offer online courses; state Department of Education has created a task force looking into distance education issues that will report in January 2008.

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In Connecticut, the six educational service agencies have partnered with Massachusetts-based Virtual High School (VHS) to provide VHS membership to schools at reduced rates, and more than 1800 course registrations from Connecticut students are expected in VHS in 2007-2008. The state also has the Connecticut Adult Virtual High School, a statewide online program run by consortium of local education agencies that provides students enrolled in Connecticut's Adult Credit Diploma Programs the option of earning credits online. In 2006-2007 the CT AVHS had between 250 and 500 course registrations.

Delaware has begun initial planning for the Delaware Virtual School. Meetings were held in May and June 2007, and the Planning Committee is charged with generating the Delaware Virtual School Implementation Plan by the end of October 2007, with implementation beginning the 2008-2009 school year.<sup>40</sup> Maine has no charter school law, no state-led online program, and no major multi-district online programs or state level online education policy. Most distance education at the state level is videoconferencing, through the Maine Distance Learning Project (MDLP), which connects 91 classrooms. The state has a web-enhanced learning initiative, the Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI), which has equipped all the state's 7th-and 8th-grade students and teachers with one-to-one access to wireless notebook computers and the Internet for the past five years. In June 2006, the Legislature approved a budget that contained \$41 million for another four years of the laptop program and the Department of Education renewed its contract with Apple Computer for 38,000 new iBook laptops, training and technical support.<sup>41</sup> In June of 2007 it was announced that all educators and administrators in grades 9-12 will receive professional development, equipment, and support that has been available to their counterparts in middle school.<sup>42</sup>

Vermont has several schools using Virtual High School but no large district programs or state-led initiatives. Efforts this past year to address distance learning policy questions have generated considerable legislative interest in the potential for distance learning in the state. In order to help guide and inform legislative efforts, the Department of Education has created a task force to make recommendations concerning development of a statewide, managed network offering shared, high-quality distance-learning opportunities to all Vermont schools. The Department of Education expects to have an initial report to the State Board of Education by January 2008.<sup>43</sup> Vermont currently has distance education rules that apply to independent schools, however only a couple of these schools exist and they serve primarily adult learners. Vermont does not have a charter school law.

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<sup>40</sup> Southern Regional Education Board, Report on State Virtual Schools, August 2007.

<sup>41</sup> <http://pressherald.mainetoday.com/story.php?id=107195&ac=PHnws&pg=2>

<sup>42</sup> [http://www.mainelearns.org/story\\_detail?story\\_id=738](http://www.mainelearns.org/story_detail?story_id=738)

<sup>43</sup> Personal communication, Bill Romond, State Coordinator, Educational Technology, Vermont Department of Education, August 27, 2007.

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## 6.1 Maryland

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities                                  |
| Other online programs | No     |  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | Maryland charter school law effectively prohibits online charter schools |

Maryland's state-led online program, Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities (MVLO), is part of the State Department of Education and offers supplemental courses. No other major online programs exist in the state. Because a provision of charter school law requires that students be "physically present on school premises"<sup>44</sup>, there are no online charter schools.

MVLO opened in Fall 2002. In the 2006-2007 school year MVLO had 1,000 - 2,000 course registrations across the state in courses for grades 9-12. Between 30-45% of the registrations were for AP courses; and between 16-30% were for credit recovery. The program is funded with course fees and some federal funds.

In addition to the courses available to students for a fee, MVLO has developed online courses in English 2, Biology, Algebra/Data Analysis, and U.S. Government and made them available as a resource for teachers to use with their students at no cost. MVLO has extended access to these specific courses for teachers because these are subjects that have end of course state assessments (High School Assessments, or HSAs) that all students (starting with students who entered grade 9 in 2005) must take and pass in order to graduate.

## 6.2 Massachusetts

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led initiative  | Yes    | Massachusetts Online Network for Education (MassONE) provides online tools and resources for educators across the state |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Over 100 schools are members of the Virtual High School Consortium  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | <i>Recommended Criteria for Distance Learning Courses</i> published by the Department of Education in 2003              |

### Online programs

Massachusetts has a state-led learning portal, MassONE, which offers online tools and resources to teachers and students, although it does not directly register students into its own courses. The state also has over 100 schools that offer online courses through the Virtual High School Consortium. MassONE and the Virtual High School Consortium are profiled in section 2.

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<sup>44</sup> Maryland State Code § 9-102; retrieved August 3, 2007, from <http://michie.lexisnexis.com/maryland/lpext.dll?f=templates&fn=main-h.htm&cp=>

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## State policies

Massachusetts does not have any required state policies that govern online courses. In 2003 the state Department of Education published “Massachusetts Recommended Criteria for Distance Learning Courses,” which states “Since the Department does not approve or oversee online courses, it is up to each school district to decide if it will allow students to take online courses, determine which students can take online courses, and evaluate the available online course offerings.”<sup>45</sup> The recommended criteria include:

- “The content of the course is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and is equivalent in rigor to traditionally delivered courses.
- The course makes the best use of available technologies and online resources to enrich the content. Face-to-face or other real-time meetings are provided for any content that cannot be effectively delivered online.
- The course provides frequent and timely interactions between the students and the online teacher, as well as among the students.
- The course provides ways to assess students’ participation and achievement of learning goals.
- The online teacher is fully qualified in the content area being taught.
- The online teacher has been trained and is skilled in methods of teaching online.
- The school designates an onsite coordinator, who manages technical and administrative issues and serves as the primary contact person between the school, the students, and the course provider.
- The learning environment and course materials are universally designed, making them accessible to all learners.”

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<sup>45</sup> Recommended Criteria for Distance Learning Courses published by the Department of Education in 2003; retrieved July 23, 2007, from [www.doe.mass.edu/edtech/news03/dl\\_letter.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edtech/news03/dl_letter.html)

## 6.3 New Hampshire

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led program     | No     | No  |
| Other online programs | Yes    | At least one charter school offering a blend of online and face-to-face courses <sup>46</sup> |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | State has formal rules on distance learning   |

New Hampshire has state rules on distance learning that have been in effect since July 2005<sup>47</sup>. Most of the rules describe policies that the local school board must set for distance learning, without going into much detail. One provision states that the school board must create policies to address “the number of students a teacher may be required to supervise” and “monitoring of student progress, grading of assignments, and testing.”

Two proscriptive provisions require that “students earning credit for distance education courses shall participate in all [state] assessments,” and “credit courses require students to meet similar academic standards as required by the school for students enrolled in credit courses offered by the school.”

New Hampshire does not have a state-led program, but has at least one charter school currently offering online instruction, Great Bay eLearning Charter School. A Virtual Learning Academy Charter School was approved in May 2007, but has not yet begun operations as of August 2007. In addition, New Hampshire schools had nearly 500 course registrations in Virtual High School in 2006-2007, and almost 1000 course registrations are expected in 2007-2008.

## 6.4 New York

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | No     |  |
| Other online programs | Yes    | AccelerateU provides courses for partner districts and BOCES. Charter school cap and past charter denials currently block online charters. |
| State-level policy    | No     |  |

New York does not have a state-led virtual school initiative or state-level policy. Local education agencies, including school districts or Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), may choose to create and offer online courses for students under the guidance and supervision of their boards. Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES has created Project Accelerate and AccelerateU, which provides online courses for students and professional development and instructional support for teachers. Through agreement with other BOCES, the online courses have been available to students and teachers from other regions. For example, the Monroe 2-Orleans BOCES Distance Learning program offers online high school courses, primarily for credit recovery. Courses are asynchronous and both self-paced and with set start and end dates. The project was originally funded through a New York State Title III Technology Grant five years ago. Student courses are now funded by an enrollment fee paid by districts and by courses fees. Districts who meet certain state requirements then receive aid back from the state in the following fiscal year, ranging from 50-75% of the amount paid.

<sup>46</sup> Great Bay eLearning Charter School, <http://www.gbecs.org/>

<sup>47</sup> Section 306.22 of Rules Ed Chapter 300; retrieved September 5, 2007, from <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rules/ed300.html>

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## 6.5 Pennsylvania

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | No     |  |
| Other online programs | Yes    | 11 cyber charter schools   |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | Cyber charters are approved by the PA Department of Education, which has a tracking and review process in place. |

In Pennsylvania, cyber charter schools are authorized by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE).<sup>48</sup> The PDE has a system of cyber charter review in place,<sup>49</sup> which may be partly a result of previous funding controversy surrounding these schools. Pennsylvania law requires that the home district of a student forward per-pupil funding allotments to the student's school of choice. In 2001, school districts refused to pay student funds to the cyber charter schools and joined the Pennsylvania School Boards Association in filing a lawsuit that challenged the legitimacy of the cyber charter schools. The school districts lost in court; but, in response to their concerns, Act 88 (2002)<sup>50</sup> was passed. (Direct quotes below are from this legislation.) The new law designated the PDE as the authorizer of any new cyber charter school and of any renewing charter of an existing cyberschool. As of August 2007, the funding controversy continues as hearings in the House are being held to consider new legislation which may shift rate setting from school districts to the PDE and possibly add enrollment caps.

Cyber charter school oversight is regulated by a combination of charter school law that oversees all charter schools, and regulations specific to cyber charters. The Pennsylvania System of Cyber Charter Review (PASCCR) was developed by the PDE's charter school team to specifically address cyber charter school issues. Together PASCCR, the charter school's annual report to the state, and the original charter school application to PDE explain how the school meets Pennsylvania's academic standards and assessment requirements, what technical support will be given to students, how student work will be monitored, what type of communication will be held with students and parents, and how often that communication will take place.

### Online programs

Pennsylvania has a number of cyber charter schools that are authorized by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, including:

- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cyber Charter
- Achievement House Cyber Charter School
- Agora Cyber Charter School
- Commonwealth Connections Academy is a full-time cyber charter serving k-11 students across the state. Begun in 2003, the school enrolled between 1,000 and 2,000 students in 2006-2007.

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<sup>48</sup> [http://www.pde.state.pa.us/charter\\_schools/lib/charter\\_schools/2006-07\\_Cyber\\_List.pdf](http://www.pde.state.pa.us/charter_schools/lib/charter_schools/2006-07_Cyber_List.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> [http://www.pde.state.pa.us/charter\\_schools/lib/charter\\_schools/PASCCR.pdf](http://www.pde.state.pa.us/charter_schools/lib/charter_schools/PASCCR.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> <http://www2.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/BI/BT/2001/0/HB0004P4196.pdf>



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- PA Learners Online Regional Cyber Charter School
  - Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School
  - Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School
  - Pennsylvania Leadership Cyber Charter School
  - PADELA Cyber Charter School
  - South Side Cyber Services is a district-run program for k-12 students in South Side Area School District. In 2006-2007, the first year of operation, just under fifty students were served. Six of the students were dual-enrolled with university programs.
  - SusQ-Cyber Charter School

## State policies

### Funding

- Local school districts provide funding for students enrolled in cyber charter schools based on a per-pupil cost determined by funds budgeted in specified categories in the attending school districts of residence.
- A cyber charter school must “satisfy requirements for compulsory attendance,” but it is up to the cyber charter school to provide “a description of how the cyber charter school will define and monitor a student’s school day.”

### Governance, tracking, and accountability

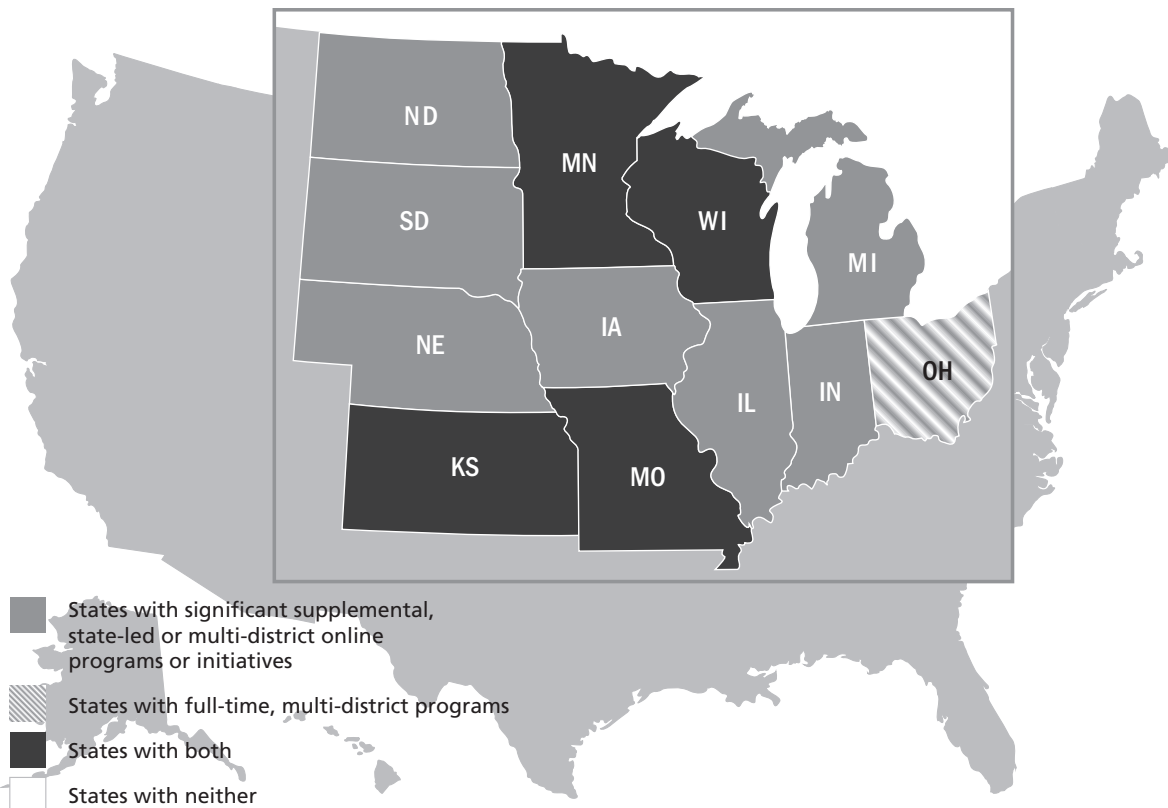
- All cyber charter schools are authorized by the PDE, and an annual report and quality review specific to online programs (PASCCR ) is required.
- Cyber charter school students are required to take the Pennsylvania state assessment.

### Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- PDE requires all curricula used by school districts and public charter schools to be aligned with academic standards approved by the State Board of Education. Cyber charter schools must determine compliance with state curriculum standards.
- All charter schools are required to have 75% of staff meet state certification standards. Teacher evaluations must be done by a supervisor holding a Principal Certificate or Letter of Eligibility with the PDE. There are no special provisions for online teachers, but the PASCCR includes teaching and professional development provisions.



# Central states



## Illinois

Illinois Virtual High School is a state-led supplemental program; full-time online charter school in Chicago is only other online program.

## Indiana

Online charter schools were denied state funding by legislature in early 2007.

## Iowa

Two programs fit the *Keeping Pace* definition of state-led, Iowa Learning Online and the Iowa Online AP Academy; few other online programs.

## Kansas

Thirty-five district programs and charter schools; extensive Department of Education policies although state audit released in 2007 questioned whether oversight was effective.

## Michigan

Michigan Virtual High School is a state-led program that is helping schools meet the new requirement that all high school students must have an "online learning experience" to graduate.

## Minnesota

Many district programs and charter schools and extensive Department of Education oversight; law passed in 2007 changed some oversight provisions.

## Missouri

State-led program planning to have first students in 2007; will have both part-time and full-time students at elementary and high school grade levels.

## Nebraska

Distance Education Council created by legislation in April 2006 is providing supplemental online courses across the state.

## North Dakota

North Dakota Center for Distance Education (formerly North Dakota Division of Independent Study) is state-led program; new law in 2007 requires the state to set up an approval process for online courses.

## Ohio

Many online charter schools with a combined enrollment of over 20,000 students.

## South Dakota

South Dakota Virtual High School, Department of Education establishing criteria for approval of other organizations as Distance Learning Providers.

## Wisconsin

Numerous district programs, online charter schools, and Wisconsin eSchool Network.

## 7.1 Illinois

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments                       |
|-----------------------|--------|--------------------------------|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Illinois Virtual High School   |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Chicago Virtual Charter School |
| State-level policy    | No     |                                |

Almost all online education activity in Illinois is through the Illinois Virtual High School (IVHS), a non-credit granting program of the Illinois State Board of Education, operated by the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy. IVHS serves a high proportion of students from low-income areas; in some cases, IVHS provides scholarships to cover these students' tuition. For school year 2006–2007, 48% of IVHS students were from low-income schools.

As of September 2006, Chicago Public Schools and Illinois State Board of Education approved a charter for an online charter school in Chicago serving grades k-8, which is operated by K12. The Chicago Virtual School requires students to meet at a physical location once a week in order to address a legal provision that charter schools not be home-based. In the 2006-2007 school year Chicago Virtual had 248 students enrolled in its program. There is a cap of 600 students for the 2007-2008 school year.

## 7.2 Indiana

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led program     | No     |   |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Indiana Virtual Academy and Indiana Online Academy                |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | HB1001, passed in 2007, denies funding to virtual charter schools |

In 2005, legislation was passed that allowed charter schools to provide online courses. Afterwards, one of the charter authorizers, Ball State University, generated guidelines for authorizing virtual charters that were finalized in August 2006. Two charter schools were authorized to begin operations in Fall 2007, but the legislature included a provision in its budget bill to deny funding to online charter schools. The provision says

“Virtual charter school” means any entity that provides for the delivery of more than fifty percent (50%) of instruction to students through virtual distance learning, online technologies, or computer based instruction. A virtual charter school is not entitled to any funding from the state of Indiana during the biennium and is not entitled to a distribution of property taxes. This paragraph expires June 30, 2009.”

This provision halted—at least temporarily—efforts to create online charter schools, and as of August 2007 online charter school proponents have not decided on their next steps.

There are several non-charter online programs in Indiana. The Indiana Virtual Academy (profiled in section 2) and the Indiana Online Academy are primarily supplemental programs run at least in part by education service centers. Indiana Public Schools offers an online program, and Indiana University has the Indiana University High School.

Aside from the bill denying funding to online charter schools there are no other state policies related to online learning.

## 7.3 Iowa

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Iowa Learning Online and the Iowa Online AP Academy  |
| Other online programs | No     |  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | I.C.A. 257.11 A school district may establish a regional academy, which will include advanced-level courses, and to which multiple schools send pupils in grades 9-12. The regional academy may include a virtual academy. |

Iowa has two programs that fit the *Keeping Pace* definition of state-led programs. Iowa Learning Online, which offers a variety of Internet and video-based courses, is a program of the Iowa Department of Education. The second program is the Iowa Online AP Academy, which offers online AP courses and professional development for teachers.

Aside from the state-led programs there is little state policy activity. A weighted funding provision was passed for the 2008-2009 school year that will provide additional funding for schools offering distance courses to other Iowa schools through the use of the Iowa Communication Network.

### Online Programs

**Iowa Learning Online:** A non-credit granting, supplemental program started in Summer 2004, the program offers courses at the 9-12 grade level, but has students from grades 6-12. Registrations for the 2006-2007 year increased 50% more than last year and fall in the 250-499 range. ILO offers 13 courses with set start/end dates both synchronous and asynchronous. Four of the courses were purchased (History, American Government, English 9, World History) and ILO developed seven (Anatomy/Physiology, Algebra I, Calculus, Chemistry, English 10, Physics, Precalculus). The program has four full-time and seven part-time teachers. Some of the program's courses in science and math are offered via the statewide video Iowa Communication Network. The program received \$700,000 in federal funds for the year.

**Iowa Online AP Academy:** The program was created specifically to offer AP courses. The AP Academy offers 10 AP courses through Apex Learning, as well as professional development for teachers. Courses, which have set start and end dates, are free to students. The AP Academy was initially funded in 2001 with a \$1.6 million technology grant from the IA Department of Education, and additional funding has been awarded to the program by the US Department of Education.

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## 7.4 Kansas

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led program     | No     |   |
| Other online programs | Yes    | The Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) lists 35 districts and service centers registered to provide online courses. <sup>51</sup>  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | KSDE has a well-developed set of registration and audit requirements for online programs, although an audit of online programs in Kansas questioned whether the policies were being followed. |

The Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) has perhaps the most-developed and well-documented system for tracking online programs of any state, although the state audit of online programs released in April 2007 questioned whether the policies were being carried out appropriately.<sup>52</sup> The audit is discussed in chapter 2, and the programs and policies—whether or not they are being well implemented—are discussed in this section.

KSDE requires that online programs be registered in order to claim FTE funding. Registration and claiming funding requires a desktop audit and an annual report from each program. In addition, the state has published extensive guidance and rules for online programs. Requirements include site visits, personnel and program requirements. They are very specific, for example stating the type of personnel that must be included on the program staff and requirements for those positions. The state also mandates that a team of at least two people evaluate each online program to ensure that guidelines have been followed. This type of process, with a formal review of individual programs against established guidelines, is rare. These requirements do not appear to be stifling the development of online education programs, as the state has 35 registered programs.

### Online programs

The state audit and KSDE website list online programs in Kansas, divided into several types: charter schools, programs within a building, programs within a district, and buildings within a district. The largest program has over 500 FTE, and most programs have less than 100 FTE. Grade levels served range from some programs serving k-12, and others having only high school or elementary level students.

### State policies

Information and quotes in this section are based on documents available on the Kansas Department of Education (KSDE) Web site, including an extensive explanation of Virtual Education Requirements.<sup>53</sup> Specific requirements are detailed below.

### Funding

Online students receive FTE funding, with the following requirements:

- Only students who reside in Kansas are eligible for FTE funding, with some exceptions for out-of-state students.
- FTE can only be claimed for students who are enrolled in a program that is registered with KSDE and has completed the Online Program Requirements application.

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<sup>51</sup> Retrieved July 27, 2007, from [www.ksbe.state.ks.us/Default.aspx?tabid=457](http://www.ksbe.state.ks.us/Default.aspx?tabid=457)

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.kasb.org/legis/2007/07paVirtualSchools.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Retrieved July 27, 2007, from [www.ksbe.state.ks.us/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=vX3t1O8cVME=&tabid=455](http://www.ksbe.state.ks.us/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=vX3t1O8cVME=&tabid=455)

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- Programs claiming FTE funding have to count students through one of three census date options detailed by the KSDE.
  - Verifying “enrolled and attending” students in a virtual course is done through an Academic Activity Log or Documentation of Virtual/Online Activity.

## Governance, tracking, and accountability

- Online programs are tracked by the state. The required annual reports and desktop audits allow KSDE to have more information regarding online activity across Kansas than any other state education agency across the country.
- The KSDE accredits schools and districts. If an online program is a program within the district it must be integrated into the district Quality Performance Accreditation (QPA)/NCA plan.

## Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- Courses must be aligned to state standards.
- “Course delivery must be based on ‘accepted’ good practice for online learning. This may include but is not limited to clearly communicating course expectations, grading policies, required/supplemental materials, etc.; establishing timelines; and regular communications with students and parents.”
- Orientation training sessions must be provided for students/parents.
- Access to academic content licensed personnel must be available to provide answers to student/parent questions for every online course.
- “Opportunities for students to participate in group activities must be provided. These may include some face-to-face activities such as (but not limited to): field trips, study sessions, additional orientation/training assistance, open houses, conferences, end-of-year celebrations, use of parent resource center, and teacher face-to-face instructions for labs or virtual teaming opportunities.”
- “Online communication opportunities must be provided enabling students to share with others; i.e. discussion boards, chats, virtual classrooms, e-mails, group online projects.”
- Ongoing feedback regarding student progress must be provided.
- Students/families must be provided a response within a 24-hour turn-around during school days, and a backup plan must be established for handling communication if a teacher isn’t available.
- “A person or contracted entity must be designated to implement and evaluate training provided to all staff, students and parents in the use of the online program.”
- An assessment coordinator must be designated who will ensure that
  - All students 18 and under take all required state assessments for their grade level.
  - All data is reported as part of the state’s QPA requirements, the federal NCLB requirements (e.g. Adequate Yearly Progress), and NCA requirements, if appropriate.
  - All state assessments proctored are by a licensed educator.

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## 7.5 Michigan

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Michigan Virtual School   |
| Other online programs | No     | No online charter schools, few district programs  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | Legislation requiring an “online learning experience” in order to graduate was passed in 2006 <sup>54</sup> and regulations implementing the law were released in Fall 2006 |

Michigan is at the forefront of k-12 online education, led by the Michigan Virtual School (MVS, profiled in section 2) and the Michigan legislature, which in 2006 passed a requirement that students have an “online learning experience” before graduating. In late 2006 the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) released its guidelines for the online learning experience, which require that students:

- “Take an online course, or
- Participate in an online experience, or
- Participate in online experiences incorporated into each of the required credit courses of the Michigan Merit Curriculum.”

In addition to defining an online course, the guidelines go on to explain options for the “online learning experience” and require that the “meaningful online experience requires a minimum accumulation of twenty hours...for students to become proficient in using technology tools to virtually explore content.” The elements that will satisfy the online learning experience requirement include:

- Provide opportunities for students to interact with other students and experts from around the globe in authentic online learning activities in a controlled environment with a highly qualified instructor
- Utilize webquests, blogs, podcasting, webinars, vblogs (videoblogs), Real Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, or virtual reality simulations
- Utilize an online learning management system that allows ongoing interactive opportunities for students
- Use technology tools for online research or online projects
- Develop and track an electronic portfolio (organized collection of completed materials)
- Determine the value and reliability of content collected on websites and other online resources
- Provide an opportunity for interactive discussion with an instructor or expert, such as an author

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<sup>54</sup> Public Acts 123 and 124 of 2006, retrieved August 10, 2007, from [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/PA\\_123\\_and\\_124\\_159920\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/PA_123_and_124_159920_7.pdf)



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- Communicate via threaded discussions with other students in and outside of their school
  - Provide authentic experiences through online field trips by bringing the community into the school/classroom
  - Participate in an online project where students apply understanding of software applications to simulated or real data
  - Participate in ongoing online projects for teachers and students
  - Provide teacher-led, student-directed online learning activities such as test preparation tools and career planning resources

The MDE guidelines also include a glossary and suggestions for developing an online experience categorized in five broad areas:

- Develop life-long learning skills
- Use of technology tools
- Content alignment and use of media
- Educator, expert and student involvement
- Sustained learning

In response to the law, MVS has collaborated with the MDE to develop an online course, *Career Forward™*, which helps Michigan students understand how the new global economy will impact their career opportunities. The course was funded through a grant from Microsoft's Partners in Learning program, was piloted in Spring 2007, and is available in one of three course types: within a learning management system (LMS), on the Internet separate from an LMS, or on a demonstration CD.

The requirement will likely increase demand for a large number of teachers experienced in online instruction, and affords an opportunity to expand Michigan LearnPort®, an existing collaboration between the MDE and Michigan Virtual University (the parent organization of MVS). LearnPort seeks to redefine how professional development services are delivered in Michigan by making effective use of innovative web-based tools and resources. MVU is required by the Michigan Legislature to offer at least 200 hours of online professional development for classroom teachers free of charge. The LearnPort catalog currently contains 107 online courses or professional development modules, and over 20,000 active users have joined Michigan LearnPort as of August 2007.

## 7.6 Minnesota

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led program     | No     |   |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Twenty-one charter schools, multi-district programs and consortia of schools are approved by the Minnesota Department of Education; this does not include single-district programs. |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | State has extensive policies and tracking of many online programs but does not track single-district programs.  |

Minnesota has online charter schools, multi-district programs, intermediate districts, and organizations of two or more districts operating under a joint powers agreement. According to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), many school districts in Minnesota offer substantial online learning programs. The Omnibus K–12 Education Act of 2003 (amended in 2007)<sup>55</sup> sets forth a number of policies directly affecting online education. It also directs MDE to develop and maintain a list of approved online-learning providers and a list of courses and programs that it has reviewed and certified. This certification effort by MDE is the overarching state-level policy activity, covering most online learning programs except district-level programs that only offer online courses to students enrolled in the district's schools. As of May 2007, there were 21 online programs on the “approved” list.<sup>56</sup>

In 2007 the Online Learning Law was amended to:

- Define “supplemental online learning” as an online course taken in place of a course period during the regular school day at a local district school and “full time online learning provider” as an enrolling school authorized by the department to deliver comprehensive public education.
- Specify that online learning providers of supplemental courses must make available to the enrolling district the credits to be awarded, start date, confirmation that the course meets the student’s graduation plan, course syllabus, standards alignment, content outline, assessment requirements and contact information.
- Restrict supplemental online learning enrollment to 50% of the student’s full schedule unless agreed upon by enrolling district. Students may enroll in full time online programs to a maximum of 12 semester long courses per year.
- Stipulate that students may enroll in supplemental online learning up to the midpoint of the enrolling districts term unless waived by the enrolling district.
- Establish procedures and timelines for enrollment. Parents and students must identify reason for online learning enrollment and sign a statement of assurance that they have reviewed the course or program and understand expectations.
- Change the requirement that online learning providers “affirm” to the commissioner that OLL courses have equivalent standards or instruction, curriculum and assessment requirements as other courses offered to enrolled students to the requirement that providers “demonstrate” these qualities.

<sup>55</sup> Retrieved July 30, 2007, from [http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/bin/getpub.php?pubtype=STAT\\_CHAP\\_SEC&year=current&section=124D.09](http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/bin/getpub.php?pubtype=STAT_CHAP_SEC&year=current&section=124D.09)

<sup>56</sup> Based on document titled Certified Online Learning (OLL) Providers, Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) June 2007; retrieved July 28, 2007, from [http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_FILE&dDocName=031616&RevisionSelectionMethod=latest&Rendition=primary](http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=031616&RevisionSelectionMethod=latest&Rendition=primary)

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## Online programs

Because Minnesota law requires that online learning providers report annually to the state, the MN Department of Education is able to provide a list of online programs on its website. Additionally, there is a searchable database of certified online learning k-12 courses and programs at <http://www.iseek.org>. MDE divides programs into several categories:

- Consortia of schools or intermediate districts: Providing supplemental online classes to membership schools and students across the state
- Multi-district programs: District-level programs providing comprehensive education and supplemental online learning courses to students across the state
- Charter schools: Providing comprehensive education and supplemental online courses to students across the state
- Online learning programs serving special populations and/or school districts

## State policies

The policies and quotes in this section are based on Minnesota Statutes 124D.095, Online Learning Option Act.

## Funding

- Effective FY 2006, Minnesota provides general education revenue for online students. For students taking online courses from the district in which they are enrolled, funding is the same as if the students were taking all their courses in physical classrooms. For students taking supplemental online courses from outside their enrolling district, the online learning program receives basic revenue for 88% of one twelfth of an average daily membership (ADM) per completed semester course, weighted based on grade level. The other 12% goes to the student's enrolling district and generates general education revenue unless the student's total ADM has exceeded 1.0 (1.2 for students enrolled in learning year programs). Funding for supplemental courses is generated only for students who complete the online course.
- Funding is tied to the program meeting all requirements of the law that are explained in the sections below.

## Governance, tracking, and accountability

- Minnesota annually certifies public school online learning programs. Tracking is based on student financial reporting and an annual program data report. Students register either as fully-enrolled online learning students in a comprehensive program or they access instruction as supplemental online learning students and are reported by online learning course completion file.
- Programs that offer online learning classes to students enrolled in that district are reported as students enrolled in the district. No distinction is made for online learning in those cases and these programs may not be state-certified.
- Districts must accept credit for courses from providers certified by the MDE. The law allows an enrolling district to "challenge the validity of a course offered by an online learning provider".

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- The department must review such challenges based on the certification procedures “set forth in the online learning statute.” The department may initiate its own review of the validity of an online learning course offered by an online learning provider.”
  - The legislation allows “an online learning student to have the same access to computer hardware and education software available in a school as all other students enrolled in the district,” and “an online learning student may participate in the extracurricular activities of the enrolling district on the same basis as other enrolled students.”
  - The legislation directs the online learning provider to “assist an online learning student whose family qualifies for the education tax credit (under section 290.0674) to acquire computer hardware and educational software for online learning purposes.”
  - “An online learning provider may limit enrollment if the provider’s school board or board of directors adopts by resolution specific standards for accepting and rejecting students’ applications.” An enrollment policy is submitted to the department during the certification process.
  - The student’s enrolling district is responsible for ensuring that students take the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments. If the enrolling district is the online learning provider, the online program administers annual state tests.
  - A legislative education subcommittee has been set up to study the effectiveness of online learning.

## Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- “Courses and programs must be rigorous, aligned with state academic standards, and contribute to grade progressions in a single subject.” Online courses must have equivalent standards or instruction, curriculum, and assessment as other [non-online] courses...”
- The MDE certification process requires that providers list courses and “demonstrate” their alignment with Minnesota state academic standards.
- The legislation “requires that a [highly qualified] teacher with a Minnesota license be the person that assembles and delivers instruction to online learning students...The instruction may include curriculum developed by persons other than a teacher with a Minnesota license.”
- The legislation states that “unless the commissioner grants a waiver, a teacher providing online learning instruction must not instruct more than 40 students in any one online learning course or program.”
- Actual teacher contact time or other similar communication, including frequent assessment, is an expected online learning component and the online learning provider must “demonstrate expectations for actual teacher contact time or other student-to-teacher communication.” The MDE requires that programs describe the methods and frequency of course interactivity, teacher contact, ongoing instructional assistance and assessment of student learning to comply with the law.
- An Online Learning Advisory Council was appointed by the Commissioner of Education in 2005 for a three-year term to take up issues related to online learning.

## 7.7 Missouri

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Missouri Virtual Instruction Program (MoVIP)   |
| Other online programs | Yes    | University sponsored   |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | In 2006, SB912 created MoVIP; SB64, passed in 2007, outlines how districts must pay for their students enrollment if district is either provisionally or fully unaccredited. |

Missouri currently has three major programs active in the state. The newest is the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program (MoVIP) that was created by Senate Bill 912<sup>57</sup> and House Bill 1275 in 2006, and has enrolled almost 2,000 students to begin in its inaugural semester in Fall 2007. The program will accept both full-time and part-time students, but will not initially grant diplomas. Since part of the program's focus is on delivering AP courses, there are no plans to offer dual credit to high school students. The k-5 portion of the program will be run in partnership with Connections Academy; Northwest Missouri State University (NWMSU) will partner with MoVIP for grades 6-12. NWMSU extended partners are eCollege, Kaplan and Bocavox.

If public, private, or home school students enroll in MoVIP courses as a part of their regular daily class schedules, they are eligible for state-funded seats during fall and spring semesters. Although these seats are at no cost to the students, these seats could be limited and a selection process has been developed. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is anticipating that this could assist about 2,500 students both full and part time. In addition, MoVIP will offer courses for tuition that would be paid for by parents, school districts, or private schools. While the state funded seats will have a specific number, the tuition paid seats will be unlimited.

### Online programs

Other programs include:

- The University of Missouri-Columbia High School (MU High School)<sup>58</sup> is a part of the University of Missouri Center for Distance and Independent Study and provides distance learning courses delivered asynchronously to nearly 16,000 students nationwide. Students can get credit for individual courses or a full diploma.
- Missouri State University has a program called Missouri Virtual School (MVS)<sup>59</sup> offering supplemental high school and dual credit courses emphasizing teacher interaction.

### State policies<sup>60</sup>

Missouri is slightly unusual in that it has declared that MoVIP will be accountable for its students, public, non-public, and home-schooled, taking the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) tests. Senate Bill 912 states that MoVIP “will comply with all state laws and regulations applicable to school districts, including but not limited to the Missouri school

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.senate.mo.gov/06info/pdf-bill/tat/SB912.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> <http://cdis.missouri.edu/MUHighSchool/HShome.htm>

<sup>59</sup> <http://mvs.missouristate.edu/index.htm>

<sup>60</sup> Information in this section is quoted from pages on the following site: <http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/curriculum/movip>

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improvement program (MSIP), adequate yearly progress (AYP), annual performance report (APR), teacher certification, and curriculum standards.” If a student fails to take the MAP test, MoVIP’s management system will place a hold on the student for all future courses so that the student cannot enroll in any other virtual courses. Public School Districts that use district funds to pay tuition for students to take MoVIP classes will be accountable for the MAP scores as well as MoVIP.

Senate Bill 64, passed in 2007, states “for the school year beginning July 1, 2008, a parent residing in a lapsed, or poor performing school district may enroll their child in the Missouri virtual school if the child first enrolls in the school district of residence. The school district shall include the child’s enrollment in the virtual school in determining the district’s average daily attendance. The board of the home district shall pay to the virtual school the amount required under current law to be paid for other students enrolled in the virtual school.”<sup>61</sup>

## Funding

- The new virtual public school was funded for setup costs of \$100,000 for 2006-2007. Missouri legislation has appropriated \$5.2 million for 2007-2008 for the first year operations and services. The virtual school is a separate appropriation and not included in the foundation formula that financially supports Missouri schools. Missouri funds its schools using an FTE model divided into sixths. Senate Bill 912 dictates that for every course taken online through the virtual public school, the enrolling district will receive 15% of the funding and the virtual public school the remaining 85%.

## Governance, tracking, and accountability

- The MoVIP is under the office of the DESE. Registration goes through DESE’s webpage: [www.dese.mo.gov/movip](http://www.dese.mo.gov/movip).
- The MoVIP is subject to the same laws and regulations as regular school districts including but not limited to assessments and AYP. In Missouri, state assessments are by discipline. Details for administering and reporting assessments are still being worked out, however MoVIP is accountable for its students taking the MAP tests.

## Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- The MoVIP is subject to the same laws and regulations as regular school districts including but not limited to content and teacher licensing standards.

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<sup>61</sup> [http://www.senate.mo.gov/07info/BTS\\_Web/Bill](http://www.senate.mo.gov/07info/BTS_Web/Bill).

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## 7.8 Nebraska

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led initiative  | Yes    | Distance Education Council created by legislation in April 2006                                      |
| Other online programs | Yes    | University Nebraska Independent Study High School and other district programs, no charter school law |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | LB1208 passed in 2006; LB603 passed in 2007.   |

In August 2007 Nebraska completed Phase I of a three-phase project to update aging JPEG videoconferencing equipment and connect all schools to a high bandwidth IP-network. Approximately 100 schools, postsecondary institutions and Educational Service Units will make the IP-conversion during each of the three years of the project and will have 40-100 megabytes of access right to their doorstep. Nebraska schools will see increased opportunities for the sharing of interactive videoconference (IVC) courses, dual-credit courses, online courses, blended courses and enrichment activities. The Distance Education Council purchased a statewide scheduling, clearinghouse, and device control system to help facilitate the brokering of both IVC and online courses. The new system will allow the Council to monitor and report on the exchange of distance education courses in Nebraska.

The Distance Education Council designated mylearning.org of Nebraska to provide learning management system licensing, training, and support to schools. Other notable online programs include Westside Virtual High School, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Independent Study High School, which includes some supplemental online courses in its correspondence course program. Additionally, Omaha Public Schools is currently developing online courses for credit recovery. Many Nebraska schools also supplement their curriculum by contracting with online content providers.

Legislative Bill 1208<sup>62</sup>, passed in 2006, facilitated creation of the groundwork for distance education courses by:

- Increasing bandwidth into schools—opening the door for blended learning options in the classroom and high quality online or video courses;
- Creating a state-level Distance Education Council to, among other tasks, broker and facilitate courses, administer learning management systems, and provide assistance in instructional design and best practices;
- Shifting interested districts from a consortium model into an Educational Service Unit (ESU) model which facilitates state funding and allows them to enter into contracts with providers.

As of August 2007, much of the groundwork is in place and the next phase is beginning as of late summer 2007. The statewide scheduling software and statewide accessible database which will allow districts to share courses is in place and being coordinated by the executive director of the Distance Education Council. Per LB1208<sup>63</sup>, the Nebraska Department of Education shall provide distance education incentives from the Education Innovation Fund to school districts and ESUs for qualified distance education courses both sent and received. Each unit of distance learning would be worth up to \$1,000 and be paid one year in arrears.

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<sup>62</sup> [http://www.networknebraska.net/denu/FINAL\\_LB1208\\_1.pdf](http://www.networknebraska.net/denu/FINAL_LB1208_1.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> Section 23 of Legislative Bill 1208 retrieved July 31, 2007 from [http://www.networknebraska.net/denu/FINAL\\_LB1208\\_1.pdf](http://www.networknebraska.net/denu/FINAL_LB1208_1.pdf)

An increased incentive is in place if at least one of the students receiving the course is in another district that is in a “sparse” or “very sparse” costing group and the course is delivered by two-way video. These incentives currently place emphasis on utilizing the two-way video system heavily invested in by the state, however, it is expected that many of the courses developed in the near future will be of a blended model so asynchronous, Internet-delivered courses are also likely to receive a boost. Language in LB603<sup>64</sup>, passed in 2007, clarifies and defines what elementary distance education is so that distance education classes delivered at the elementary level will qualify for the distance education incentives payments similar to those provided at the 9-12 level.

## 7.9 North Dakota

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | Yes    | North Dakota Center for Distance Education (formerly North Dakota Division of Independent Study) |
| Other online programs | No     |  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | HB1491 requires the state to set up an approval process for online courses by July 2009          |

The only significant online program in North Dakota is the North Dakota Center for Distance Education (formerly North Dakota Division of Independent Study), which offers both online and print courses that are self-paced. The Center for Distance Education is a state-funded, supplemental program that was started in Fall 1996 and serves middle and high school students. In 2006-2007 it had about 5,000 course registrations in 150 unique courses, almost all of which were home-grown (2% licensed from an outside source). Courses are self-paced and asynchronous. Twenty full-time teachers are responsible for 500 students in a course section; the program also employs five part-time teachers. The North Dakota Center for Distance Education is funded via state appropriation and course fees. The appropriation for the 2006-2007 school year was \$3.8 million; course fees are \$93 per semester course for in-state students and \$101 for out-of-state students.

The only law related to online education in North Dakota in addition to the ones that created the North Dakota Division of Independent Study,<sup>65</sup> and the law that changed the name to the Center for Distance Education, is a law passed in 2007<sup>66</sup> that requires the Department of Public Instruction to set up a process for approving online courses. The entire law has just a few relevant provisions; they do not “apply to a course provided electronically between approved schools in” North Dakota. The relevant provisions are quoted below:

“1. Before a person may provide elementary or high school courses electronically to a student, school, or school district in this state, the person must obtain annual approval from the superintendent of public instruction. The electronic delivery of a course includes online and technological delivery methods.

<sup>64</sup> Section 9.4 of Legislative Bill 603 retrieved July 31, 2007 from <http://uniweb.legislature.ne.gov/FloorDocs/Current/PDF/Final/LB603.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> Retrieved July 30, 2007, from [www.legis.nd.gov/cencode/t15c19.pdf](http://www.legis.nd.gov/cencode/t15c19.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> House Bill 1491, retrieved August 1, 2007, from <http://www.legis.nd.gov/assembly/60-2007/bill-text/HBIR0400.pdf>



2. ... the superintendent shall verify that:
  - a. All courses... are aligned with the state content and performance standards and if standards do not exist for a particular course, the criteria must ensure that the course content is sufficiently challenging for students...;
  - b. All teachers... meet or exceed the qualifications and licensure requirements placed on the teachers by the state in which the course originates; and
  - c. All students receiving a course electronically have ongoing contact time with the teachers of the course."

These provisions become effective as of July 1, 2009.

## 7.10 Ohio

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | No     |  |
| Other online programs | Yes    | 40 eCommunity Schools  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | 2003 legislation from House Bill 364 provided operational guidance; 2005 legislation from House Bill 66 placed a moratorium on new eCommunity schools. |

As of August 2007, Ohio has 40 eCommunity (charter) schools that served approximately 20,750 students in FY 2007.<sup>67</sup> These include seven statewide schools. A community school is similar to charter schools in other states. An eCommunity school is an Internet- or computer-based community school in which the enrolled students work primarily from their residences. eCommunity schools first opened for the 2000–2001 school year. Legislation adopted in April 2003 provided additional guidance for their operation. Legislation enacted in 2005 imposed a moratorium on new eCommunity schools until the General Assembly adopts standards for the schools, due to a number of concerns including:

- Fast growth of some of the eCommunity schools coupled with a lack of additional standards (beyond those captured in the 2003 legislation and the general charter law)
- Low state assessment participation rates and aggregate test scores by some eCommunity schools (In the year since passage of the 2005 legislation, most of the eCommunity schools moved up one level on Ohio's school report card system.)
- Enrollment of students in eCommunity schools contributing to decreased enrollment in many public school districts
- Funding issues; because state funding follows the student, districts lose most of the state foundation funding (but none of the local funding) associated with students who go to the eCommunity schools.

<sup>67</sup> Information in this section is based on and updated from the 2004-2005 Annual Report on Ohio Community Schools and legislation passed in 2005, House Bill 66.; retrieved August 3, 2007, from [http://www.legislature.state.oh.us/BillText126/126\\_HB\\_66\\_EN1\\_N.html](http://www.legislature.state.oh.us/BillText126/126_HB_66_EN1_N.html)

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As of August 2007, the eCommunity School standards are under review. Other aspects of the legislation are covered below.

## Online programs

As of August 2007, there are 40 eCommunity schools in Ohio with about 20,750 students, including:

- Ohio Virtual Academy, with between 4,000 and 5,000 students in grades k-11 (see profile in section 2)
- ECOT, Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow with between 7,500 and 10,000 students in grades k-12
- Ohio Connections Academy, with approximately 1,000 students in grades k-11

## State polices

### Funding

- Community schools, including eCommunity schools, receive state funds directly from the state; these funds have been transferred from school district allocations.<sup>68</sup>
- eCommunity schools no longer are eligible to receive poverty-based funding.
- Beginning in FY 2007, each eCommunity school shall spend a designated amount for pupil instruction or face a possible fine of up to 5% of state payments to the school.

### Governance, tracking, and accountability

- Each eCommunity school must have an “affiliation” with at least one “teacher of record” licensed by the State Board of Education. The “teacher of record is responsible for the overall academic development and achievement of a student and not merely the student’s instruction in a single subject.”
- No teacher of record can be responsible for more than 125 students.
- Each eCommunity school must provide a minimum of 920 hours of “learning opportunities” to students per school year. Only 10 hours in any 24-hour period can count toward this total.
- eCommunity schools can count student learning in terms of days instead of hours; in this case, a “day” must consist of at least five hours.
- Each child enrolled in an eCommunity school is entitled to a computer supplied by the school. If there is more than one child per household, the parent can request fewer computers than children enrolled in the school.
- eCommunity schools may not provide a stipend in lieu of a computer; they must provide an actual computer.

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<sup>68</sup> Legislative Committee on Education Oversight (2004), Funding for Charter Schools; retrieved August 11, 2006, from [http://www.loeo.state.oh.us/reports/PreEleSecPDF/FundingforCharterSchools\\_web.pdf](http://www.loeo.state.oh.us/reports/PreEleSecPDF/FundingforCharterSchools_web.pdf)

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## Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- eCommunity schools must administer the state-developed achievement tests and diagnostic assessments in the same manner as school districts, and must provide students a location within 50 miles of the student’s residence for the assessments.
- Whenever an eCommunity school student fails to participate in the spring administration of a grade-level achievement test for two consecutive school years, the school must withdraw that student from enrollment unless the parent pays tuition equal to the state funds the school otherwise would receive for that student. eCommunity schools must report these students to the state, the state must maintain a list of these students, and no eCommunity school will receive funds for students appearing on this list.
- Each eCommunity school “must submit to its sponsor a plan for providing special education and related services to disabled students enrolled in the school.”

## 7.11 South Dakota

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | Yes    | South Dakota Virtual High School   |
| Other online programs | No     |  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | House Bill 1236 <sup>69</sup> signed in March 2006 creates the Virtual High School and Advisory Council; House Bill 1113 <sup>70</sup> essentially limits state to the SDVHS program |

In Summer 2004, the Department of Education hosted a series of discussions about education in South Dakota. The resulting 2010 Education Plan has as one of its main objectives to “increase 21<sup>st</sup> century skills using advanced technology to enhance learning” through various initiatives. These included the creation of the South Dakota Virtual High School and a one-to-one laptop initiative.

### Online programs

House Bill 1236, signed in March 2006, created the South Dakota Virtual High School as a consortium of approved statewide distance education providers under the auspices of the South Dakota Department of Education. The School does not grant diplomas or credit and represents an expansion of current synchronous and asynchronous virtual class offerings in the state. The Virtual High School is intended to create consistency and structure for online coursework aligned with South Dakota content standards. The Department of Education will establish criteria for approval of other organizations as Distance Learning Providers (DLP), and review each course offered by a DLP for:

- Alignment with state content standards;
- Qualified instructional staff;
- Evaluation component for students to demonstrate course completion; and
- Assurance that approved distance provider will work with local district to meet special needs to be in compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act<sup>71</sup>.

The Virtual School was launched in March 2007 and is accepting registrations through school districts; students cannot register on their own. So far 91 different courses have been approved for offering. In February 2007 House Bill 1113 was signed into law which restricts districts from putting a grade on a student transcript unless the course was from an approved DLP. This is intended to centralize quality control and will effectively limit any other programs.

Another part of the 2010 Education Initiative is known as Classroom Connections, a laptop initiative piloted in 2006-2007 which provides incentive money to school districts to initiate one-to-one laptop programs for their high school students<sup>72</sup>. In 2007-2008, the program is expected to double from the pilot of 20 school districts to 41 school districts (of 168 in the

<sup>69</sup> South Dakota State Legislature House Bill 1236; retrieved August 2, 2007, from <http://legis.state.sd.us/sessions/2006/bills/HB1236H.pdf>

<sup>70</sup> South Dakota State Legislature House Bill 1113; retrieved August 2, 2007, from <http://legis.state.sd.us/sessions/2007/bills/HB1113HED.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> <http://legis.state.sd.us/rules/DisplayRule.aspx?Rule=24:43:12:11>

<sup>72</sup> “Pilot schools selected for South Dakota’s Classroom Connections project”, press release dated May 16; retrieved from <http://www.state.sd.us/news/showDoc.aspx?i=7371>

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state), serving more than 9,600 students, participating in the laptop program. The state will continue to provide \$1 for every \$2 invested by the local school district toward the purchase of the laptops. The state's funding supports maintenance, infrastructure, and training for the laptop program.

## State policies

The following policies are detailed in state administrative rules<sup>73</sup>. As of this writing, the state Department of Education is currently in the process of writing additional administrative rules and clarifying their definition of distance courses. Once approved, these new rules are expected to go into place within two years.

## Funding

- Fee based rules are currently being proposed by advisory council. There is already separate government funding restricted to higher level courses and related to remote districts as determined by a "sparsity" formula.

## Governance, tracking, and accountability

- State DOE is certifying DLPs to be listed on the website through an application and review process. The certified DLPs are required to report on the type of courses offered, the number and names of districts served, number of course registrations, completion rates, and other information. The certification applies to any DLPs, including the already existing Digital Interactive Academic Link (DIAL) program. The certification only applies to programs originating from outside the school district being served.
- State will require proctored exams.

## Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- DLPs are required to ensure that the instruction provided is aligned with South Dakota academic achievement standards and in the case of a student with disabilities, will coordinate with the district to assure that instruction is consistent with the student's individualized education program.
- Distance learning instructional staff will have the same qualifications as teachers in a traditional physical school.
- Distance learning instructional staff must annually demonstrate proficiency in delivering instruction using the distance learning provider's delivery system. South Dakota will not require DLPs to use any particular LMS over another.
- Current professional development for instructional staff delivering coursework in the distance learning environment is offered by the distance learning provider. Instructional staff shall demonstrate proficiency in current methods of delivering distance instruction.

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<sup>73</sup> From South Dakota administrative rules specific to distance learning and the virtual school retrieved from <http://legis.state.sd.us/rules/DisplayRule.aspx?Rule=24:43:12>

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## 7.12 Wisconsin

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | No     |  |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Several online charter schools, district, and multi-district online programs |
| State-level policy    | No     | No but the DPI and WCON have drafted policy recommendations                  |

Wisconsin has numerous district and multi-district programs and online charter schools (see partial list below). District online programs are not tracked or regulated by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Charter schools in Wisconsin are authorized primarily by school districts. In 1997 UW-Milwaukee, the Milwaukee Area Technical College and the Milwaukee Common Council became approved authorizers. Charters are governed by charter school laws and while they are exempt from most state requirements, they are accountable in three major areas: (1) student performance (i.e., state assessments), (2) fiscal management, and (3) adherence to their contracts and the charter school law. Wisconsin's open enrollment law allows students to attend any public school in the state by transferring funds between school districts.

DPI, in consultation with a committee comprised of educators from around the state, initially created a set of recommendations for online policies in early 2001. In 2004, the Wisconsin Collaborative Online Network (WCON), an online education stakeholder group created its own set of recommendations for online education standards and policies.<sup>74</sup> In June 2005, State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster invited many of the same virtual education advisers from WCON to build on their findings and further examine virtual schools and online learning in public PK–12 schools in Wisconsin, conduct public hearings, and report to the DPI. As of August 2007, a draft of the DPI recommendations based on the Advisory Group work has been published, but no final report or formal regulations or laws have been created.

### Online programs

- Wisconsin Virtual School opened in fall of 2000 and serves grades 6-12. WVS is a program offered by CESA 9 (a cooperative educational services agency) in northern Wisconsin. Districts contract with them to enroll their local students on an individual basis in online courses taught by Wisconsin teachers under contract with CESA 9. In 2006-2007 WIVS had between 2,000-3,000 course registrations, attracting students across multiple states. The school is funded by course fees and state alternative education grants. Local districts decide whether to accept credit for online course work.
- Wisconsin Connections Academy is a public charter school for grades k-8 in the Appleton Areas School District.
- Appleton eSchool is an online charter high school that opened in the Fall 2002.
- Kiel eSchool is an online charter school serving students 7-12 that also opened in the Fall 2002.

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<sup>74</sup> Available at <http://www.wcon.info/wconpolicies.html>

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- Wisconsin Virtual Academy is a full-time public school aligned with K12, Inc. and chartered by the Northern Ozaukee School District. WVS currently enrolls grades k-8, however, beginning in 2007-2008, high school students can enroll in the affiliated Honors High Online of Wisconsin.
  - iQ Academies of Wisconsin is a full-time public, virtual, charter high school chartered by the Waukesha School District.
  - Grantsburg Virtual School opened in Fall 2004 and serves grades 6-12 statewide.
  - Wisconsin eSchool Network formed as a non-profit organization during the 2006-2007 school year as a means for local online schools and programs to share resources and experiences and is profiled in section 2. The Network currently includes charters and programs in eight school districts across the state, and had over 800 enrollments in grades 6-12 during the 2006-2007 school year. Over 3,000 enrollments are projected for the 2007-2008 school year as the new Network Partners fully implement their online learning opportunities. The schools are funded through public FTE funds at the same rate as brick and mortar schools and sometimes through federal charter school implementation grants.

## State policies

State policies regulating online programs in Wisconsin are primarily charter school law.

### Funding

- Wisconsin's open enrollment law allows parents and students to choose any public school in the state, including online charter schools.
- Through open enrollment funding, approximately \$5,500 is paid by the resident district to the non-resident district in which the student attends school. The resident district in turn is allowed to count the student for aid and revenue limit purposes.
- For special-needs students, there are two steps to calculating payments. First, the resident district owes the non-resident district the regular education open enrollment transfer amount. Second, the non-resident district is allowed to charge only the actual additional special education costs above the regular education state-led open enrollment transfer amount that is required to implement the student's special education program and related services required by the student's individualized education program (IEP).
- There are no limits on students who were formerly home-schooled enrolling in online charter schools and receiving public education funding.

### Quality Assurance, teaching and curriculum

- Courses must align with state content standards.
- Teachers must be licensed by DPI and certified in the subject area in which they are teaching. A charter school license permits a teacher to teach more than one subject, however instructors must be certified in their core subject area.
- Charter schools must participate in the annual School Performance Report.

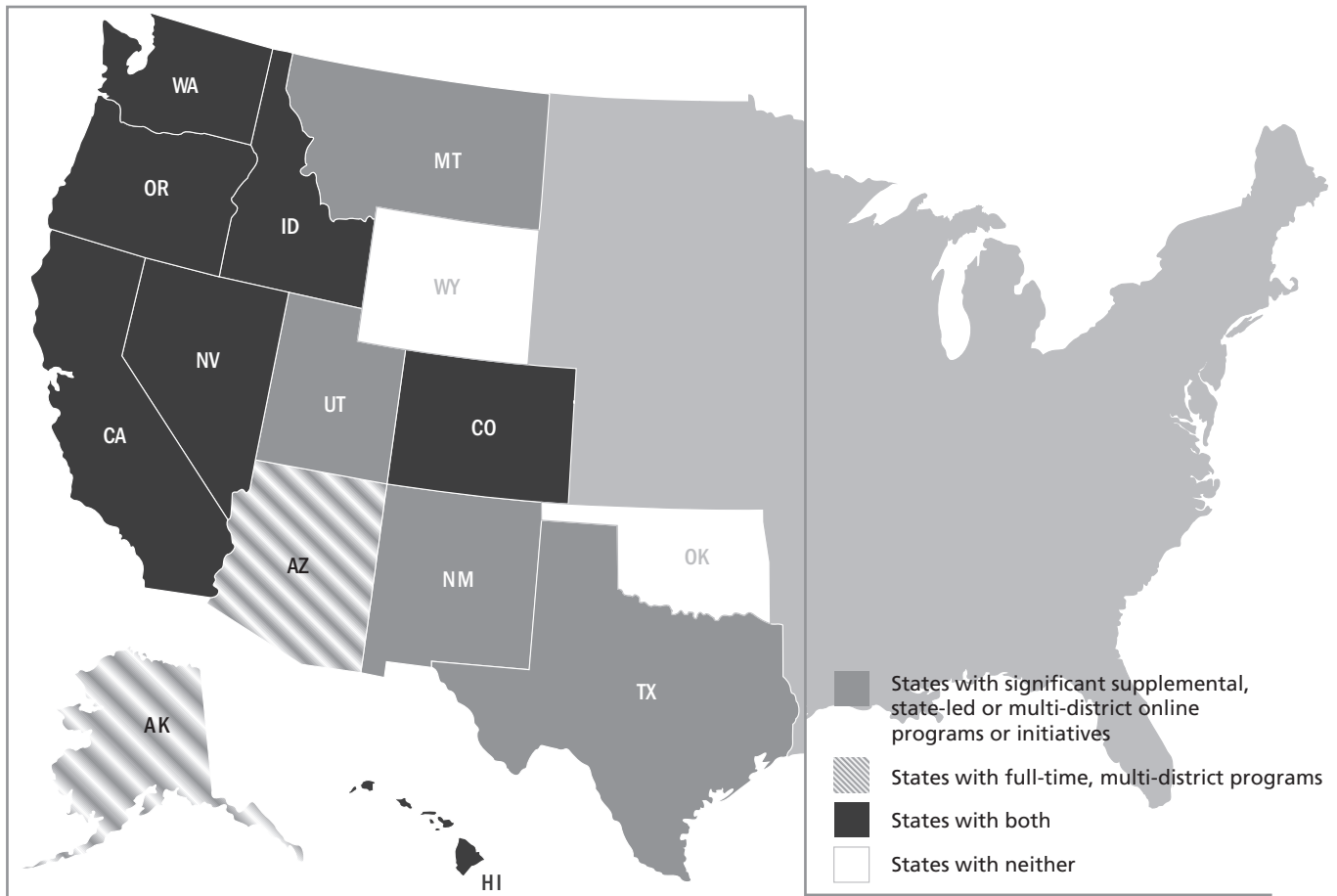
- 
- There are no requirements for content, teaching, or professional development that are specific to online programs.

## Governance, tracking and accountability

- In their petitions, all charter schools must explain the methods that will be used to help students reach the educational goals spelled out in Wisconsin law and must define how student progress will be measured.



# Western states



## Alaska

Some district programs; at least one online charter school.

## Arizona

Technology assisted project-based instruction program has 14 schools offering online courses including seven charter schools; a bill to expand the program was passed but vetoed by the governor.

## California

Many district programs and online charter schools; University of California College Prep is a state-led initiative.

## Colorado

State audit released in December 2006 led to passage of state law in 2007 creating new online division within the Department of Education and far-reaching oversight mechanisms.

## Hawaii

ESchool is state-led program; new online charter applications anticipated.

## Idaho

Idaho Digital Learning Academy is state-led program; several other online charters and district programs; audit of full-time programs in 2007 noted lack of online policies.

## Montana

Many supplemental district programs and an online learning consortium; Department of Education has distance education standards.

## Nevada

Online charter schools and district online programs including the large Clark County Virtual High School; Nevada Revised Statutes set distance education program requirements.

## New Mexico

State-led New Mexico Cyber Academy is in development.

## Oklahoma

State code sets simple distance learning guidelines.

## Oregon

Law in 2005 created Oregon Virtual School District, several district programs and one statewide online charter school.

## Texas

New legislation passed in 2007 to create "virtual learning network;" Electronic Course Pilot and district programs.

## Utah

Utah Electronic School is state-led program, Utah Online Academies is a consortium of districts.

## Washington

District programs serving statewide, no charter school law, extensive state rules governing online learning.

## Wyoming

A few small district programs, distance education task force releasing recommendations in winter 2007.

## 8.1 Alaska

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | No     |  |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Delta Cyber School is fully online; other charter schools and district programs offer a few online courses and/or online curriculum provided by K12. <sup>75</sup> |
| State-level policy    | No     |  |

Alaska's state-approved charter schools have historically offered correspondence courses to support home-schooled students, and increasingly these courses are being offered online. There are six schools that K12, Inc. lists in Alaska as using its online curriculum; these are not full-time charter schools. One fully online charter school is the Delta Cyber School. It operates out of the Delta/Greely School District, and is available to students ages 5-19. It is free of charge to any Alaskan student not attending another public school; however, tuition-based courses are also available for public school students.<sup>76</sup>

## 8.2 Arizona

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led program     | No     |   |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Fourteen online programs in the technology assisted project-based instruction program (TAPBI) |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | Legislation created and updated TAPBI   |

In 2003, Arizona passed legislation creating the technology assisted project-based instruction (TAPBI) program,<sup>77</sup> a pilot program that in 2006 consisted of seven public schools and seven charter schools<sup>78</sup> offering online courses. The legislation was updated in 2005.<sup>79</sup> In 2007 Arizona Governor Napolitano vetoed Senate Bill 1019, which would have increased the number of TAPBI school sites by two charter schools and two district schools. The Governor indicated that the results of a state audit of TAPBI should be considered before the program is expanded.<sup>80</sup> The state audit is due to be released November 2007.

### State polices

Schools participating in the program receive public funding and must provide an annual report describing the program and how student achievement will be measured. Schools must also survey students annually and include survey information in their reports. The State Board of Education is to compile the information from the pilot program reports and report to the legislature on the effectiveness and cost of the pilot program.

<sup>75</sup> The Alaska Online Consortium from past years appears to no longer exist; its website is no longer up and an email sent to a contact at the Consortium was returned as undeliverable.

<sup>76</sup> <http://www.dcs.k12.ak.us/about.html?section=general>

<sup>77</sup> Arizona Revised Statutes § 15-808 describing the program; retrieved July 18, 2006, from <http://www.ade.az.gov/technology/StateStatuteonDL.pdf>.

<sup>78</sup> Participating schools, listed at <http://www.ade.state.az.us/stateboard/tapbi.asp>

<sup>79</sup> Arizona Senate Bill 1422; retrieved July 31, 2006, from <http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/47leg/1r/bills/sb1422h.pdf>

<sup>80</sup> Newsletter retrieved August 5, 2007 from

<http://www.asbcs.state.az.us/pdf/Newsletter/2007%20Board%20Briefs/6-11-07%20FINAL.pdf>

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## Online programs

There are 14 participants in the TAPBI program, made up of both charter schools and school districts. There were over 15,000 students participating in the TAPBI schools during the 2005-2006 school year. Reported test scores for TAPBI students are slightly above state averages in reading and language and slightly below in math and writing.<sup>81</sup>

TAPBI charter schools are Arizona Connections Academy, Arizona Virtual Academy, Kids at Hope Online Academy, Humanities & Sciences of the United States, Pinnacle Education, and Primavera Technical Learning Center. School districts participating in TAPBI are Lake Havasu, Marana, Peoria, Tucson, Tempe Union High School District, Deer Valley, Mesa, and Arizona Distance Learning School.

## Funding

- Online schools receive standard FTE student funding, no more than 1.0 FTE.
- FTE funding may be split between a pilot program school and another charter school or district based on the time the student spends in each.
- For funding purposes, programs must maintain a daily student log describing the amount of time spent by each pupil on academic tasks.
- 80% of the students accepted into a school must have previously been public school students.

## Governance, tracking, and accountability

- Each school must provide an annual report to the state that describes numerous aspects of the program, including student and parent surveys, and a description of the cost-effectiveness of the program, and information on students' academic advancement.
- The state auditor will complete a performance audit of the project by November 2007.
- Students must participate in state assessments; if a student does not take the state assessment and the school has less than 95% participation in the assessments, the student may not continue in the online program.

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<sup>81</sup> Student numbers and test score information; retrieved August 6, 2007, from [http://az.gov/webapp/portal/SiteSearch?sitehome=http%3A%2F%2Fazed.gov&sitename=ADE&returnlink=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ade.state.az.us%2Fstateboard%2Ftapbi.asp&template=http%3A%2F%2Fazed.gov%2FSearch\\_Results.asp&q=cache:qFahu9EBMPAJ:www.azed.gov/stateboard/minutes/2006/12-04-06.pdf+TAPBI&access=p&output=xml\\_no\\_dtd&ie=UTF-8&client=azportal&oe=UTF-8&proxystylesheet=azportal](http://az.gov/webapp/portal/SiteSearch?sitehome=http%3A%2F%2Fazed.gov&sitename=ADE&returnlink=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ade.state.az.us%2Fstateboard%2Ftapbi.asp&template=http%3A%2F%2Fazed.gov%2FSearch_Results.asp&q=cache:qFahu9EBMPAJ:www.azed.gov/stateboard/minutes/2006/12-04-06.pdf+TAPBI&access=p&output=xml_no_dtd&ie=UTF-8&client=azportal&oe=UTF-8&proxystylesheet=azportal)

## 8.3 California

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led initiative  | Yes    | University of California College Prep  |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Numerous online charter schools and district programs  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | Most online programs are governed by independent study regulations that cover all non-classroom based instruction. Charter laws also apply to some programs. |

California has extensive online education activity, including a state-led initiative and roughly 25 online charter schools and district programs, many of which are supplemental. Online learning is regulated via a combination of laws and regulations that are explained below. The Online Learning Classroom Pilot Program was created in 2004 and officially ended at the start of 2007. As of August 2007 there is a bill in the California Legislature to extend the program, and perhaps expand it significantly. If the law does not pass, or if it significantly changes the requirements of the program, some provisions discussed below may not be current.

### Online programs

The University of California College Prep (UCCP) is funded by the state and run out of the University of California Santa Cruz. UCCP began as a response to the lack of availability of AP courses in many high schools across California, and grew to offer a wide variety of high school courses. As of August 2007 UCCP has had personnel changes that have forced it to cut back its offerings, and for Fall 2007 it is offering its course content through various channels but not offering instructed, teacher-led courses.

California also has numerous online charter schools and district online programs. These include:

- California Virtual Academies, a network of online charter schools affiliated with the private company K12, Inc. The schools are in San Diego, Kern, Kings, Jamestown, Sonoma, Sutter, and San Mateo.
- Capistrano Connections Academy (CapoCA) is an online charter school serving Orange, San Diego, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Riverside counties; it is profiled in section 2. A sister school, Central California Connections Academy, serves Tulare, Fresno, King, Kern, and Inyo counties.
- RAI Digital High School and Choice 2000 are online charter schools that offer synchronous courses. eScholar Academy serves students grades 3-12 with self-paced courses based on mastery of the subject area.
- The Los Angeles Virtual Academy and Pacific Coast High School are online high school programs that use a blended delivery model with asynchronous, synchronous, and traditional classroom content delivery methods.
- Online Classroom Pilot Program Districts: AB294 established a pilot program of school sites offering online courses. In 2006 the California Department of Education reported nine participating districts with a total of about 1800 students taking supplemental online courses from their schools.

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In addition to these schools that were in place in 2006-2007, several new online charter schools are planned for 2007-2008 and it appears that California will see significant growth in the number of online students.

## State policies<sup>82</sup>

Online programs in California are governed by one or two of three sets of laws and regulations: AB294, passed in 2003, which created a three-year classroom online education “pilot program,” allowing 40 supplemental online programs to collect funding based on average daily attendance (ADA) for up to two online courses, provided the student attends school for a minimum of 180 minutes per day. The pilot program officially ended at the start of 2007 but may be renewed or expanded.

- Independent study regulations for all non-classroom based instruction.
- Charter school laws, some of which are specific to online programs (see SB740, below) and others that are not.

The AB294 classroom online pilot program schools offer online programs in the school setting, so are not subject to the non-classroom based instruction regulations. Online charter schools are governed by charter school law and the independent study provisions.

## Funding

- Online curriculum may be presented either in a classroom setting or through independent study; the appropriate method of attendance accounting for such classes is dependent upon the instructional setting utilized.
- For online courses in a classroom setting, in which students are under the “immediate supervision and control” of a teacher, regular ADA funding applies through the provisions of AB294. For online courses at a distance, the instruction is considered non-classroom based and independent study provisions apply.

## Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

Non-classroom based online courses are subject to independent study provisions, including that the student-teacher ratio for independent study cannot exceed the ratio of classroom-based students to classroom-based teachers. “Independent study is an alternative instructional strategy, not an alternative curriculum. Students work independently, according to a written agreement and under the general supervision of a credentialed teacher.”<sup>83</sup>

Online charter schools are governed in part by provisions of SB740, passed in 2001, which require a charter school to:

- Spend 80% or more of total revenues on instruction;
- Spend 40% or more of public revenues on certificated staff salaries and benefits;

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<sup>82</sup> This section based on the report *The State of Online Learning in California: A Look at Current K-12 Policies and Practices*, published by the University of California College Prep Online, 2006; retrieved August 1, 2007, from <http://www.uccp.org/online/SOLC.pdf>

<sup>83</sup> Independent study requirements are complex, and explained in documents available at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/eo/is/>

- Have a pupil-teacher ratio equal or lower than 25:1 or equal to or lower than the pupil-teacher ratio in the largest unified school district in the county or counties in which the school operates.

In 2005, however, new regulations were created<sup>84</sup> that allow schools to avoid the pupil-teacher ratio provisions of the law if the school “has and maintains an 8 or above Academic Performance Index (API) rank in either its statewide or similar schools ranking and has no less than a 6 in the other of these two rankings.” In this case the school must spend at least 85% of its budget on instruction but is freed from other expenditure requirements. Other elements of the law include:

- Instruction must include “standards-based guided lessons, lesson plans, initial testing of students, [and] periodic assessment of student achievement...”
- Each student must have an individualized learning plan;
- All students must be given “access to a computer, Internet service, printer, monitor, and standards-aligned materials based on State Board adopted academic content standards for each grade level and for each subject studied;” and
- All students eligible for special education services must receive these services, and the charter school must recruit a student population with ethnic and racial representation similar to the counties served by the program.

## 8.4 Colorado<sup>85</sup>

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments                                       |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Colorado Online Learning                       |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Numerous district programs and charter schools |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | SB215 and HB1066 passed in 2007                |

Colorado has a state-led supplemental program, numerous full-time programs with over 9,000<sup>86</sup> full-time students, and extensive policy activity. In December 2006 the Office of the State Auditor released an audit reviewing full-time online programs and the performance of the State Department of Education in overseeing online programs.<sup>87</sup> The audit questioned the practices of several full-time online programs and the oversight capability of the Department of Education. The Trujillo Commission, formed in response to the audit, captured the audit’s findings in its report:<sup>88</sup>

“Auditors found that state oversight of online programs was lacking in numerous ways. Auditors reported that the Colorado Department of Education...did not effectively use the accreditation process to maintain oversight of school districts. Some school districts did not

<sup>84</sup> Title 5. EDUCATION, Division 1. California Department of Education, Subchapter 13. Independent Study, Article 3. Provisions Unique to Charter Schools; retrieved August 1, 2007, from [www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr05/documents/bluejul05item37a2.doc](http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr05/documents/bluejul05item37a2.doc)

<sup>85</sup> Dr. Timothy Snyder of Aurora, Colorado, provided information used in this profile.

<sup>86</sup> According to the Colorado Department of Education fall 2006 student count, available at [www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/download/PDF/2006PM/District/06IPST.pdf](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/download/PDF/2006PM/District/06IPST.pdf)

<sup>87</sup> Retrieved May 31, 2007, from [http://www.leg.state.co.us/OSA/coauditor1.nsf/All/6D2762978BB1D6DF8725723E005ED7D4/\\$FILE/1768%20Online%20Ed%20Perf%20rel%20Dec%202006.pdf](http://www.leg.state.co.us/OSA/coauditor1.nsf/All/6D2762978BB1D6DF8725723E005ED7D4/$FILE/1768%20Online%20Ed%20Perf%20rel%20Dec%202006.pdf)

<sup>88</sup> The Trujillo Commission’s report; retrieved May 31, 2007, from <http://www.dkfoundation.org/PDF/TrujilloCommissionOnlineEducationFinalReport-2-15-2007.pdf>

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use their own accreditation processes. In some instances chartering processes were not effectively used to maintain adequate oversight of online programs. In some instances, individual schools did not maintain adequate oversight of their own program. In response to their findings, auditors suggested 16 recommendations to be considered for implementation by Colorado's Department of Education, State Board of Education, and General Assembly."

The State Board of Education also created a task force to respond to the audit's findings;<sup>89</sup> both the task force and the Trujillo Commission suggested recommendations for legislators who had requested the audit and expressed concerns about the lack of oversight of full-time online programs. In response, the legislature passed Senate Bill 215,<sup>90</sup> which made numerous changes to online education regulations. The new law in Colorado is among the most comprehensive online education oversight laws in any state. The key elements, among many details of the bill, are:

- A distinction between multi-district online programs and single-district programs; while both types of programs must submit an annual report to the CDE, the multi-district online programs are subject to greater oversight because the authorizers of multi-district programs must be state-certified as demonstrating capacity to run an online program.
- A requirement that online programs that use physical facilities in which students meet enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the school district in which the physical facility is located
- Removal of the existing prohibition on funding online students who were not public school students in the prior year, as of June 2008
- A requirement that all online programs report annually to the state

Other important provisions of the law include:

- Creation of an online division within the Colorado Department of Education that will certify authorizers;
- Creation of an online education advisory board;
- Requirement that the online division and State Board of Education create quality standards for online programs; and that the state board consider including the quality standards in accreditation requirements; and
- Requirement that school districts and online programs share information about students who transfer between programs within 30 days of notice.

A second online education law was also passed in Colorado. House Bill 1066 provides \$480,000 to fund a board of cooperative educational services (BOCES) to contract with a provider of supplemental online courses to provide online courses to school districts across the state for no more than \$200 per student per semester. The law does not mention a specific provider. Colorado Online Learning (COL), a 501(c)3 organization that grew out of

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<sup>89</sup> Retrieved May 31, 2007, from <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdecomm/download/pdf/OnlineReportInterimReport.pdf>

<sup>90</sup> Retrieved May 31, 2007, from [http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2007a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont/E4DFB9DF18308CC487257251007C783E?Open&file=215\\_enr.pdf](http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2007a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont/E4DFB9DF18308CC487257251007C783E?Open&file=215_enr.pdf)

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the Colorado Online School Consortium in response to a series of task forces created by the state over several years, was selected as the statewide provider by the Mountain BOCES at the conclusion of its RFP process. COL is profiled in section 2.

## Online programs

In addition to COL, the 2006 state audit identified 18 full-time online programs and the 2006 pupil count included 9,150 online students. Programs include:

- Colorado Virtual Academy, a K12, Inc. school chartered by the Adams 12 district
- Denver Connections Academy, a full-time program run by Denver Public Schools in partnership with Connections Academy, with 400 students in 2006-2007
- Hope Online Learning Academy, chartered by the Vilas school district and with 1,500 students in 2005
- Branson Online, run by the Branson school district, with 1,080 students in 2005
- Vilas Online, also run by the Vilas school district, separate from Hope Academy, with about 370 students in October 2005

## State policies

State policies are based on Senate Bill 215 and HB1066, both passed in 2007.

## Funding

- Funding for all public school students in Colorado is based almost entirely on per-pupil revenue (PPR), an FTE funding model that sets a minimum level of funding, which is adjusted upward based on a number of factors for brick-and-mortar districts, but which remains at the state minimum for online students. PPR funding is limited to 1.0 FTE per student and may be split in half but not into smaller units. Most online students are funded at the state minimum PPR level.
- In cases where students are taking more than half of an FTE class load in two schools, the districts involved negotiate the payment split or, in rare cases, the split is determined by the Department of Education.
- Single-district online schools get funded at the district's regular PPR unless the student is taking more than 50% of courses online and at home, in which case the district receives the state minimum.
- No official policy exists for determining a seat-time equivalent for online students.
- State law has prohibited online schools from obtaining PPR funds for students in grades two and higher who were not enrolled in a public school in the previous school year, unless the students receive a special-needs exemption. This prohibition will end after the 2007-2008 school year.
- The state is funding a supplemental online course provider at \$480,000 per year for three years starting in 2007-2008. The funds will go to the Mountain BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services), which will request proposals from online course providers.



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## Governance, tracking, and accountability

- An online division has been created within the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) which will oversee online programs.
- Multi-district program authorizers must be certified by the CDE; single district programs do not require certification.
- All online programs must adhere to quality standards that will be created by CDE.
- All online programs must report to the CDE annually.
- SB215 creates an online education advisory board that will report annually to the State Board of Education.
- The supplemental online program funding provided by HB1066 requires an annual report to the legislature noting number of students taking courses, completion rates, and other information.

## Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- The CDE Online Division will create quality standards, including “standards-based curricula and data-driven instructional practices,” to be used in accreditation and program reporting.
- Multi-district program authorizers must demonstrate capacity to oversee online program curriculum and instruction.

## 8.5 Hawaii

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Hawaii Department of Education's E-School                 |
| Other online programs | No     | Online charter schools being considered as of August 2007 |
| State-level policy    | No     |   |

The Hawaii Department of Education's E-School is a supplemental, credit granting program offering courses to grades 9-12.<sup>91</sup> E-School has 200 to 400 students per semester coming from 30 to 48 secondary schools in the Hawaii DOE school system. Students come from public schools or charter schools, but students from private schools or who are homeschooled may only take courses during the summer school session. During the regular school year there is no charge/tuition for courses. All students pay the regular fee-based charges for courses offered during summer school.

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<sup>91</sup> <http://165.248.2.18/>

## 8.6 Idaho

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Idaho Digital Learning Academy  |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Four programs with 3,600 students identified by state audit   |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | No legislative response to the audit as of August 2007, but an existing statute addresses “technological instruction” |

Idaho has a state-led program, the Idaho Digital Learning Academy, four full-time online charter schools with a total of about 3,600 students, and one school, the Idaho Leadership Academy, which is not a charter school and operates both on-site and online. In March 2007 the Office of Performance Evaluations of the Idaho Legislature released an audit of the online charter schools. The audit discusses how online charter schools are recognized and defined in charter school law, and the lack of any similar definition or recognition of online programs that are not charter schools. It states:

“Staff at the Department of Education are not aware of any other school in Idaho offering [an online] program [other than the online charter schools]...However, the department does not have a process for determining whether any other school is offering a virtual program. Commission staff are also not aware of any other school offering virtual programs, but stated they would only be aware of a virtual program offered at a school they authorized... Currently, state law does not appear to prohibit a school from offering a virtual or distance program. However, they are not subject to the same approval and oversight as the virtual schools discussed in this report... Virtual charter schools in Idaho operate under a framework of state laws, rules, and other oversight mechanisms. Virtual schools are not required to comply with most rules made by the State Board of Education, but must comply with the general education laws of the state and the rules and laws that specifically apply to charter schools. Initial oversight of virtual schools occurs throughout the petition approval process. The Public Charter School Commission and the state accreditation process provide some ongoing oversight of virtual schools in operation. However, neither the approval nor oversight processes address key areas related to virtual education: curriculum development, delivery of instruction, and student-teacher contact...This framework of laws and rules is consistent with federal charter school policy that focuses...on educational outcomes and allows charter schools flexibility..”

In addition to charter school requirements, online schools are required to be accredited according to standards developed by the state or by the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools. There are no accreditation requirements specific to online schools. The audit concludes with several recommendations, including defining virtual public schools, requiring that all online charter schools be authorized by the Public Charter School Commission, and requiring all online schools to report annually. As of August 2007 these recommendations have not been passed by the legislature.

### Online programs

As of March 2007 the state audit identified six online programs. Four are full-time charter schools with a total of 3,600 students: Idaho Distance Education Academy, Idaho Virtual Academy, INSPIRE Connections Academy, and Richard McKenna Charter High School. Two other online programs are the Idaho Leadership Academy and the Idaho Digital Learning Academy. IDLA is the state-led supplemental program and is profiled in section 2.

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## State policies

The policies and quotes in this section are based on two laws: charter school law<sup>92</sup> and a statute addressing “technological instruction.”<sup>93</sup>

### Funding

- Charter schools, including online charters, are funded based on average daily attendance and a specific formula.
- Funding of students who were previously home schooled is not recognized as a concern within the charter school law. There is no limitation on FTE funding of these students.
- Districts offering distance learning programs may count students’ time in an online course for ADA funding purposes. They are not allowed to claim more ADA funding than the FTE of a regular term of attendance for a single student.
- For students in distance learning programs, “a school district may use documented contact hours... in determining the district’s average daily attendance (ADA), whether the student is actually in the computer lab or distance learning center, or has logged onto the computer from another location.”

### Governance, tracking, and accountability

All schools in Idaho must be accredited by the Department of Education, including online schools; therefore the department has a list of online learning programs. The accreditation process, however, does not have standards or processes specific to online programs.

### Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- Online charter schools, as with all charter schools in Idaho, must describe:
  - “The measurable student educational standards identified for use by the... school.”
  - “The method by which student progress in meeting those student educational standards is to be measured.”
  - “A provision by which students of the charter school will be tested with the same standardized tests as other Idaho public school students.”
- All charter schools must meet state accreditation standards that include curriculum quality indicators; these are not specific to online courses.
- Charter schools are required to have certified teachers, unless a waiver or limited-certification option is granted by the State Board of Education.
- “The certification requirements for... a distance learning program may be met by having a properly certificated teacher available on a consultant tutorial basis. The consultant tutors will be available by telephone, fax, e-mail, or in person at the school site on a daily basis.”

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<sup>92</sup> Idaho Statutes Title 33, Chapter 52; retrieved June 11, 2007, from <http://www3.state.id.us/idstat/TOC/33052KTOC.html>

<sup>93</sup> <http://www3.state.id.us/cgi-bin/newidst?sctid=330100003C.K>

## 8.7 Montana

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | No     |  |
| Other online programs | Yes    | No charter school law, but several district programs   |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | Senate Bill 359; Montana Distance Learning Standard A.R.M. 10.55.907 <sup>94</sup> amended in May 2007 |

In 2006 the Montana State Board of Public Education established a Distance Learning Task Force to address issues of distance learning and report in multiple phases. In May 2007, based on recommendations made by the task force in phase I, the state amended its administrative rules to, among other requirements, require that either the teacher delivering the online course or a local facilitator for students in online courses be licensed or endorsed by the state of Montana in the area of instruction taught. This provision will not go into effect until July 1, 2009. The state also requires distance learning providers to register with the state and provide program and course descriptions, including demonstrating that students have “ongoing contact” with the online teacher, and verifying the qualifications of teachers. The Distance Learning Task Force will convene again for phase II in October of 2007 to further examine issues including program models, quality assurance, funding, professional development and more.

Montana also has the Montana Schools E-Learning Consortium<sup>95</sup>, a group of districts working together to provide online learning opportunities using properly licensed educators through a self-funded, member-governed, state-wide program. In June 2006, it was reported that there were 40 school districts involved in the MSEL, representing 40% of the state’s k-12 public school enrollment.<sup>96</sup>

### State policies

Montana policy states that districts may receive or provide distance learning, and may receive supplemental distance learning instruction “without restriction.”

### Funding

- Effective July 1, 2006 students enrolled at district expense in online, distance or technology delivered education are included when calculating “average number belonging” (ANB) for school districts used for calculating state entitlements.<sup>97</sup>
- Montana allows school districts to report to Office of Public Instruction (OPI) the students who took distance learning courses during the year but were not enrolled on the official count dates. Information reported is used to determine the additional ANB the district is qualified to budget for the ensuing year.

<sup>94</sup> Section 907, <http://www.opi.mt.gov/pdf/arm/55chapter.pdf>

<sup>95</sup> [www.mselc.org](http://www.mselc.org)

<sup>96</sup> [http://www.house.gov/list/press/mt00\\_rehberg/061906\\_MSEL.html](http://www.house.gov/list/press/mt00_rehberg/061906_MSEL.html)

<sup>97</sup> Montana Senate Bill 359, retrieved August 1, 2006, <http://data.opi.state.mt.us/bills/2005/billhtml/SB0359.htm>

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## Governance, tracking, and accountability

All providers or coordinating entities of distance, online, and technology delivered learning will annually:

- Register with the Montana Office of Public Instruction
- Identify all Montana school districts to whom they are delivering distance, online, and technology delivered programs and courses
- Verify the professional qualifications of course teachers
- Provide course descriptions, including content and delivery model, for each program and/or course
- Demonstrate that students have ongoing contact with the distance learning teachers

## Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- “School districts receiving distance, online, and technology delivered learning programs described in this rule shall have a distance learning facilitator as provided in this rule assigned for each course and available to the students.
- When a teacher of distance, online, and technology delivered learning programs and/or courses is not licensed and endorsed as provided in this rule, the facilitator must be licensed and endorsed in Montana in the area of instruction facilitated.
- When a teacher of distance, online, and technology delivered learning programs is licensed and endorsed in the area of instruction, as provided in this rule, the receiving school district’s facilitator shall be a licensed teacher or a para-educator.
- “The school district must see to it that the facilitator receives in-service training on technology delivered instruction...”
- “A school district shall provide a report to the Office of Public Instruction documenting how it is meeting the needs of students under the accreditation standards who are taking a majority of courses during each grading period via distance, online, and/or technology-delivered programs.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Page 33 of the Distance Learning Task Force Phase I final report, <http://bpe.mt.gov/pdf/Distance%20Learning%20Final%20Report.pdf>

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## 8.8 Nevada

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | No     |  |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Online charter schools and district online programs                  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | Nevada Revised Statutes set distance education program requirements. |

Nevada has online charter schools and district online programs. The state is unique in that 70% of its students are in one district, the Clark County School District, whose Virtual High School is profiled in section 2. The state also has policies governing distance education, which include video and online delivery and are discussed in the following section. Policies governing distance education apply to both district programs and charter schools

### Online programs

Other programs include:

- Silver State Charter High School accepts full-time students from most or all districts across the state. In the 2006-2007 school year, SSCHS had between one and two-thousand course registrations and between 250-500 unique students. 83% of enrolled students are considered “at risk” and between 31-45% of enrollments are for credit-recovery. Students attend synchronous courses in a cohort and are required to meet with a teacher at a school once a week.
- Odyssey Charter School serves grades k-12, is authorized by the Clark County School District and is profiled in section 2.
- Nevada Connections Academy, a full-time program run in partnership with Connections Academy, was authorized by the State Board of Education in March 2007 and will enroll students in grades 4-11 beginning in Fall 2007.
- The Nevada Virtual Academy is a public charter school authorized by the Nevada State Board of Education and partnership with K12, Inc. It is scheduled to open in the Fall 2007, serving students in grades 4-8.

### State polices

Nevada online education policies set forth programmatic and reporting requirements have the state maintain a list of courses and programs that meet its requirements, allow the state to review or audit distance programs, and allow the state to revoke its approval of a distance education program that does not meet the requirements. Unless otherwise noted, the following information is taken from Nevada Revised Statutes,<sup>99</sup> with quotes from the Nevada Department of Education web page on distance learning.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Retrieved September 6, 2007, from <http://www.leg.state.nv.us/nrs/NRS-388.html> and <http://www.leg.state.nv.us/NAC/NAC-388.html>  
<sup>100</sup> <http://www.doe.nv.gov/techinn/disted.html>

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## Funding

Students must get permission from their own school district before taking part in another school district's online program. This allows FTE funding to go to the school district offering the online program. If the student is taking online courses as part of the school day, the two districts agree to the apportionment of funds. The written agreement must be filed with the state to allow the student funding to go to the district providing the instruction. Similar provisions apply to charter schools and for agreements between districts and charter schools.

## Governance, tracking, and accountability

Each online program must report the following to the state each year:

- A program description including program expenditures;
- The number of part-time and full-time students;
- "If available, a description of the reasons why pupils enrolled in the program;"
- "A description of any disciplinary measures taken against pupils who were enrolled in the program;" and
- "An analysis of the academic achievement and performance of the pupils who were enrolled in the program before and after the pupils participated in the program."

## Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- Teachers of core academic courses must be licensed in the state of Nevada.
- The teacher must meet with or otherwise communicate with the pupil at least once each week during the course to discuss the pupil's progress.
- "If a program of distance education is provided for pupils on a full-time basis, the program must include at least as many hours or minutes of instruction as would be provided under a program consisting of 180 days."

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## 8.9 New Mexico

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led initiative  | Yes    | New Mexico Cyber Academy (pilot Spring 2008)  |
| Other online programs | Yes    | On limited scale, some school districts are using various vendor or home grown solutions for their students. State rule funds districts for only students that live in their district, but schools can choose to contract outside solutions with their funding. |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | State code in place since 2000 sets distance learning guidelines; SB 209, passed in Spring 2007, created the statewide Cyber Academy.   |

New Mexico has progressed in the past year in establishing its statewide eLearning strategy facilitated through the New Mexico Learning Network (NMLN), an evolving statewide entity that encompasses the eLearning interest of k-12, higher education, government agencies, and workforce development. At least four new separate bills were passed impacting eLearning policy and funding. Significant funding was provided from the 2007 state legislature to support a Governor Richardson initiative entitled IDEAL-NM (Innovative Digital Education and Learning in NM). A related bill was the “Cyber Academy” act which provides the framework for a statewide virtual school.<sup>101</sup>

The NM Virtual School is planned to provide eLearning courses/teachers offered statewide in partnership with the local schools. Also planned for Fall 2008 is a statewide service center to provide technical help for a statewide eLearning delivery system (LMS and Web Conferencing) and administrative support for the statewide virtual school. The service center will also support an eLearning web portal for k-12, higher education, and government agency eLearning courses and programs ([www.nmln.net](http://www.nmln.net)).

In addition to the IDEAL-NM and NMLN projects, New Mexico has had a successful laptop program in place for approximately four years, the New Mexico Laptop Learning Initiative. The state has appropriated \$1.5 million to support this initiative in the coming year. Results from a recent survey among initiative participants have shown positive improvement in written materials, increase in teacher usage of technology, increase in student attendance and a decrease in truancy.<sup>102</sup>

### Online programs

The NM Virtual School is currently operating limited online course pilots and conducting eTeacher training with full operations targeted for Fall 2008.

### State policies<sup>103</sup>

New Mexico Administrative Code Title 6, Chapter 30, Part 8 establishes requirements for distance learning programs taken for credit or a grade by students enrolled in a school district or charter school. One intent of this rule was to strengthen small local schools by bringing new eLearning opportunities to students in partnership with the local school rather than extracting the funding for students in small communities.

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<sup>101</sup> Senate Bill 209, Cyber Academy Act; retrieved September 13, 2007, from <http://legis.state.nm.us/Sessions/07%20Regular/final/SB0209.pdf>

<sup>102</sup> Information regarding Laptop Initiative from individual conversation with Dr. Jim Holloway, New Mexico Public Education Department, Rural Education program.

<sup>103</sup> Unless otherwise credited, information in this section is based on New Mexico Administrative Code; retrieved August 2, 2007, from <http://www.nmcpr.state.nm.us/nmac/parts/title06/06.030.0008.pdf>



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The NMLN is a clearinghouse and support organization for all higher education institutions seeking to offer dual credit to NM high schools. Currently there are a number of local/regional relationships between high schools and colleges/universities. In January 2007, the state legislature passed a new dual credit law.<sup>104</sup>

## Funding

- \$7.5M was appropriated in FY 2007-2008 for an initiative (IDEAL-NM) to implement a statewide eLearning delivery system for k-12, higher education, and government agencies. Part of this funding (\$670,000) was earmarked to leverage this system to offer a statewide virtual school, currently named the New Mexico Cyber Academy.<sup>105</sup>

## Governance, tracking, and accountability

- Qualified distance learning students enrolled in asynchronous distance learning courses must log on to their computers a minimum of four times per week and certify that they are the enrolled student each time they log on to their computers.
- Students enrolled in synchronous distance learning courses shall log on to their computer at the scheduled class time and certify that they are the enrolled student.
- Students may only participate in distance learning courses with approval of local site coordinator based on school board criteria.
- Districts and charter schools shall establish written policies and procedures for monitoring student progress and graded assignments, which shall include requirements that students be physically present at the school in which they are enrolled at regularly scheduled intervals, as established by the site coordinator and student or parent, and demonstrate mastery of the subjects being learned.
- Only students regularly enrolled in a school district or charter school may participate in distance learning. Students must have a primary enrolling school district. For students in a non-public school setting, their school must have a contract with the school district in which their program is physically located in order for their students to participate in distance learning.

## Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- Districts and charter schools shall ensure that all courses taught by New Mexico school personnel are taught by an appropriately licensed and endorsed primary instructor, and that all courses taught by an out of state or university instructor are affiliated with an accredited provider.
- Local school boards are the sole credit granting authorities.
- The NM Virtual School (Cyber Academy) is designed to serve high school students throughout the state. The local school where the student physically attends will be required to provide an Instructional Supervisor and access to an Internet computer during the period(s) allocated for them to work on their asynchronous eLearning course(s). The students will also be able to access their weekly assignments outside of school if they have Internet access. The local school Instructional Supervisors will be in touch with the remote teacher as required.

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<sup>104</sup> Senate Bill 0943; retrieved August 30, 2007, from <http://legis.state.nm.us/Sessions/07%20Regular/final/SB0943.pdf>

<sup>105</sup> Detail provided in response to Keeping Pace 2007 survey completed by Brian Ormand, Program Director of New Mexico Learning Network.

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## 8.10 Oklahoma

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments   |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | No     |  |
| Other online programs | Yes    | University-sponsored   |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | State code in place since 2000 sets distance learning guidelines |

There are two university sponsored programs in Oklahoma. The Oklahoma State University/ K-12 Distance Learning Academy is a supplemental program offering a handful of courses. The University of Oklahoma Independent Learning High School, started in 2000, is supplemental but also has a diploma granting arm known as OU High School. Some of the more than 100 courses are online, many are correspondence.

### State policies

Oklahoma has formal policy that requires that local school boards develop policies for online courses, and provides a few guidelines, detailed below. Quotes are from state code.<sup>106</sup>

### Funding

Oklahoma funds its schools using Average Daily Membership. Local boards set policy for online learning which typically means districts pay for the online courses.

### Governance, tracking, and accountability

- The school board policy must address “monitoring of student progress, graded assignments, and testing.”
- Students in an online program must be “regularly enrolled” in the school district of the online program; however, a district may make an exception for students who have dropped out or have been suspended if they were Oklahoma public school students at any time in the previous three years.
- The state keeps track of local school board efforts through state accreditation.

### Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- Teachers “shall be provided in-service training” in distance learning technology.
- Each school must designate a staff member to serve as a local facilitator for students.
- The school must formally approve each student’s participation in an online course.
- Teachers do not have to be certified in Oklahoma; they may be certified in another state, or may be a faculty member at a postsecondary institution. Students in online courses must take the state assessments at “the school site at which the student is enrolled.”
- Local school board must set a policy for the number of students each instructor will have in an asynchronous course; in a synchronous course the number of students per class and per day is the same as in face-to-face courses.

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<sup>106</sup> Information in this section is based on Oklahoma State Code 210:35-21-2: Alternative Instructional Delivery Systems.

## 8.11 Oregon

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led initiative  | Yes    | Oregon Virtual School District                              |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Numerous district programs and one statewide online charter |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | SB 1071 created the Oregon Virtual School District.         |

Oregon has several district online programs, a consortium of districts providing online courses (Oregon Online), and a history of extensive discussions about online learning policy at the state level<sup>107</sup> that have resulted in the Oregon Virtual School District (OVSD). Senate Bill 1071,<sup>108</sup> passed in 2005, provides for the creation of the OVSD within the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). OVSD does not register students, but instead acts as a portal for finding and accessing courses and providers, as well as leading in developing future online learning policy in the state. The bill authorizes the State Board of Education to create rules under which the ODE will establish quality criteria and policies for the OVSD, including development and delivery of virtual content and teacher training. The portal includes an aggregated course catalog, links to registered online course providers, links to the OVSD-created course management system, pod casting services, video streaming services and a teacher professional development site. The ODE has also completed the purchase of 69 titles for online instruction and as supplemental teaching resources in classrooms through the OVSD Content Library.

Even before the creation of OVSD the state has had a well-developed distance learning infrastructure, both Internet-based and video-based. These programs continue to flourish as the state provides digital instruction resources to all districts.

### State policies

Online programs and schools are sponsored by school districts and are governed by their school district guidelines for operations and education delivery. There are also specific rules for public education providers of online learning when using the Oregon Virtual School District resources. These are outlined in Oregon Administrative Rule chapter 581, division 20.<sup>109</sup> Quotes in the policies listed below come from this rule.

### Online programs

The wide range of programs in the state include:

- Oregon Online is a program of Southern Oregon Education Service District that provides online courses to students, professional development for educators, and helps schools support and accommodate online teachers and learners.
- COOLSchool offers an array of online courses designed to complement local curriculum.

<sup>107</sup> See Distance Education in Oregon Policy Brief, October 2004, for a history of these efforts. [http://www.ode.state.or.us/initiatives/elearning/ecs\\_policybrieffinal.pdf](http://www.ode.state.or.us/initiatives/elearning/ecs_policybrieffinal.pdf)

<sup>108</sup> Retrieved August 22, 2007, from <http://www.leg.state.or.us/05reg/measpdf/sb1000.dir/sb1071.en.pdf>. Quotes in this section are taken from the law.

<sup>109</sup> Retrieved August 22, 2007, from [http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/rules/1206\\_Bulletin/1206\\_ch581\\_bulletin.html](http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/rules/1206_Bulletin/1206_ch581_bulletin.html)

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- Salem-Keizer Online offers Internet-based courses for high school students in math, science, lingual arts, social studies, health, and computer electives. SK Online also offers dual credit (high school/community college) for many of their courses, and a selection of middle school courses.
  - Corvallis Online (Corvallis Public Schools) offers classes for students with scheduling conflicts, acceleration or remediation needs, medical needs, a preference for self-directed learning, students who school privately or at home, and students seeking to recover credits.
  - Oregon Connections Academy (ORCA) is a statewide virtual charter school, chartered by Scio School District 95C, serving approximately 1,500 students in grades k-11 in 2006-2007.
  - OSU K-12 Online offers numerous high school courses in English, math, science, social science, health, world languages, arts, technology, family and consumer science, and career learning. These online courses are highly interactive and give students the opportunity to tap into the resources of Oregon State University from anywhere. OSU also offers dual-credit courses for high school students.
  - Portland State University Independent Study offers 40 high school correspondence courses in business, English, math, science and social science. All courses are available in printed format; the majority are also available online.

## Funding

- OVSD initially received \$2 million for two years beginning July 2005 in a fund separate from standard FTE funding. “The Oregon Virtual School District is not considered a school district for purposes of apportionment... of the State School Fund and the department may not receive a direct apportionment from the State School Fund for the Oregon Virtual School District.” The budget for two years beginning in July 2007 will transfer \$1.8 million from the State School Fund to continue funding OVSD operations.

## Governance, tracking, and accountability

- The ODE lists courses taught by Oregon educators and outside online course providers on its website.<sup>110</sup> OVSD also lists providers on its portal site.<sup>111</sup> Providers work directly with school districts for reporting annual yearly progress (AYP).
- Accountability is handled between providers and districts.

## Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- Teachers must be “properly licensed or registered.” Teacher licensing and professional development requirements are done by the Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission.
- “Student/Teacher Ratio. Online learning providers are required to have guidelines in place for reasonable student to instructor ratios that allow for regular, individualized interaction with instructors.”

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<sup>110</sup> <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=334>

<sup>111</sup> <http://orvsd.org/>

- “Student Teacher Interaction: Online learning providers are required to have guidelines in place for reasonable student to instructor communication that allow for, individualized interaction with instructors as needed. Communication includes, but is not limited to, electronic mail, online discussion groups, telephone interaction and face to face discussions between teacher and student.”
- “Timeframe for Teacher Response to Student Questions: Online learning providers are required to have guidelines in place for the time and process that teachers will provide prompt response to student inquiries and requests for assistance.”
- “Online Learning Providers are required to have policies for Teacher professional development. Teachers need to have appropriate training for the delivery of online instruction. Providers receiving public support must maintain Oregon teaching licensure for all teachers consistent with TSPC professional development requirements.”
- OVSD is also doing research and development of professional development plan for phased roll-out of OVSD offerings
- Courses must meet academic content standards. “Courses offered are governed by individual school district guidelines, including, but not limited to, courses meeting requirements for high school diploma, electives as well as supplementary instruction.”

## 8.12 Texas

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led initiative  | Yes    | A law was signed in June 2007 (Senate Bill 1788) establishing a state virtual school network. Over the past several years, the state has been implementing the Electronic Course Program (eCP). |
| Other online programs | Yes    | In addition to SB1788 and the eCP, online programs exist in a growing number of districts.  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | The eCP codified in Texas Education Code 29.909; SB1788 established the state virtual school network.   |

The Texas Senate Bill 1788, passed in May 2007, establishes a state virtual school network to provide education to students through electronic courses delivered via the Internet. It sets forth the operational, administrative, and funding requirements of the network. The bill defines provider school districts and their role within the network, and outlines the way in which provider school districts or schools can submit courses for evaluation, approval, and delivery through the network. The bill calls for the State Board Of Education to establish objective standard criteria for electronic courses offered through the network to ensure alignment with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). This has already been established in Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Chapter 74.23. The Commissioner may establish additional quality criteria. Implementation plans and timelines have not yet been determined.

Additionally, Texas is implementing the Electronic Course Program (eCP), which was designed to allow the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to gather data to develop and support recommendations to the legislature regarding online learning in the state. The eCP was

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created by Senate Bill 1108, passed in 2003, and is codified in Texas Education Code 29.909<sup>113</sup>. Implementation by districts selected to participate in the program began during the 2005-2006 school year.

Recognizing the educational opportunity that online learning offers students and educators across the state, the Texas State Board of Education incorporates online learning throughout its *Long-Range Plan for Technology 2006-2020* and includes it in key recommendations to all stakeholder groups. The Texas Education Agency Educational Technology Advisory Committee (ETAC) developed the Texas School Technology and Readiness (STaR) Chart, an online resource tool for teachers, campuses and districts to self-assess their efforts to effectively integrate technology across the curriculum. In 2006, online learning was added as one of six focus areas addressed in the Teacher and Campus Texas STaR Charts.

## Online programs

Texas authorizes all public schools to offer online courses to their students as state-funded supplemental programs. Districts may grant credit for a course if they have determined that the course meets or exceeds the state's curriculum standards for that content area. In order for the district to receive state funding students must meet the normal attendance accounting rules of the state. Texas does not have statewide online charter schools, but a growing number of districts are offering virtual courses or programs. The University of Texas and Texas Tech also offer online high school courses, but these are not funded by state k-12 education funds and the programs charge tuition.

## State policies

State policies explained below are based on the eCP.<sup>112</sup> As of August 2007 implementation plans and timelines for SB1788 were not determined.

## Funding

- Public school funding is based on average daily attendance (ADA), a full-time equivalency model based on seat time. To receive Foundation School Program (FSP) state funding for distance learning programs, schools must abide by the ADA standard, meaning students must be physically present to be eligible for state funding under normal attendance accounting rules. When a student enrolls and takes courses through a district participating in the eCP, the eCP district may then get FSP funding.
- The program allows districts participating in the eCP to offer online courses to students residing in other districts, per a written agreement between the districts.
- The FSP funding model is the only mechanism for districts to collect state funding. Only districts approved to participate in the eCP can collect FSP funding for students taking courses in a virtual setting. In order to be included in the program and be eligible to generate state funding, students must be enrolled in a public school district approved to participate in the eCP.

## Governance, tracking, and accountability

- The eCP has extensive reporting requirements for eCP participants.

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<sup>112</sup> Information on the Electronic Course Program is available at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/technology/ecp/>

<sup>113</sup> Retrieved September 11, 2007, from <http://tlo2.tlc.state.tx.us/statutes/docs/ED/content/html/ed.002.00.000029.00.htm>

- All students participating in the eCP must take course completion exams, as well as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), and AP exam (if applicable) at the regularly scheduled times.
- Electronic Course Program schools are required to physically proctor administration of these exams.

## Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- Online courses must meet the same standards as traditional courses. Courses must meet or exceed Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards in order for students to receive state credit for the courses. Schools may offer courses that do not meet TEKS for local credit. This decision is made at the local level.
- State Board of Education rules for high school science courses call for 40% hands-on wet lab experiences for students. eCP participants may apply for a waiver and propose alternative methods.

## 8.13 Utah

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments                                 |
|-----------------------|--------|--|
| State-led program     | Yes    | Utah Electronic High School              |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Utah Online Academies, district programs |
| State-level policy    | No     |  |

Utah has a state-led program, the Utah Electronic High School (EHS), but no other major online programs or online charter schools. Four districts form the Utah Online Academies and use curriculum provided by K12, Inc.

Utah's EHS started in 1994 as a statewide virtual school located at the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) which funded it via USOE funds and grants. Legislation was passed in 2001 that started line-item funding in support of the EHS. This annual line item funding was \$1.3 million for 2006 and \$2 million for 2007. All of the courses are open-entry/open-exit. Between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2007, EHS granted 16,119 quarter credits to 6,365 students. To put this into perspective with similar programs, this is roughly the equivalent of 8,000 individual semester course completions for the time-frame. These numbers represent growth of approximately 30% from the previous year.<sup>114</sup>

### Online programs

- Utah Electronic High School
- Davis Online K8 is a district level program with between 250 and 500 students. The other three district programs comprising the Utah Online Academies with Davis are Alpine Online, the Uintah K8 Program, and Washington Online.
- Park City Independent High School, a regionally accredited program

<sup>114</sup> The number of course registrations and completions was incorrectly reported in the Keeping Pace 2006 report.

## 8.14 Washington

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led initiative  | Yes    | Washington Digital Learning Commons is a state-funded provider of online learning courses and resources |
| Other online programs | Yes    | District programs   |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | Alternative Learning Experience law   |

Online programs are governed by the state’s “alternative learning experience” (ALE) policies, clarified via program implementation guidelines issued in 2005 by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). These guidelines build in part on Senate Bill 5828, passed in 2005 to specifically address online learning. The ALE rules provide a method for school districts to claim basic education funding for learning experiences that are conducted in large measure away from school, including online courses.

The recent moves to clarify ALE rules are partially based on concerns about academic and fiscal “credibility gaps” in ALE programs,<sup>115</sup> and also based on the recognition that the rules did not appropriately govern online courses. These concerns were identified in two reports issued in 2005 by the Washington Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) on the ALE policies.<sup>116</sup> The passage of SB5828 was also in response to the concern about online program practice outpacing policy. The introduction to the law states, “rules used by school districts to support some digital learning courses were adopted before these types of courses were created, so the rules are not well-suited to the funding and delivery of digital instruction.” The recent amendments to the rules are designed to better accommodate online learning programs, and to improve ALE program accountability.

### Online programs

There are at least six online programs in Washington. Washington does not have a charter school law, and all of these programs are run by school districts while serving students statewide. Online programs in Washington include:

- Federal Way Internet Academy, run by the Federal Way school district, was the first online program in Washington and has been in operation for over ten years.<sup>117</sup>
- Washington Virtual Academy, aligned with K12, Inc. provides online k-8 curriculum through a program of Steilacoom Historical District No. 1, and for grades 9 and 10 through a program of Monroe Public Schools.<sup>118</sup>
- Everett Online High School,<sup>119</sup> Evergreen Internet Academy,<sup>120</sup> Insight School of Washington<sup>121</sup> and Spokane Virtual Learning<sup>122</sup> are all online programs governed by the local school district.

<sup>115</sup> <http://www.k12.wa.us/AlternativeEd/ProgramImplementationGuidelines/ALETrainingPPTII.ppt>

<sup>116</sup> <http://www.k12.wa.us/AlternativeEd/pubdocs/JLARCFinalReportALE.pdf>

<sup>117</sup> [www.iacademy.org/](http://www.iacademy.org/)

<sup>118</sup> [www.wava.org/about-wava/index.html](http://www.wava.org/about-wava/index.html)

<sup>119</sup> [online.everett.k12.wa.us/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp](http://online.everett.k12.wa.us/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp)

<sup>120</sup> [eia.egreen.wednet.edu/](http://eia.egreen.wednet.edu/)

<sup>121</sup> [www.go2ischool.net/about\\_us.asp](http://www.go2ischool.net/about_us.asp)

<sup>122</sup> [www.spokaneschools.org/onlinelearning/](http://www.spokaneschools.org/onlinelearning/)



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- The Valley School District provides online learning options through its Columbia Valley Virtual Academy.<sup>123</sup>

Along with these programs, Washington has two more online resources. First, the Digital Learning Commons (DLC), is a state-subsidized non-profit that bundles together online resources and ongoing support to help schools, but does not have its own courses and students. The DLC is profiled in section 2. Spokane Virtual Learning and Federal Way Internet Academy are among the providers of courses that are brokered through the DLC. In addition to the DLC, the Washington Learning Source (WLS) also brokers online courses and resources for districts in WA. The WLS is a statewide program developed by Washington's nine regional Educational Service Districts which provides a place for districts to choose quality products and services that meet their needs.<sup>124</sup>

## State Policies

The following policies come from the Alternative Learning Experience law and subsequent clarifications and guidelines.

### Funding

- FTE funding is generated by students in ALE programs, based on the student making satisfactory progress towards the goals in the student's learning plan.

### Governance, tracking, and accountability

- "Certificated instructional staff" must provide "supervision, monitoring, assessment, and evaluation" of the program.
- Programs must use "reliable methods to verify a student is doing his or her own work."
- Each online student must have "a learning plan that includes a description of course objectives and information on the requirements a student must meet to successfully complete the program or courses."
- Students must have "direct personal contact" with an instructor weekly; direct personal contact in an online program may include "telephone, e-mail, instant messaging, interactive video communication, or other means of digital communication," if explicitly authorized by local school district policy.

### Quality assurance, teaching, and curriculum

- Programs that are primarily online must be accredited through "the state accreditation program or through the regional accreditation program."
- ALE programs must provide an annual report that gives FTE enrollment, how students are evaluated, and how the program supports state and district learning objectives

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<sup>123</sup> [www.columbiavirtualacademy.org](http://www.columbiavirtualacademy.org)

<sup>124</sup> WLS online offerings are listed at: [www.walearningsource.org/SearchResults.asp?Cat=72](http://www.walearningsource.org/SearchResults.asp?Cat=72)

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## 8.15 Wyoming<sup>125</sup>

| Category              | Yes/No | Comments  |
|-----------------------|--------|---|
| State-led program     | No     |   |
| Other online programs | Yes    | Several small programs  |
| State-level policy    | Yes    | Distance learning funding incentive. Also, the Wyoming Department of Education has created a task force that is considering online education issues. Its report is expected in Fall 2007. |

The Wyoming Department of Education is currently in the process of writing guidance policies referencing distance education programs in accordance with Wyoming legislator's HB 0115 Section 301. The Superintendent of Public Instruction, in consultation with the Distance Education Task Force, will develop recommendations on state oversight, assistance and guidance for the development, operations and funding of distance education programs by school districts as extensions to or a component of public school education programs. The Wyoming Department of Education's need to institute rules to govern distance learning, funding and accountability is paramount to establishing virtual school programs for grades k-12

### Online programs

Wyoming does not have a state-led program and only a few school districts operating online programs. The Fremont County School District #21's Wyoming E Academy of Virtual Education (WeAVE) and Campbell County School District #1's Wyoming Virtual School (WYVS), for example, serve a small number of full-time and home-schooled students.

### State policies

Wyoming policies affecting online education are based on regulations not specific to online learning.

### Funding

Wyoming law provides a funding incentive for distance learning programs of \$500 per student above regular FTE funding, for students from districts other than the one providing the online program. Postsecondary institutions as well as k-12 districts are eligible to receive this funding. There is also a small stipend for teachers of k-12 distance learning courses funded by the state; however, this funding is subject to budget constraints. Most k-12 distance learning courses currently are via two-way videoconferencing. A viable funding model is a part of the Distance Education Task Force's objectives in accordance with the aforementioned legislator's mandate.

### Governance and tracking

Wyoming currently tracks only those students attending distance learning courses provided by a school district or college institution other than the student's school district. The report is collected twice a year, and the incentives are paid based on the number of students attending distance learning courses.

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<sup>125</sup> Updated from *Keeping Pace 2006* by Chuck Mitchell, Wyoming Department of Education via personal communication, May 2007.

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# Appendix A: Glossary of Online Learning Terms<sup>126</sup>

**Asynchronous communication:** Communication in which the participants interact in varied time spaces (e.g., e-mail, threaded discussions, homework, message boards)

**Course management system (CMS):** The technology platform through which online courses are offered; a CMS includes software for the creation and editing of course content, communication tools, assessment tools, and other features designed to enhance access and ease of use.

**Cyberschool (virtual school):** An online learning program in which students enroll and earn credit towards academic advancement (or graduation) based on successful completion of the courses (or other designated learning opportunities) provided by the school

**Distance learning:** Educational activity in which the participants are separated by space (e.g., correspondence courses, online learning, videoconferencing)

**Dual enrollment:** A program that allows high school students to simultaneously earn college or vocational credit toward a postsecondary diploma, certificate, or degree at a state public institution that also will count as credit toward a high school diploma

**E-learning:** Instruction and content delivered via digital technologies, such as online or CD-ROM, or learning experiences that involve the use of computers; e-learning often (incorrectly) is used as another term for online learning.

**Enrollment:** A single student being counted by a school towards the school's share of state FTE funds, based on the student's attending the school and taking courses (Enrollment is distinguished from registration, which in this report means that a student signs up to take a course from a supplemental online program.)

**Full-time equivalent (FTE):** The number of students at a given institution, if every student were full-time; "full-time" status is determined by the institution according to the total number of credit hours a student takes.

**Online learning:** Education in which instruction and content are delivered primarily via the Internet; online learning is a form of distance learning.

**Registration:** A single student signing up to take a course in an online program (Registration is distinguished from enrollment, which in this report means that a student is counted by a school towards the school's share of state FTE funds.)

**Seat time:** The actual physical presence of a student in a brick-and-mortar school setting, often used for attendance and funding

**Synchronous communication:** Communication in which the participants interact in the same time space (e.g., telephone calls, face-to-face meetings, physical classrooms, chat rooms, videoconferencing)

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<sup>126</sup> Originally adapted from the Colorado Department of Education glossary of online learning terms, available at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/edtech/download/osc-glossary.pdf>

