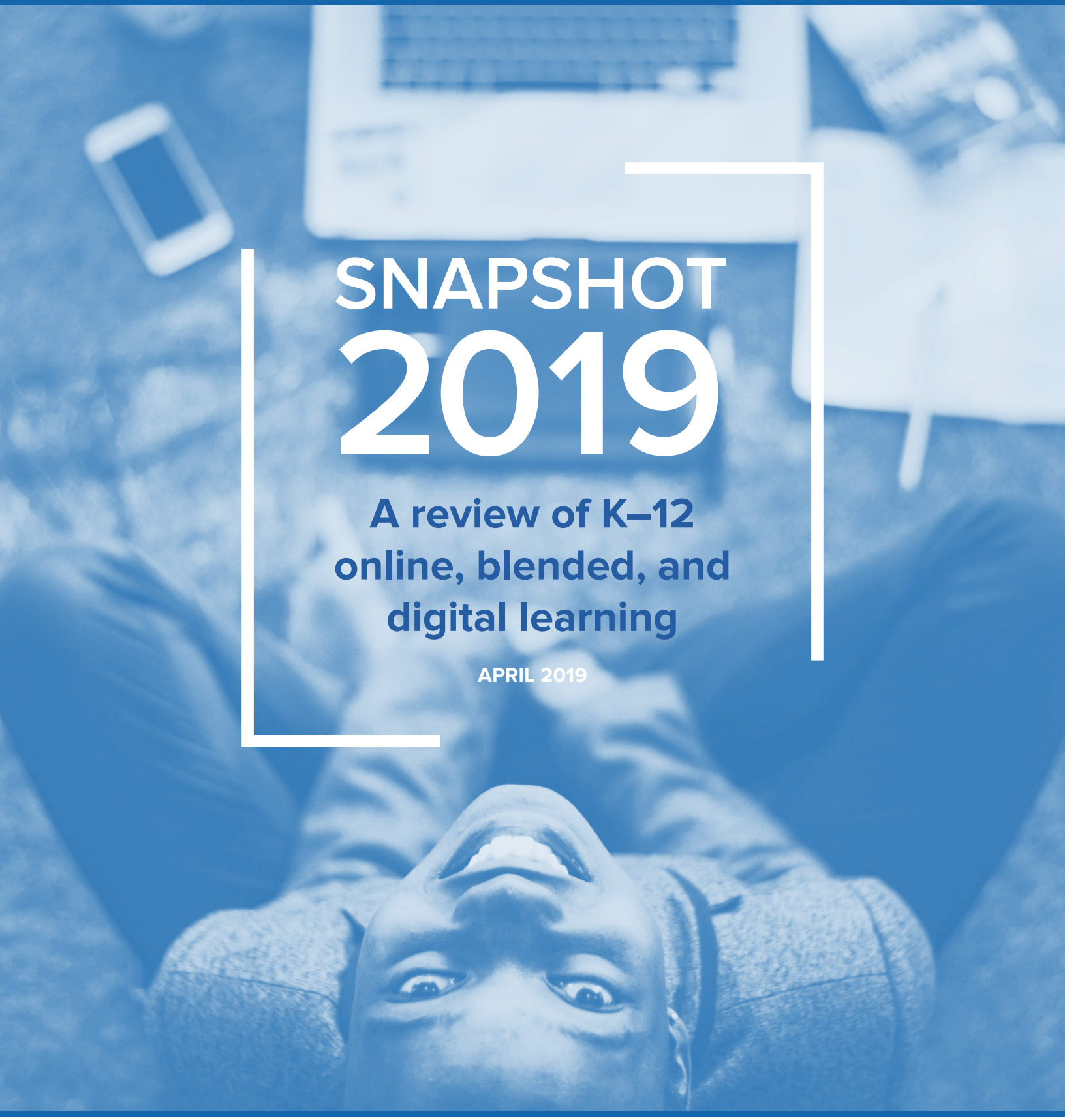
A ***KEEPING PACE WITH DIGITAL LEARNING*** REPORT



SNAPSHOT 2019

A review of K–12 online, blended, and digital learning

APRIL 2019

digital learning COLLABORATIVE

About this report

Snapshot 2019 is the first annual report of the Digital Learning Collaborative.

From 2004 to 2016, the Evergreen Education Group (Evergreen) published a series of annual *Keeping Pace* reports. The reports, which were sponsored by a range of organizations, including school districts, state agencies, non-profit organizations, and companies, provided reviews of practice and policy for the field of K–12 online, blended, and digital learning. Some of the reports included planning guides designed to help educators in the field with the establishment and growth of their digital programs.

In 2017 and 2018, Evergreen did not publish the annual report, as Evergreen and key partner organizations considered how to maintain the overall goal of *Keeping Pace*—to provide the foundational information that the field requires—while shifting to a new digital-first, financially sustainable model.

Now in 2019, *Keeping Pace* has returned within the umbrella of a new membership group and a new annual conference.

The membership group is the Digital Learning Collaborative (DLC). The DLC membership is made up of the same types of organizations as the earlier *Keeping Pace* sponsors: school districts, state agencies, non-profit organizations, companies, and a small number of foundations. The DLC website is growing and provides reports, blog posts from DLC members and guests, news items, and similar information.

The conference is the new Digital Learning Annual Conference (DLAC), which is holding its inaugural event in 2019 and is in planning for subsequent years.

The digital-first aspect of our current reporting is still evolving. Our intent is that this annual report will provide a snapshot that will be shorter than previous *Keeping Pace* annual reports, and the DLC website will contain updated information throughout the year. This report should be seen as the annual snapshot version of the information on the DLC site, informed by and supporting the conversations that take place at DLAC.

Suggested citation: Digital Learning Collaborative. (2019). Snapshot 2019: A review of K-12 online, blended, and digital learning. Retrieved from https://www.digitallearningcollab.com.

About the Digital Learning Collaborative

The Digital Learning Collaborative (DLC) is a membership group dedicated to exploring, producing, and disseminating data, information, news, and best practices in digital learning.

Our current members include school districts, intermediate units, public agencies, non-profit organizations, companies, and a small number of foundations.

The Collaborative activities are supported financially by annual membership fees paid by providers. School districts, most public agencies, and some non-profit organizations may join free of charge. We accept foundations as members but do not seek nor accept foundation funding at levels higher than other members.

DLC members determine the topics that we explore, via monthly web meetings and individual discussions. Topics include but are not limited to the following:

- Best practices and strategies for success in a variety of online and blended learning settings (e.g., mainstream classrooms, alternative education, online schools, credit recovery programs)
- Honest explorations and analysis of difficulties and pitfalls that have challenged digital learning
- Implementation case studies exploring the varied settings discussed above
- Discussion of successful online content and technology platforms supporting digital learning
- Identification of professional development needs for teachers and strategies for success
- Policy issues including state funding and accountability systems, which benefit or hinder best practices in supporting students
- Annual reports documenting key issues in digital learning, including growth and trends

DLC core principles

Members of the Digital Learning Collaborative believe the following:

- Online, blended, and digital learning encompass a wide range of schools, instructional strategies, and practices that may be implemented across a district, network of schools, single school, or individual classroom.
- Existing schools and programs demonstrate that many of these instructional strategies and practices are helping K–12 schools and students improve educational opportunities and outcomes.
- Online, blended, and digital learning encompass practices that may be implemented well or poorly. Therefore, the theoretical question "does online/blended/digital learning work" is nonsensical in the same way as asking "do traditional schools work?"
- The technology used in online, blended, and digital learning always supports teachers and other professional adults who work with students in a variety of ways. There are no examples of successful, scalable educational programs in the United States that operate without teachers.
- Although K–12 digital learning has a track record that extends over more than two decades, significant myths and misunderstandings are common. The DLC exists in part to counter these myths and replace them with data and accurate information.
- Many different types of organizations have a valuable role to play in improving education. Digital tools, resources, and instruction are created and implemented by a wide variety of organizations that include individual schools, districts, regional public agencies, state agencies, private non-profit organizations, and for-profit companies.
- Individual DLC members support these principles. DLC documents and resources, including this annual report, build on these principles, but may not always reflect the views of individual DLC members.

CONTENTS

Executive summary 6

Key terms 7

Statewide and regional online schools 8

Hybrid schools 11

State virtual schools 18

District activity 28

Executive summary

Online, blended, and digital learning in K–12 schools in the United States includes an assortment of schools, programs, tools, and resources. These range from the fully online schools in which students receive their entire education, to the digital platforms and content that mainstream teachers are using to bolster instruction in their physical classrooms.

That opening paragraph is an accurate portrayal of digital learning in 2019. It applied equally well to 2009. So what has changed in ten years?

Quite a bit, actually. Some areas of digital learning are growing, while others are stabilizing. For example:

- Enrollments in online schools that serve students across entire states are growing slowly but steadily, at a rate of about 6% per year. We count 31 states that allow statewide online schools, and estimate that 310,000 students are enrolled in these schools nationwide. This sector has largely stabilized, with relatively few states allowing online schools for the first time in each of the past few years.
- State virtual schools (generally, supplemental online course programs that are state-supported) operate in 23 states, and serve about 420,000 students with almost a million online course enrollments. This sector has also largely stabilized in recent years, with fluctuations in some states but few major additions or losses.
- Digital learning in districts is the area that appears to be growing the most, and yet we have far less data available than in other sectors. With the spread of Internet access to the large majority of schools, the growth of district one-to-one device programs, and the widespread adoption of a dizzying array of online content, software, and platforms, very few (if any) districts have no formal digital learning activity. This report includes 11 district-level digital learning use cases, exploring a specific goal that a district seeks to meet. These include raising graduation rates, lowering dropout rates, addressing equity issues, offering career and technical education, offering world language courses, and providing continuity of learning during snow days and extended emergencies. We recognize that other use cases exist. One in particular, the use of content and software to increase student achievement in math, ELA, and other courses, deserves its own report and will be detailed in future studies.

We believe that some of the most interesting work in K–12 digital education is taking place in hybrid schools, and we devote a section of this report to short profiles of six such schools. These schools have a physical location at which students are regularly present for instructional purposes, however, students are not required to attend the physical campus on a schedule that approaches a regular school schedule. The school might require students to be on campus a couple of days per week, but never five days per week. These schools are transcending barriers of time and space, while providing a physical place to learn that the majority of students (and parents) desire. The best of these schools are shifting the role of teachers to having a closer, more personal relationship with students. They are also redefining teacher professional learning, because teachers take on new responsibilities and are engaging with new instructional strategies, and have more time to explore and implement them. Arguably, these schools are redefining what it means to be a teacher.

As with any snapshot, this report captures only a portion of activity, at one point in time. We have consistently updated information about the field in general, new and longer school and program profiles, additional educational topics, extensive policy discussions, blog posts, and news items on the Digital Learning Collaborative website. We hope you'll join us online throughout the coming year and beyond.

Key terms

This page describes several key terms used by the Digital Learning Collaborative in presentations, on the DLC website, and within documents and reports like this one. We purposely call these key terms *descriptions* and *characterizations* instead of *definitions*, because the focus should be on the value and effectiveness of instructional practices, not on whether a certain practice fits a specific definition.

Online learning encompasses a wide range of educational activities, tools, and resources that are delivered via the Internet. These can be schools in which the large majority of curriculum is delivered online, and interaction between students and teachers, and between students, is mostly or entirely at a distance. Online learning can be the online component of specific activities in mainstream classrooms, such as students using instructional math software for an hour per week in a class that otherwise uses face-to-face teaching, group activities, and a range of similar approaches that are common in traditional schools.

Blended learning describes any combination of online learning and site-based, face-to-face education. Although the DLC believes that student agency and the use of student data in instruction are valuable, we do not include these elements in our characterization of blended learning. Blended learning that substitutes for a traditional instructional activity may be unlikely to impact outcomes, while a use of blended learning that innovates instruction and student activity is more likely to have a positive impact. Both of these, however, may be characterized as blended learning.

Digital learning encompasses online learning and blended learning and refers to any use of either of these.

Educational technology includes digital learning as well as additional technologies that apply to activities other than instruction, such as student information systems and other technologies, that support teachers and administrators without involving students directly.

A **hybrid school** combines online and face-to-face instruction and meets the following characteristics:

- The school enrolls students, receives FTE funding (ADA/ADM/PPOR etc), and is listed as a school by NCES.
- The school has a physical location which students regularly attend for instructional purposes.
- The large majority of students must take part in learning activities at the physical location at least occasionally.
- Students are not required to attend the physical campus on a schedule that approaches a regular school schedule. The school might require students to be on campus a couple of days per week, but never five days per week.

The Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance published a longer set of definitions available on the DLC website.

Statewide and regional online schools

We characterize statewide and regional online schools as entities that are listed as a school in the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data, enroll students from across a region that crosses district geographic boundaries, have few or no requirements for students to attend a physical location, and are responsible for student progression through grade levels and/or graduation.

Most statewide and regional online schools share the following attributes.

- **Organization type:** The majority of these schools are charter schools. Some are run by school districts or intermediate agencies such as BOCES, and are not charter schools, but in practice these district-run schools look very much like charter schools, although with governance being provided via district mechanisms instead of by a charter school authorizer under state charter school laws. In some cases, the district contracts with an Education Service Provider to operate the school.
- **Affiliation:** The schools that serve about 60% of all online students in this category are operated by Education Service Providers (ESPs); the two largest ESPs are K12 Inc. and Pearson via the Connections Academy brand. ESPs typically contract to provide courses, software, teacher professional development, and other key management and logistical support. Other schools operate independently or are affiliated with a school district, BOCES, or similar agency.
- **Geographic reach:** Most of these schools attract students from across the entire state in order to achieve scale; therefore, most of these schools are located in states that allow students to enroll across district lines and have funding that follows the student. California is an exception in that it allows online schools to enroll students from within a region made up of contiguous counties. In California, K12 Inc. and Connections operate networks of affiliated schools that reach most students in the state.
- **Grade levels:** All grade levels are offered in online schools collectively, although individual schools may be limited to older or younger students.
- **Instructional strategies:** Younger students in these schools work with adult mentors (often, but not always, parents) who work with the students at home. The schools often send physical materials to students, including paper workbooks and science materials, to complement online offerings. Online teachers communicate with both students and parents via text, chat, email, discussion boards, online video and audio, and phone calls. Face-to-face interactions at school field trips help build relationships and support key concepts. Older students tend to work more directly with online teachers and have less direct involvement from parents. They also tend to spend more time online as fewer of their resources are offline.
- **Funding:** Most funding is provided via state public education funds that follow the student.
- **Size:** Most statewide online schools have enrollments of a few hundred to several thousand students (FTE), and most of these schools enroll primarily full-time students. Some enroll students part-time as well, particularly in states that support part-time enrollment.
- **Accountability for student achievement:** Schools in this category are accountable for the same metrics as all other public schools and/or charter schools in the states in which they operate. They are responsible for facilitating state assessments for all students, regardless of geographic location.

As of school year 2017–18, 31 states allow online schools to operate and draw students from across districts, and a total of about 310,000 students attend these schools.

Online school enrollment trends

Our numbers suggest that enrollment in these online schools is growing by about 6% per year. Although some reports and observers characterize online schools as growing "rapidly" or even "explosively," the growth rate is in fact slow to moderate, especially considering the small size and percentage of online enrollment compared to the total statewide enrollment. In all states, the percentage of students in online schools is 2% or less; in most states with online schools, the percentage is 1% or less.

A note about enrollment numbers

We pulled student enrollment numbers from a variety of sources. Some states track online school enrollments very closely; in these cases, we provide an exact number that we received from data requests, phone interviews, or existing reports. Other states do not track online school enrollments closely. In these cases, we gathered data from the best sources that we could find, including the online schools we are aware of in those states, studies from organizations such as the National Education Policy Center, and the National Center for Education Statistics.

Even in the cases in which a state tracks a precise enrollment number for each online school, the numbers are open to some interpretation. For example, states most often count for funding purposes, so may report a number based on ADM, ADA, or count days. Because online schools have high rates of student mobility, a discrepancy may exist between the number the state reports and the number of unique students that the school served across the school year.

These numbers, therefore, should be considered fairly accurate but not exact.

Comparisons with previous *Keeping Pace* numbers

Some readers may note that we are reporting a smaller total number of students in online schools than *Keeping Pace* reported several years ago, while reporting a growth rate (6%) that is about the same.

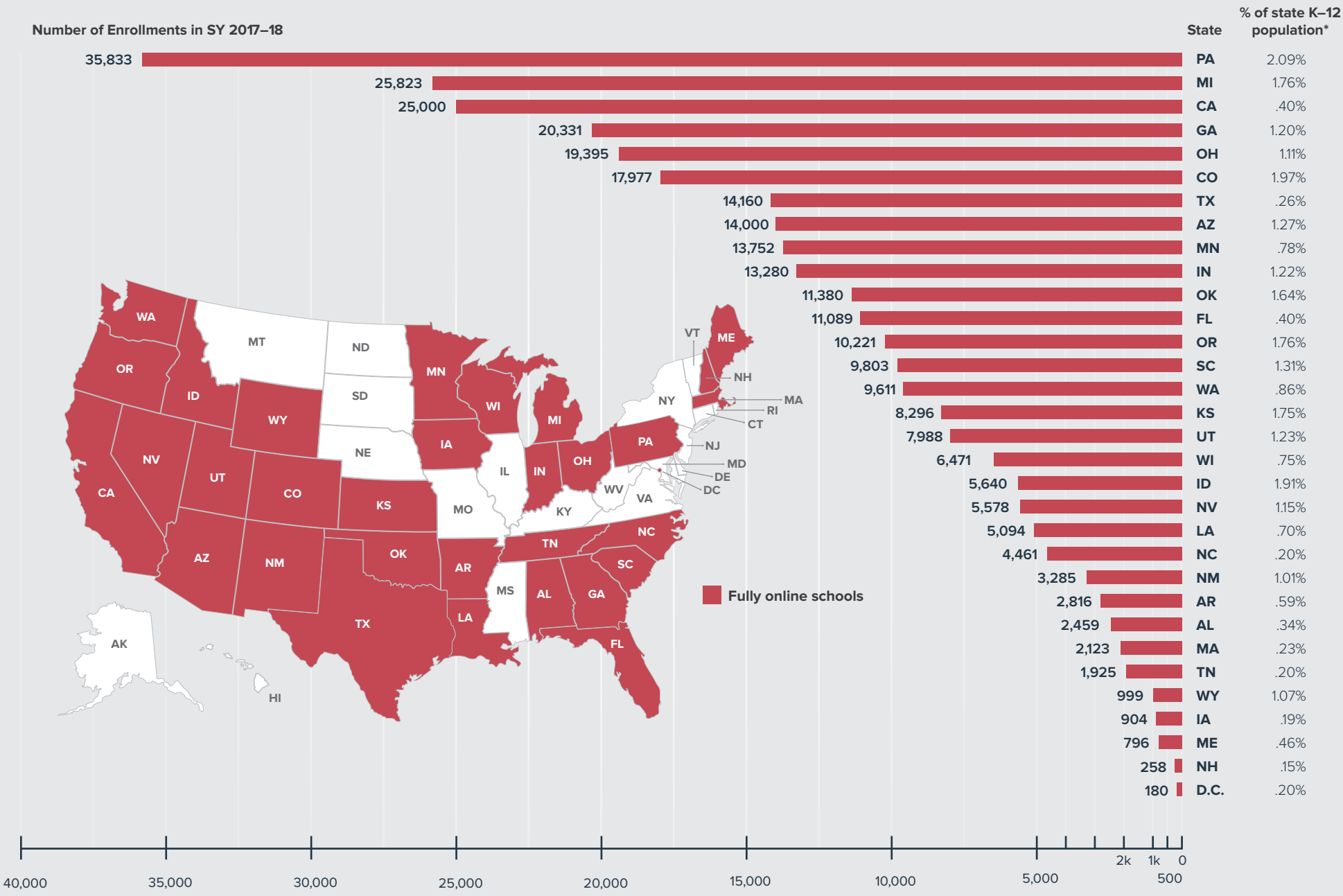
Two reasons exist for this apparent discrepancy. First, in at least one state (Arizona), we were reporting a number that was too high because it was including students taking a single course from an online school. Second, a single very large school in Ohio closed during the 2017–18 school year. It is not clear where those students went, and it may be that we are slightly under-counting in this report.

Although there is still a range of quality in the numbers reported by state agencies and other sources, we believe the numbers are generally more accurate now than a few years ago, and we have higher confidence in our current numbers than in the previously published numbers.

2019

States with Statewide Fully Online Schools

FIGURE 1: **NUMBER OF STUDENT ENROLLMENTS BY STATE AND PERCENTAGE OF STATE'S K–12 POPULATION**



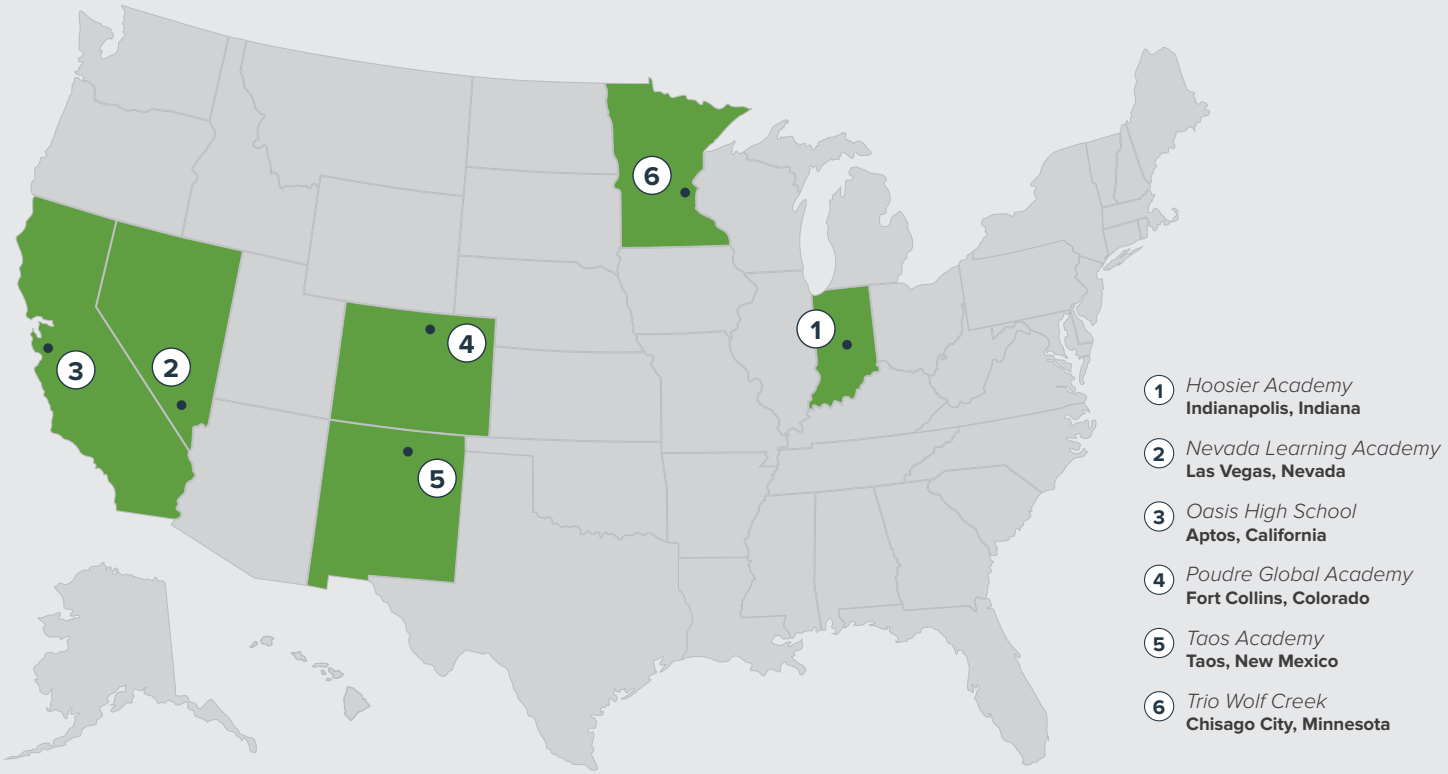
Hybrid schools

The Digital Learning Collaborative characterizes hybrid schools as combining online and face-to-face instruction and meeting the following characteristics:

- The school enrolls students, receives FTE funding (ADA/ADM/PPOR etc), and is listed as a school by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).
- The school has a physical location at which students are regularly present for instructional purposes.
- The large majority of students must take part in learning activities at the physical location at least occasionally.
- Students are not required to attend the physical campus on a schedule that approaches a regular school schedule. The school might require students to be on campus a couple of days per week, but never five days per week.

Most hybrid schools are operated by districts for their own students, but some are run by regional service agencies such as BOCES or County Offices of Education.

FIGURE 2 : **Location of hybrid schools profiled**



Hoosier Academy

Indianapolis, Indiana

GRADE LEVELS SERVED: K–12

NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED: 250

HYBRID MODEL: Students are on campus for two days per week and learn from home virtually using digital curriculum and tools the rest of the week.

Situated in the urban setting of East Indianapolis, Hoosier Academy provides a safe learning environment for a diverse group of students with unique needs, including students with anxiety, students who are medically fragile, and students who are on the Asperger's/Autism spectrum. Most of their student population perform either above or below grade level, and the program provides the students an opportunity to catch up or move ahead with a combination of onsite learning support and virtual learning options. Hoosier Academy has a diverse population of students with over 80% qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch.

Hoosier Academy's hybrid model is organized around students attending school onsite for two days per week and learning with virtual curriculum and digital support tools for three days per week. While onsite, students attend each of their courses and meet with their teachers as well as participate in project based learning and hands-on activities, including robotics and hydroponics in science. Additionally, Hoosier Academy is incorporating a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program in conjunction with their Graduation Pathways program for high school students, including adding graduation coaches and a CTE coordinator. Courses are offered in the following areas of specialization: Certified Nursing Assistant, Business, Culinary Arts and Hospitality, and Early Childhood Development. High school students can also participate in service learning and work-based learning opportunities. Student Council, National Honor Society, field trips, and service projects help provide students with a well-rounded K–12 learning experience.

Elizabeth Lamey, Head of Schools for Hoosier Academy, shares that socio-emotional resources are also built in to the students' program to build the social and emotional skills that will help students throughout their lives. With tools such as 7 Mindsets virtual learning program, they are working with their students and families to change the mindset around life's challenges such that, despite experiencing personal health or trauma in their lives, they can come to a safe school, create a stable environment, and learn. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are built into the program as well, along with rewards for progress and accomplishments. Students and families can download the school app on their phone and other devices, and the app provides access to their courses and other programs used by the school.

The teachers and school staff focus on "strong starts" and continuous monitoring of student progress that helps set expectations for student learning and success. A multi-tiered support system includes additional math and reading support onsite and virtually, small group, and 1:1 tutoring to help get students back on track with their learning when they fall behind. Hoosier Academy also adds wrap-around services, including home visits, as needed to provide additional support. Lamey reports that Hoosier Academy went from an "F" to a "C" rated school on their state report card in 2017–18, and their goals include reaching their one-year growth goals in reading and math.

This profile was developed through correspondence with Elizabeth Lamey of Hoosier Academy.

Nevada Learning Academy

Las Vegas, Nevada

GRADE LEVELS SERVED: 6–8

NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED: about 40 full-time students *(plus part-time concurrent enrolled students)*

HYBRID MODEL: Students attend school two days per week for a full-day of direct instruction and meetings with teachers; the rest of their learning for the week is done online.

Located in Las Vegas, Nevada, the Nevada Learning Academy (NVLA) is an online secondary public school, providing online courses in grades 6–12 that helps expand students' choices for courses they can take on their learning path. NVLA is a "minority majority" district with a student body that is representative of the county with 3% Native American, 27% Hispanic, 21% African American, 38% White, and 11% students reporting two or more races; and students are evenly divided as male/female. NVLA Middle School (MS) specifically is serving approximately 40 full-time students in the 2018–19 school year, with many more students enrolling in part-time concurrent courses.

NVLA's hybrid model for MS requires that students are on campus two days per week for a full-day of direct instruction, where students attend classes and meet with their teachers. MS students attend school on Tuesdays and Thursday from 7:15am to 1:45pm, with a short lunch break. Principal Andrea Connolly says students live all over the Las Vegas valley, and transportation is provided by the Clark County School District or parents can select to bring them to school for the on-campus days. The rest of the students' learning is done online. Originally the online courses were designed by the district, but recently, the courses were adapted by the teachers based on student feedback and learning data.

Lin Soriano, Assistant Principal for the MS, shares that in addition to coursework, teachers work with students on time management, using digital calendars, study skills, goal setting, and effective work habits. Soriano is proud of the school's "5-Star" rating and says that students and families like the school's high achievement focus and small class sizes. Students also get a full middle school experience with National Junior Honor Society and Student Council, as well as electives. Students are also able to play sports at their local residential zoned school, though many students attending the MS are involved in sports with travel teams and are drawn to the part-time onsite attendance option to create flexibility in their schedule to accommodate sports or other activities.

Teachers and staff are onsite at the school on Mondays and Fridays for ongoing training and professional development (PD), meetings, and to provide additional tutoring, learning support, remediation, tech support, and academic counseling to students. As part of their PD, teachers and staff have completed Quality Matters (QM) training and use the QM rubric to monitor program success. Webinars are also used for ongoing training specific to topics that are pressing for teachers. On Wednesdays, teachers work remotely to provide learning support. In addition to school leaders and teachers, the school has a counselor, a learning facilitator, and a special education teacher. Learning support involves parents and can take the form of a structured improvement plan if needed to guide success.

This profile was developed through correspondence with Andrea Connolly and Lin Soriano of Nevada Learning Academy Middle School and through the program's website.

Oasis High School

Aptos, California

GRADE LEVELS SERVED: 9–12

NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED: 180

HYBRID MODEL: Students choose how much on-campus time they have and combine online and face-to-face instruction to allow flexibility for engagement in internships, apprenticeships, and community service.

Oasis High School (Oasis) is an alternative education (Alt Ed) program run by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education (SCCOE) located on the campus of Cabrillo College overlooking Monterey Bay. The 180 students mirror the county-wide demographics, with approximately 57% White or Caucasian, 33% Hispanic or Latino, 4% Asian, 1% African-American, 4% multi-race, and 1% other. According to the Santa Cruz County Economy Snapshot (CAP Report), 14% are living below the poverty line. Oasis students reported choosing the program because of health issues, falling behind in their previous school, feeling academically unchallenged in their previous school, and feeling that they did not fit in well for non-academic reasons. Typically, students are affected by one or more significant life challenges. In addition to previously mentioned issues, this could include drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, criminal activity, truancy, expulsion, poverty, lack of fluency in English, and various other traumas. Oasis serves transitional students who move between schools, districts, and programs due to fluctuating housing and employment needs.

To serve this high-needs, at-risk student population, Oasis offers a hybrid approach to learning, providing students with flexibility in scheduling so that they can focus on experiential internships, work apprenticeships, and community service. Online courses require students to complete licensed coursework and get help from their teacher during weekly appointments. In addition to their weekly appointment, students may work on their courses at the Oasis campus for as much or as little time as they choose, although teachers may encourage students who need extra help to spend more time on campus and utilize tutoring support by subject-specific teachers. All students come to the campus for state- and district-required assessments. There is also an opportunity for dual enrollment credit through Cabrillo College.

Oasis employs five full-time teachers, three part-time teachers, four instructional aides, and one office manager. Each teacher serves a roster of students in whichever courses they need and reviews, corrects, proctors, and instructs students in person or online. Aides tutor students to provide additional support. Rotating staff include special education, college and career counseling, and a socio-emotional counselor. Oasis students work with their parent or guardian, teacher, and counselor to design an educational plan. In addition to ensuring that all students have access to courses required for graduation, Alt Ed provides a variety of programs to meet student needs including counseling, special education services, reduced adult-student ratio, work-based learning, and employment counseling.

On campus, Oasis students meet with their instructor in one of five open office rooms, which includes a small kitchen/meeting space. Each room houses two to three teachers, an instructional aide, and central workspaces that students can utilize during tutoring or for working independently. Students flow between rooms through interior doors, which remain open unless a meeting is scheduled. Students report that among the key elements of Oasis that they find most valuable, along with the connection they feel with their teachers, are the school's physical location, amenities, and feel of being on a college campus.

This profile was developed through correspondence with Kelly Schwirzke of Oasis High School.

Poudre Global Academy

Fort Collins, Colorado

GRADE LEVELS SERVED: K–12

NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED: 225

HYBRID MODEL: Students study online at home three days per week and on campus two days per week.

Poudre School District Global Academy (PGA) is one of 59 schools in the Poudre School District, which has a total enrollment of almost 30,000 students. PGA occupies a traditional school building in a residential community of Fort Collins, Colorado, and serves students in grades K–12. The student population includes 85.2% Caucasian, 12.4% Hispanic, 1.8% mixed race, and 0.6% Asian, and 38.9% qualify for free/reduced-price lunch. PGA began as an all-virtual K–12 school in 2009, focusing on students who were struggling in a traditional school. From 2010 through 2013, PGA evolved into a school for any student who needed or wanted a non-traditional educational experience, attracting advanced and accelerated students as well. In 2014, PGA moved away from the all-virtual instructional model. Their purpose now is to offer personalized and blended learning as a flexible alternative to traditional school schedules. Learning occurs both at home and in the school building, i.e., on campus. Students are on campus two days per week and study online from home the other three days.

The on-campus experience provides students and teachers opportunities to meet and interact in dynamic and flexible individual and group settings based on needs and progress. Students also engage in individual online learning on campus, where they are face-to-face with teachers and other students for mentoring and collaboration. On-campus schedules vary by grade level. The following table illustrates a more detailed view of the schedule.

Day of the week	On campus	At home	Office hourse & other activities
Monday		All students studying online	
Tuesday	All K–12 students on campus WIN sessions		Fine arts day for grades K–8
Wednesday	Grades 9–12 on campus STEM enrichment activities and Yearbook SST meetings for K–5 students	K–8 students studying oniine	Optional teacher office hours for grades 6–8
Thursday	K–8 students on campus WIN sessions	Grades 9–12 students studying online	Optional teacher office hours for grades 9–12 Physical education day for grades K–8
Friday	Teacher professional development, collaboration, and SST meetings	All students studying online	

PGA's on-campus teachers enhance and customize the online curriculum, develop offline curriculum, use actionable data to guide student paths and personalize the learning experience for each PGA student, and provide suggestions, encouragement, and learning strategies. On campus, students and teachers re-organize the furniture to accommodate students on the move with laptops in backpacks participating in dynamic study groups.

Approximately 60% of all instruction for K–8 students is online, and 80% is online for 9th–12th grade students. During the three days when students are working at home, learning coaches are required to mentor their students as they are working on their assignments. Learning coaches access assignments online, communicate with teachers, and sign off on work students complete at home. PGA developed a training program to teach learning coaches how to be effective. Often, a parent is the student's learning coach. PGA is a learning community in which relationships are central to student success.

This profile was developed using a profile developed by Evergreen Education Group for Fuel Ed.

Taos Academy

Taos, New Mexico

GRADE LEVELS SERVED: 5–12

NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED: 225

HYBRID MODEL: Students are on campus for two days per week, and adaptive digital curriculum online provides learning analytics to team of educators.

Taos Academy's (TA) is a state-chartered hybrid learning school combining online and face-to-face instruction to offer a flexible schedule that can vary greatly depending on student and family needs. Serving 225 students in grades 5–12 in rural northern New Mexico, TA's student population is 68% economically disadvantaged and made up of a majority of historically underserved populations: 51% Hispanic, 41% Caucasian, 3.5% Native American, 3% African-American, 2.5% Asian. Nearly one in five students participate in the school's Special Education program. The surrounding community is a high-poverty, at-risk area; recent reports show 16% of Taos County teens ages 16-19 as neither attending school nor participating in the workforce, which is twice the national average and 6% higher than the NM state average.

TA's hybrid model requires students to be on campus two days a week at a minimum; middle schoolers attend on Monday and Wednesday, while high school days are Tuesdays and Thursdays. During their on-campus days, students attend Academic Advisory and 21st Century Learning classes, including SmartLab, Global Studies, Leadership, Career Pathways, and Service Learning, all designed to offer opportunities for connection, collaboration, and authentic problem-solving. The majority of students choose to attend school on their off-days as well, taking advantage of the open Student Success Lab (fully staffed for student support), MidSchool Plus Enrichment program, and STEAM Institute classes taught by community experts partnering with TA teachers. These dynamic elective classes range from Radio Broadcasting and Journalism to Robo-Band, Kinetic Sculpture, Green Architecture, and Culinary Arts.

The school recommends that students spend approximately 20 hours each week in their digital curriculum, which may be accessed from home or the school. Core academic classes in Math, English, Social Studies, and Science contain elements of online learning as well as direct, face-to-face instruction. While the core curriculum allows teachers to quickly and easily see where students are struggling, the adaptive tools allow students to continue to work on grade-level content while addressing learning gaps and building towards mastery in their own unique areas of challenge. Digital coursework is overseen by an academic adviser who assists with goal-setting, progress tracking, and developing individualized learning pathways that reflect students' passions and interests. Every Monday morning, a schoolwide report pulled from the digital curriculum helps teachers flag students whose grades drop below 70 percent.

Students at Taos Academy can also earn unexcused "Academic Absences" for being behind in their coursework or for allowing their grades to drop below the 70% actual grade threshold. In cases like this, the student, family, and teacher meet to create a 30-day "Student Success Contract" to help students get back on track. During the 30-day period, the student is required to be on campus five days a week. In addition to academics, the staff works closely with the student during this period to support them in goal-setting, building strong work habits, and developing time management skills. At the end of the contract time, the student is often back on target and has learned some of the skills needed to stay there independently. "We strive to individualize student options across the curriculum," says Traci Filiss, Founder and Director of the school.

This profile was developed through correspondence with Traci Filiss of Taos Academy and with the help of a pre-existing profile of Taos Academy available on the DLC website.

Trio Wolf Creek

Chisago City, Minnesota

GRADE LEVELS SERVED: 9–12

NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED: 192 FT and 41 PT, as of March 2019

HYBRID MODEL: Students have the option to work 100% online or part-time online combined with up to two days a week in a physical location.

Established in 1996, as part of a local school district, in 2002 Trio Wolf Creek became a public charter school located in Chisago City, Minnesota, that serves students across the state. In March 2019, Trio Wolf Creek served 192 full-time students and 41 supplemental students, the majority of whom are White (98.4%). About 19% of students qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch, 15% had IEPs, and 85% were at-risk. Generally, about 80-85% of the students are full-time, and those who are part-time are enrolled in a traditional school and take one or two courses with Trio Wolf Creek. Most students who attend Trio Wolf Creek full-time are significantly behind on credits, and the staff works to close the gaps for those students.

The hybrid model consists of students working 100% online or combining online with up to two days of on campus work. This flexible model allows students to create a self-paced individualized learning program that best suits their needs. During online days—Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays—students access online curriculum and correspond with their teachers over email and through Google Hangouts. Trio Wolf Creek tries to make courses as asynchronous as possible because the families come to Trio Wolf Creek for the school's flexibility. The school requires students to be online at specific times only for special education services, if needed.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., students can go to the physical building located in Chisago City. During that time, teachers are available to tutor students with their course work. While students are not required to be on campus, there are some instances where teachers will encourage students who are falling behind to attend to get additional support. Some students choose to come because of the up-to-date computers and good Internet access as well as social aspects. At times, some parents require their child to attend for accountability purposes, especially if a student has been truant. According to school data, about 60-70% of students attend at least one of the on campus days every week.

Teachers serve as academic advisors also known as Learning Managers who manage students' learning to make sure students are getting the support they need to move forward in their courses, help create and monitor the students Individual Graduation Plan, and keep track of the student's log, which is where all student information is located. On Fridays, Learning Managers send out personal notes to let students and their parents know where the student is and where the most work is needed. Trio Wolf Creek also offers vocation and transition assistance, including internships and externships, and a robust mental health care support team, including a mental health specialist, part-time guidance counselor, student resource officer, and police officer, for their social emotional and behavioral well-being. Some students live too far away or have other obligations, such as children, work, or health issues, so these students tend to not come to the physical building at all. For these students, Trio Wolf Creek is working to figure out a way to offer an online version of the services they provide during their onsite days.

This profile was developed through correspondence with Tracy Quanstrom of Trio Wolf Creek.

State virtual schools

State virtual schools are an important part of the online learning landscape, collectively serving over 420,000 students and approaching one million supplemental online course enrollments in 23 states during the 2016–17 fiscal year. (See Figure 3 and Table 1.) They are among the largest and most recognized providers of online courses, instruction, technology infrastructure, professional development, and other online learning related services to schools and districts across the states in which they operate.

State virtual schools are entities created by legislation or by state-level agencies, usually funded partially or entirely by a state appropriation, course fees, and/or grants. Most state virtual schools are not "schools" as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics, as they do not grant diplomas and are not responsible for many of the functions performed by schools (such as administration of state assessments, state and federal reporting, counseling, etc.). Instead, they supply online courses and related services to schools. Students are usually enrolled with district approval, with the exception of states with course access policies. Even then the school or district plays an integral role in counseling, mentoring, and enrolling students in the state virtual school.

State virtual schools may be administered by a state education agency, or may be separate nonprofit organizations, charter schools, higher education institutions, or regional service agencies contracted by the state education agency. For example:

- Georgia Virtual School, Oregon Academy of Online Learning, Virtual Virginia, and other state virtual schools are part of their state departments of education.
- Idaho Digital Learning is a governmental entity separate from the state education agency, and was created by legislation with a Board of Directors responsible for oversight.
- Montana Digital Academy is administered by the state university system.
- Michigan Virtual receives legislative funding, but is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with a Board of Directors providing oversight.
- Illinois Virtual School is administered through the Peoria County Regional Office of Education, which was awarded the Illinois State Board of Education contract to manage and operate the state virtual school.
- New Hampshire's state virtual school, Virtual Learning Academy Charter School, was created through charter school rules.

Although state virtual schools have different organizational and governance structures, most share similar characteristics. They provide teacher-led online courses, have administrative staff, enroll students, hire and train teachers, and maintain technology infrastructure to deliver and support online courses. They may create their own online course content, license content from vendors, use open educational resources, or combine content from various sources.

State virtual school courses and services are generally funded totally or in part by legislative line items. Districts may be required to pay all or part of the cost of the courses in which their students enroll. In some cases courses are provided at no cost to schools and districts (Montana, South Carolina), or for nominal fees to help cover costs (Idaho). State virtual schools may receive federal or private foundation grants, but the bulk of state virtual school funding comes from the state allocation and/or course fees based on course enrollments.

FIGURE 3 : **States with state virtual schools. Alaska, Texas, Utah, and South Dakota previously were states recognized as having state virtual schools in *Keeping Pace* reports.**

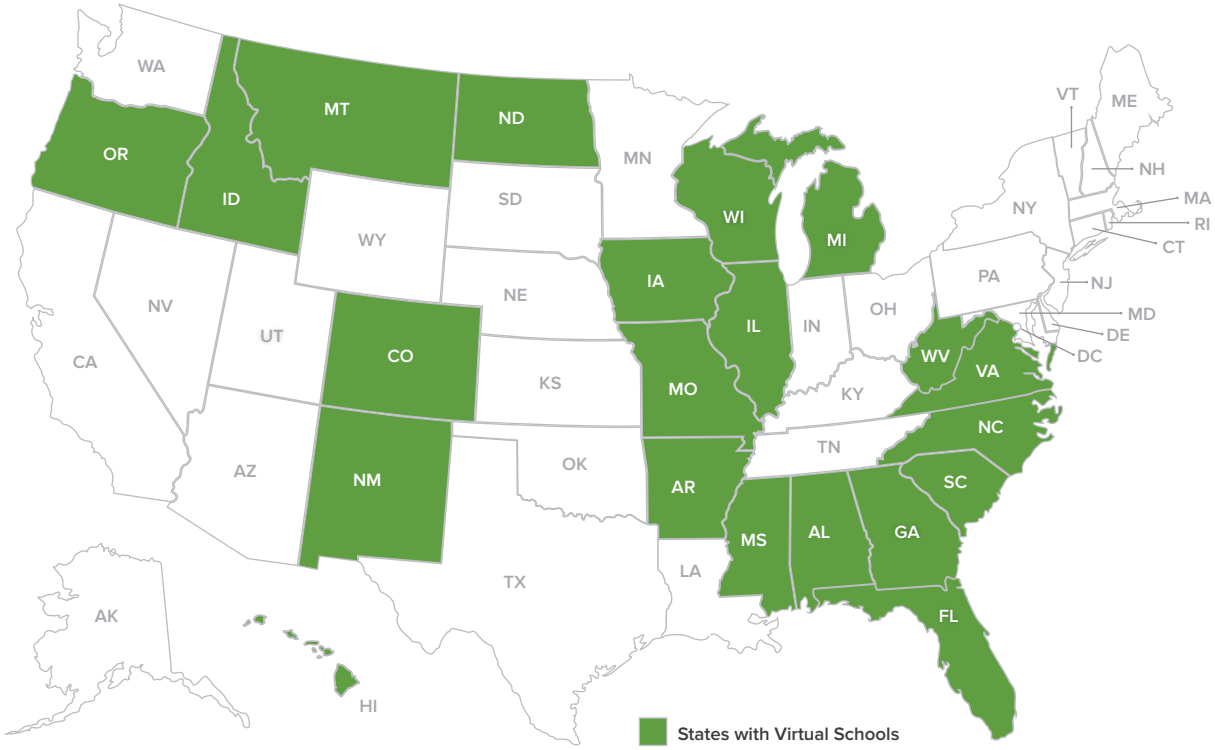


TABLE 1: **State virtual schools**[†]

STATE	STATE VIRTUAL SCHOOL	YEAR OPENED	STAFF FTE	OPERATING BUDGET	GRADES SERVED
Alabama	Alabama ACCESS	2004	8	$20,865,768	7-12
Arkansas	Virtual Arkansas	2013	17	$5,040,000	K-12
Colorado	Colorado Digital Learning Solutions	2015	3	$631,775	6-12
Florida	Florida	1997	402	$209,716,264	K-12
Georgia	Georgia Virtual School	2005	45	$10,675,543	5-12
Hawaii	Hawaii Virtual Learning Network	2007	NR	NR	7-12
Idaho	Idaho Digital Learning Academy	2001	45	$8,900,000	5-12
Illinois	Illinois Virtual School	2001	7	$2,276,435	5-12
Iowa	Iowa Learning Online	2004	4	$1,200,000	7-12
Michigan	Michigan Virtual	2001	65.5	$9,550,000	6-12
Mississippi	Mississippi	2006	NR	$600,000	11-12
Missouri	Missouri Virtual Instructional Program	2007	5	$589,778	K-12
Montana	Montana Digital Academy	2010	5.2	$2,000,500	6-12
New Hampshire	Virtual Learning Academy Charter School	2007	7	$7,566,800	6-12
New Mexico	New Mexico Blended Learning Bureau	2008	6	$890,000*	6-12
North Carolina	North Carolina Virtual Public School	2007	24	$21,000,000	6-12
North Dakota	North Dakota Center for Distance Learning	1996	14	$4,200,000	PK-12
Oregon	Oregon Academy of Online Learning	2005	0.9*	$800,000	9-12
South Carolina	VirtualSC	2006	33	$8,397,315	K-12
Vermont	Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative	2010	3.8	$649,867	6-12
Virginia	Virtual Virginia	2002	6	$4,200,000	6-12
West Virginia	West Virginia Virtual School	2001	2	NR	K-12
Wisconsin	Wisconsin Virtual School	2000	5.7	$1,339,000	6-12

[†] Data are from FY 2016–17

NR = Not reported

** 2015–16 data*

State virtual school enrollment numbers

We count a course enrollment as one student taking one, semester-long, online course. Florida Virtual School is by far the largest state virtual school, with 485,000 course enrollments in FY 2016–17. North Carolina's school is the only other with more than 100,000 course enrollments. Other large schools, in absolute terms or in relation to their state's student populations, include Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, New Hampshire, and South Carolina.

Most state virtual schools are growing, but at a slightly slower rate than in the past few years. Course enrollments collectively grew at a year over year rate of just under 4% during FY 2016–17. Florida Virtual School had 3% growth, while North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS) reported flat course enrollment numbers.

TABLE 2: **State virtual schools course enrollments over the last five years**

STATE	STATE VIRTUAL SCHOOL	2012–2013	2013–2014	2014–2015	2015–2016	2016–2017
Alabama	Alabama ACCESS	51,910	51,809	41,578	57,485	58,466
Arkansas	Virtual Arkansas	2,000	3,734	29,728	29,213	43,689
Colorado	Colorado Digital Learning Solutions	1,007	914	708	433	1,327
Florida	Florida	410,962	377,508	394,712	471,576	485,382
Georgia	Georgia Virtual School	25,877	33,041	52,290	66,460	69,907
Hawaii	Hawaii Virtual Learning Network	1,834	1,514	1,358	1,502	1,502*
Idaho	Idaho Digital Learning Academy	19,036	20,820	22,954	25,488	27,280
Illinois	Illinois Virtual School	2,994	3,097	4,681	6,493	5,848
Iowa	Iowa Learning Online	1,240	1,201	1,294	2,975	1,287
Michigan	Michigan Virtual	20,812	21,944	23,716	24,397	25,565
Mississippi	Mississippi	3,121	2,360	2,262	4,319	4,392
Missouri	Missouri Virtual Instructional Program	1,623	1,992	623	1,639	1,872
Montana	Montana Digital Academy	7,993	6,785	7,111	6,946	7,711
New Hampshire	Virtual Learning Academy Charter School	17,626	22,731	24,724	27,717	26,021
New Mexico	New Mexico Blended Learning Bureau	2,697	2,823	2,199	2,442	2,442*
North Carolina	North Carolina Virtual Public School	94,716	104,799	111,634	116,006	116,538
North Dakota	North Dakota Center for Distance Learning	3,200	6,100	5,414	5,264	6,542
Oregon	Oregon Academy of Online Learning				983	1,040
South Carolina	VirtualSC	16,818	24,491	40,363	41,666	41,638
Vermont	Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative	940	2,707	1,693	2,229	1,893
Virgina	Virtual Virginia	13,026	19,433	24,611	25,600	19,554
West Virginia	West Virginia Virtual School	6,039	11,270	10,428	NR	6,963
Wisconsin	Wisconsin Virtual School	5,036	5,357	5,511	6,150	6,189
TOTAL semester equivalent course enrollments served		**710,507**	**726,430**	**809,592**	**926,983**	**963,048**

NR = Not reported

** 2015–16 data*

Table 3 shows the number of unique students taking online courses in state virtual schools, ranging from 206,038 students in Florida Virtual School during FY 2016–17 to 1,000 or fewer students in some of the smaller programs. Based on 18 of the state virtual schools providing data, students took an average of 2.3 online courses in FY 2016–17, up from an average of 1.8 in FY 2015–16. Student online course loads vary from program to program. NCVPS had one of the highest course loads at 3.2 courses per student, largely due to a focus on year-long course enrollments. Virtual Virginia also emphasizes year-long courses, plus it is running a full-time online pilot contributing to an above-average 3.2 courses per student. Several of the smaller programs—Colorado (1.2), Illinois (1.1)—run well below the national average.

TABLE 3: **Number of students taking online courses from state virtual schools**[1]

STATE	STATE VIRTUAL SCHOOL	NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO TOOK CLASSES	TOTAL COURSE ENROLLMENTS	AVERAGE COURSES PER STUDENT
Alabama	Alabama ACCESS	26,235	58,466	2.2
Arkansas	Virtual Arkansas	21,242	43,689	1.3
Colorado	Colorado Digital Learning Solutions	1,069	1,327	1.2
Florida	Florida	206,038	43,689	2.4
Georgia	Georgia Virtual School	31,006	69,907	2.3
Hawaii	Hawaii Virtual Learning Network	NR	NR	NR
Idaho	Idaho Digital Learning Academy	16,804	27,280	1.4
Illinois	Illinois Virtual School	3,999	5,848	1.1
Iowa	Iowa Learning Online	810	1,287	1.6
Michigan	Michigan Virtual	15,152	25,565	1.7
Mississippi	Mississippi	NR	NR	NR
Missouri	Missouri Virtual Instructional Program	764	1,872	3.4
Montana	Montana Digital Academy	4,610	7,711	1.7
New Hampshire	Virtual Learning Academy Charter School	12,390	26,021	2.1
New Mexico	New Mexico	NR	NR	NR
North Carolina	North Carolina Virtual Public School	36,454	116,538	3.2
North Dakota	North Dakota Center for Distance Learning	4,579	6,542	1.5
Oregon	Oregon Academy of Online Learning	NR	NR	NR
South Carolina	VirtualSC	23,434	41,638	1.5
Vermont	Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative	1,113	1,893	1.9
Virgina	Virtual Virginia	6,036	19,554	3.2
West Virginia	West Virginia Virtual School	NR	NR	NR
Wisconsin	Wisconsin Virtual School	4,000	6,189	1.5
TOTALS		**415,735**	**505,016**	**1.2**

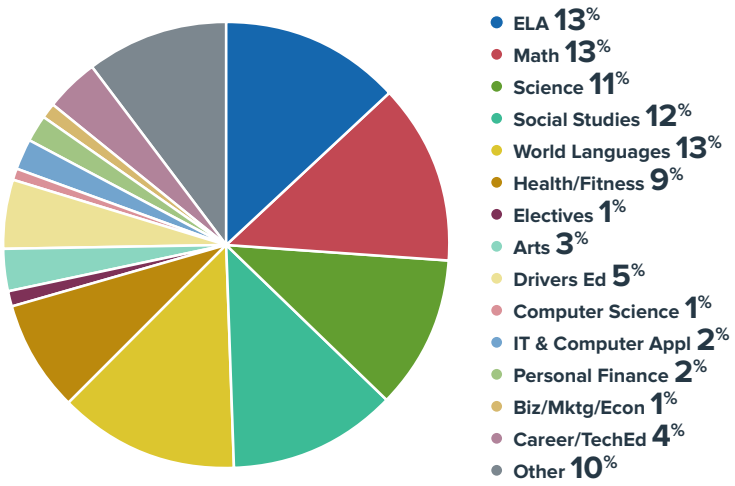
NR = Not reported

(1) Number of students who took one or more online courses from a state virtual school (students are not double counted if they took more than one course)

Enrollments by subject area

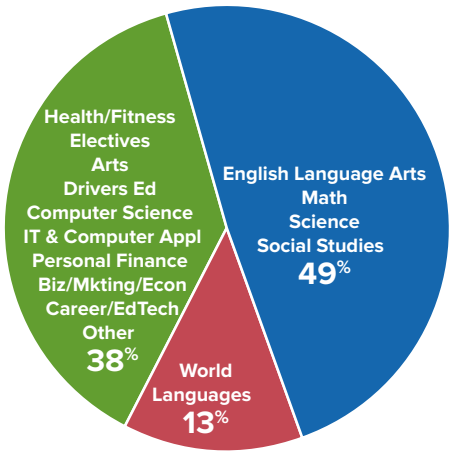
Collectively the core subjects of math, science, language arts, and social studies combined for about 49% of course enrollments in FY 2016–17, down from 53% in FY 2015–16. Enrollments in World Languages increased to 13% in FY 2016–17 after tallying just 6% of course enrollments in FY 2014–15. The cost and difficulty of finding qualified World Language teachers for campus-based courses appears to be driving many districts to rely on online courses. State virtual schools and other suppliers are being asked to create full class sections of online World Language courses to meet the shortfall of qualified local teachers.

FIGURE 4: **Course enrollments by subject categories**



Among core subjects, social studies had the greatest decrease in enrollments in FY 2016–17, representing 11% of core subject enrollments down from 16% in FY 2015–16.

FIGURE 5: **Course enrollments by subject area**

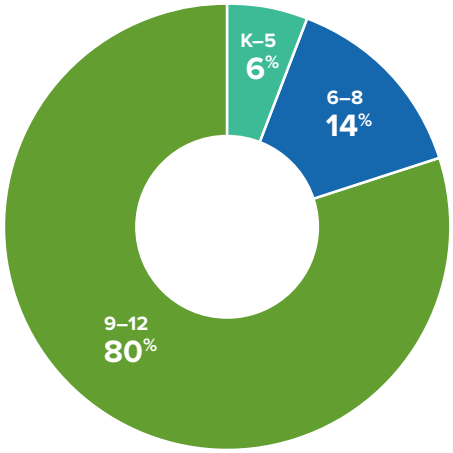


Electives and World Languages combined to total 51% of all state virtual school course enrollments in FY 2016-17, compared to just under 47% in FY 2015–16. Among electives, Health and Fitness represented 8% of all course enrollments in FY 2016–17 compared to only 3.5% in 2014–15. Driver's Education comprised 5% of course enrollments in FY 2016–17. Nineteen of the twenty-three state virtual schools reported detailed data on course enrollments by subject area, accounting for 97% of total state virtual school enrollments in FY 2016–17.

Enrollments by grade level

State virtual schools began providing supplemental courses primarily at the high school level, and about 80% of all state virtual school course enrollments remain in grades 9–12. However, that percentage has dropped from 84% in FY 2015–16.

FIGURE 6: **State virtual school course enrollments by grade level**



Serving middle school grades has been a more recent development, and as such the rate of growth in these lower grades is faster than the traditional high school segment. All but two of the 23 state virtual schools now serve students between grades 5–12 with several programs now offering courses for K–12.

Completion rates

State virtual schools typically define course completion based on a passing grade, most commonly defined as grades C, D, or 60% or higher. Florida Virtual School, which is funded on course completions, defines a completion as a student successfully finishing a virtual school course with a D or higher. Several state virtual schools require a grade of 70% or above to be considered a completion. A few define course completion as any final grade issued, including an F and even Withdrawal. A small percentage of state virtual schools accept a student completing 90–100% of a course as a completion and do not require a grade to be issued. Another counts an online course as completed if the student was still in the course when the course was marked closed on the closing date.

Teacher type and compensation

Most state virtual schools rely heavily on part-time teachers to staff online courses. Fifteen of the 18 state virtual schools reporting data on teacher type rely more on part-time teachers than full-time instructors. Six programs employ no full-time teachers, exclusively using part-time instructors. Florida Virtual School is the notable exception, with 1,471 full-time teachers and about 78 part-time.

Because almost all online courses delivered by state virtual schools are teacher-led, the primary factor in determining annual budgets is teacher compensation. Part-time or adjunct teachers are typically paid on a per enrollment basis, generally ranging from about $130 to over $200 per enrollment, based on factors such as experience and type of course. Full-time teachers are typically paid in a similar way and on similar scales as teachers in traditional schools in their state.

Sources of online courses

State virtual schools get their online courses from a wide range of sources. Some state virtual schools, like the Missouri Virtual Instructional Program and West Virginia Virtual, rely largely on vendor-supplied courses and services, often including vendor-provided online teachers. Others, such as Florida Virtual School, Alabama ACCESS, Idaho Digital Learning, Georgia Virtual School, and others, largely develop their own course content. Illinois Virtual School, Montana Digital Academy, and others combine original development with vendor courses to provide a complete course catalog.

The evolution of state virtual school services

Since around 1997, state virtual schools have been among the early pioneers providing online learning options to supplement a student's learning in the traditional school setting. Over the past decade plus, state virtual schools have significantly expanded the types of services and range of products they offer, while maintaining the traditional role of supplemental online course supplier. Innovative state virtual schools are now introducing and managing change in the delivery of online learning services.

Supplemental online courses are still at the heart of the state virtual school mission, but most state virtual schools provide a variety of other value-added services to meet the changing needs of schools and students. They work with districts to provide access to online curriculum, technology infrastructure, and teacher training to expand digital learning opportunities in mainstream classrooms. Many have expanded offerings in college and career readiness courses and tools, addressing state and local concerns over preparing students for life after high school. Some examples of the expanding services provided by state virtual schools include the following:

- VirtualSC offered online keyboarding for South Carolina students in grades K–6 across 43 school districts in FY 2017–18, serving 81,598 elementary students. It also works with nine high schools to provide Virtual Learning Labs across the state for 469 students to receive support from certified teachers, mentors, and robots. VirtualSC started using five robots in 2014, further expanding the instructional reach of the Virtual Learning Lab program.
- Idaho Digital Learning, in collaboration with the Idaho Career & Technical Education, has developed Skillstack, a badging/micro-certification platform that enables Idaho's educators to validate the skills of

their students who demonstrate proficiency towards workforce-relevant badges. Institutions of higher education are able to award badges as evidence of proficiency within specific programs of study where the mission aligns with competency based mastery. The goals of Skillstack are to document, assess, and validate student skills utilizing industry and disciplinary defined standards to create a wider talent pool for Idaho employers, and to assist with the articulation of credit from secondary career and technical education programs into Idaho's colleges and universities.

- Virtual Arkansas is offering art courses to students in grades 10–12 through a partnership with Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, making the arts more accessible to students in all parts of the state.
- NCVPS addressed a pressing need in North Carolina by launching an English I course specifically designed for English Learners built with WIDA and Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) supports. The course includes enhanced instruction to help English Learners with vocabulary and language development and includes a live class feature to help students build verbal communication skills with their instructor and peers. After a successful pilot semester, the course launched statewide in Fall 2016 and includes students identified as English Learners as well as traditional students. English II, with English Learner supports, launched statewide in January 2017.
- The Montana Digital Academy (MTDA) redeveloped its credit recovery program in 2015 to focus on creating a personalized learning path for students based on content mastery. All courses embed an advanced notification system that fosters communication between the MTDA teacher, local school support and administrative staff, parents and the students, so all stakeholders are informed of the progress or areas of focus needed for each student. Using adaptive release, students are presented with one task to be completed before the next task appears in their learning path. This redesign has resulted in enhanced communication to all stakeholders and a clear pathway to meaningful recovery of credit for students. During FY 2016–17, Montana high school students successfully completed 2,044 credit recovery courses, representing 27% of the overall MTDA course enrollments.

State virtual schools fill other value-added roles in their states. They build and maintain expertise in online learning within a state that becomes an asset to policymakers, state agencies, districts and other stakeholders. They may help reduce costs by providing online services, such as statewide online and professional development to replace face-to-face meetings and reduce travel expenses. Two state virtual schools—New Hampshire's Virtual Learning Academy Charter School and Florida Virtual School—enroll full-time online students, grant diplomas, and perform the other duties similar to traditional schools.

Providing the services needed for districts to implement a variety of online learning approaches is one of the fastest growing components of state virtual schools. State virtual schools are supporting districts across their states by offering access to online courses, learning management system (LMS) access, professional development for blended learning instruction, technology support, and planning services. Approaches vary by state virtual school and range from a district blended learning consortium to real-time, two-way video instruction. Some examples are listed below:

- The Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators, and Students Statewide (ACCESS) Franchise Model is an agreement between school districts and the Alabama State Department of Education to use select ACCESS online courses in a hosted LMS at no cost. Support includes access to teacher professional development and LMS training, a distance learning specialist, help desk support, and two campus visits during the first year for consultation and recommendations.

- Georgia Virtual makes more than 100 courses available to the public as open educational resources (OER). Districts can access these courses, plus assessments, at no cost. The public OER courses are available without assessments.
- Michigan Virtual offers districts a combination of blended learning services, including hosted online courses, teacher training for blended learning instruction, and coaching and consulting for administrators on the implementation of blended learning.
- Virtual Arkansas makes its online courses available for schools to use in the classroom in a hosted LMS at no cost. It also has an eight-person "Team Digital" field staff that consults with districts to plan and implement blended learning. Team Digital members also conduct face-to-face teacher training and other campus functions for Virtual Arkansas.

College and career readiness has a renewed focus in many states. College and career readiness programs have been in place in traditional schools for many years, but now state virtual schools are taking a role in providing online courses for college-bound students and those interested in Career and Technical Education (CTE). Online college readiness tools include math remediation, ACT test preparation, and college planning tools that better prepare college bound students. Some examples are listed below:

- The Virtual Learning Academy Charter School in New Hampshire has a college and career readiness focus that includes annual assessment of college readiness skills. Its Learning Through College program gives students the option of completing one or more college courses, completing the first year of an associate's degree program, or completing an entire associate's degree program while in high school.
- Virtual Arkansas offers a significant number of online Career Technical Education (CTE) courses, which make up about 4% of course enrollments in state virtual schools. CTE requires a campus-based lab with a mentor/facilitator for these classes because of the hands-on requirements, and all courses must be approved by the state Department of Workforce Development. The program offers dual or concurrent enrollment in partnership with two Arkansas state universities with about 3,844 course enrollments in FY 2017–18.
- In 2014 Montana Digital Academy (MTDA) launched EdReady Montana, an online college and career readiness program that assesses student skills in mathematics and provides a mastery-based personalized learning path for students. EdReady Montana was initially used by incoming college freshmen to help them prepare for the math portion of commonly used placement exams, such as AccuPlacer, Compass, SAT, and ACT. Since its launch, MTDA has made the EdReady online program available, at no charge, for any learner in Montana, including adults. This allows middle, high school, and higher education students the opportunity to hone the critical math skills they need to master in preparation for their desired educational and career goals, from algebra to pre-calculus to the HiSet high school equivalency exam. Under the management of the MTDA, with financial support from the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation, EdReady Montana has served 94,807 learners as of June 2018.

District activity

The following pages provide a set of use cases for online, blended, and digital learning in a mainstream district context.

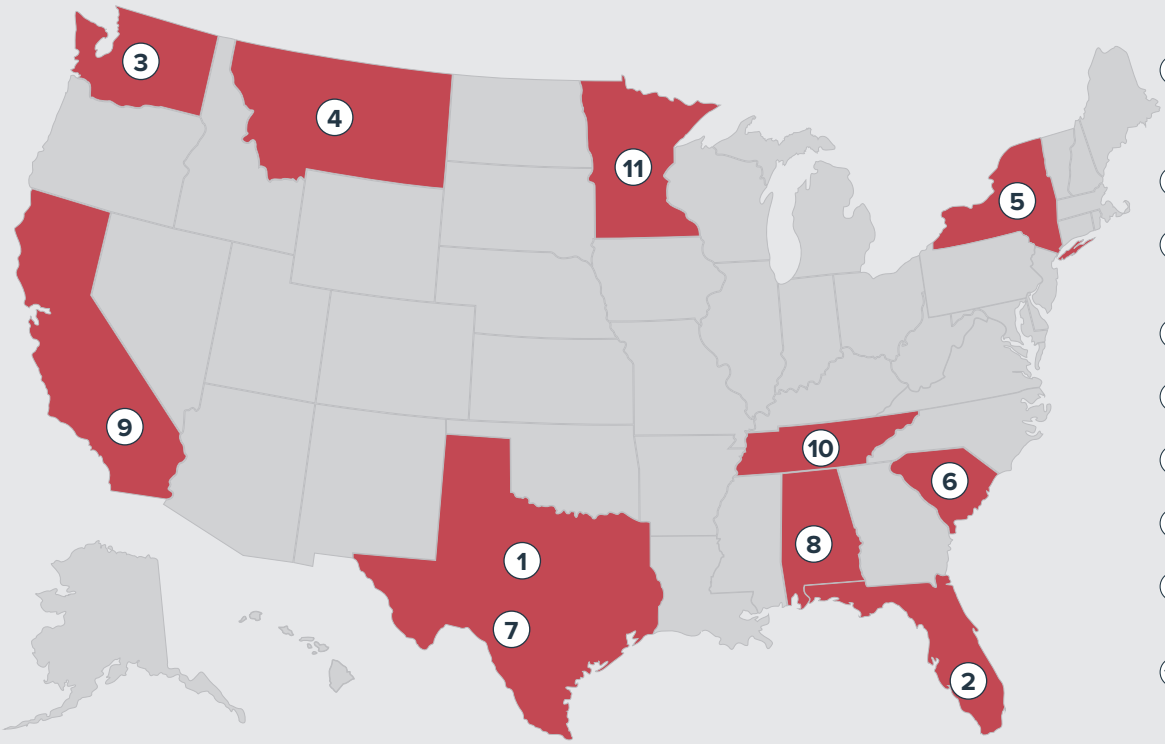
Each use case is characterized based on:

- An educational goal
  - Examples of goals include increasing graduation rates, increasing course opportunities for students, improving math achievement, and closing equity gaps.
- A strategy for reaching the goal
  - Examples of strategies include offering new instructional tools and methods, and adding online courses to fill gaps in courses available.
- An operational description that briefly describes the tasks implemented to achieve the strategy. This may include the people/positions involved, as well as online tools, resources, and instructional methods.
- A summary of the district's status relative to the educational goal.

Note that a district online or blended program does not in itself define a use case. Many use cases, however, may describe an online or blended program that was created to solve an educational goal.

In addition, although online and blended programs may be addressing multiple use cases, for the purposes of this document we focus on a single use case.

FIGURE 7 : **Location of district use cases profiled**



1. *Offering career and technical education*
   Amarillo Independent School District
2. *Educating during extended emergencies*
   Bay County, Gulf County, and Tindall Air Force Military Base Schools
3. *Addressing equity issues*
   Bellevue School District
4. *Providing World Languages in a small district*
   Charlo School District
5. *Increasing graduation rates*
   City School District of Albany
6. *Powering personalized learning*
   Horry County Schools
7. *Reducing drop-out rates*
   Keller Independent School District
8. *Addressing community needs*
   Piedmont City School District
9. *Serving at-risk students*
   Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District
10. *Increasing dual enrollment opportunities*
    Putnam County School District
11. *Continuing learning during snow days*
    Tri-City United Independent School District

Offering career and technical education

Amarillo Independent School District

Amarillo, Texas

Texas has 5.3 million K–12 students enrolled in 993 districts, the second largest K–12 student population in the country, second to only California. Fifty-one percent of the state's public school students are educated in only four percent of its school districts predominantly in the major metropolitan areas of Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and Austin. The other 49% of students are in a mix of suburban and rural areas, and 459 districts are classified as rural. Texas defines a rural district by default as not fitting into urban and suburban categories, and with a small student population demonstrating slow or no growth.

Amarillo Independent School District (AISD) is supporting these rural districts through their Gateway to Health Careers Project. Designed to increase the healthcare workforce, this innovative healthcare program is administered through AISD's Amarillo Area Center for Advanced Learning (AACAL). AACAL provides students from eleven rural districts in the Texas panhandle unique opportunities to learn about careers in the health sciences through blended learning combining online learning and clinical experience. Online curriculum and instruction is provided by AACAL through hands-on simulations and through patient interactions provided by their community hospitals, long term care facilities, or emergency medical services. In addition to the simulations, Amarillo Gateway teachers and administrators travel to the districts to train students in the basic skills that healthcare workers need, creating a deeper connection between the students and instructors. Students can graduate high school with an endorsement in Public Service through the Texas Foundation High School Program.

As of Fall 2019, AACAL is serving a little over 600 students in 24 schools in their rural partner districts. The partner schools provide a classroom, Internet connection, computer teaching station connected to a projector to display the online and/or live lessons, student computers, a classroom facilitator to monitor students, and a partnership with a clinical site. Classes are streamed or recorded in Amarillo and viewed live or asynchronously by students in a classroom in their local districts. A local facilitator provided by the rural school is in the classroom to help students during class and to monitor their work and progress throughout the year. Senior students from the rural districts travel to Amarillo for face-to-face instruction that provides them an opportunity to create a cohort across all 11 partner districts. Heather Sawyer, the Canadian ISD online facilitator says, "Students love it. The four that did Certified Medical Assistant are all going into nursing school, and hopefully, they will be able to work in the health profession as they go through school."

The Gateway program started, as many similar schools do, as a result of an innovative project design to help students. "The program was literally hatched over lunch and sketched out on the back of a napkin," notes Jay Barrett, Principal of AACAL. "The goal from the beginning has been to get more workers in the healthcare field not only in Amarillo but in rural areas."

This profile was developed through correspondence with Jay Barrett and Jean Whitehead of Amarillo Independent School District and from a case study published in the *Digital Learning Strategies for Rural America* report.

Educating during extended emergencies

Bay County, Gulf County, & Tindall Air Force Military Base Schools

Panhandle of Florida

In October 2018, Hurricane Michael made landfall onto the panhandle of Florida with sustained wind speeds of 155 mph, leaving extensive damage in its wake. Because of the devastation to schools in local areas, including Bay County, Gulf County, and an elementary school on the Tindall Air Force Base, students were unable to return to classes for weeks or months in some cases. For military families, the situation was even more challenging, as families were required per guidelines related to family safety to relocate at least 50 miles from the targeted area. The response scattered families to states as far away as Texas, California, Wisconsin, and Oklahoma, separating them from their home school. Loss of learning time was a major concern and made the need to find a learning solution for all affected students more urgent.

Parents had a choice of enrolling their children in another school, but because the situation was already overwhelming, most parents did not want to have to go through the process of transferring records. Additionally, the school records themselves were lost, damaged, or unavailable while hurricane-affected schools were in the process of recovering for student re-entry. Rian Meadows, District Relations Manager for Florida Virtual School (FLVS) who oversees 20 counties and their respective school districts in Northern Florida, which included the hardest hit areas, reached out to her contacts to see how FLVS could help.

To start, Meadows fielded communications from families and schools to understand the situations. As she built a needs-assessment of the general area, the FLVS team worked out a multi-step solution, featured in the numbered list below, for students who needed virtual course enrollments or full-time virtual enrollment for the remainder of the fall semester until their local school re-opened, or for the remainder of the school year:

1. A “help ticket” system was used for each registering student, allowing all teams that needed to provide support or follow-up to keep the registration process running smoothly.
2. Students were registered into courses by school counselors, the enrollment team, school leaders, and even Meadows herself as needed, using the K–12 Courses and Graduation guide and whatever student data was available to guide FLVS course assignments.
3. FLVS teachers reached out to students by phone and used digital “live lesson” rooms in Blackboard to assess student learning progress already made in the course, so that they could “skip” students over lessons and concepts where students could demonstrate mastery.
4. For students who elected to return to their local school district, students’ courses and grades were transferred back to their local schools at the end of Fall or Spring semester.

An estimated 1,000 students from the affected communities were enrolled in FLVS courses following the hurricane and were able to continue their education on-pace. Of special note were the handful of high school seniors who would have lost their early entry into small private colleges had FLVS not offered them a full-time enrollment option that continued their path towards graduation.

This profile was developed through correspondence with Rian Meadows of FLVS and through information from Weather.gov, the *Ed Week* blog, and FLVS website..

Addressing equity issues

Bellevue School District

Bellevue, Washington

Serving 20,400 students, Bellevue School District is located 10 miles east of Seattle. According to Bellevue's Superintendent, Ivan Duran, the student population represents 125 countries and 94 languages. Thirteen percent of the districts' students are Latino, and three percent are African-American. The majority of students are either Asian (41%) or white (34%). Nine percent are multi-ethnic. Despite its status as an affluent suburb with median income over $121,000, 17% of the students are low-income and approximately 300 are homeless. After disaggregating district data based on race, socioeconomic status, attendance, attained credits, and graduation rates, according to an article in Education Week, the district found that

> Eighty-two percent of black and Latino students graduated on time in 2018—that's 10% lower than the district's white students and 12% lower than its Asian students. The gaps in college enrollment among graduates is much starker: 56% of black students and 53% of Latino students who graduated in 2017 enrolled in college compared to 76% of white students and 89% of Asian students. Equally large disparities crop up in the state's English and math test scores as early as 3rd grade.

More and more districts like Bellevue are beginning to acknowledge the inequities and are working to close the achievement gaps. For Shomari Jones, Director of Equity and Graduation Success at Bellevue School District, his mission is to ensure that "low-income, nonwhite students have the same opportunities to success as their more privileged peers."

One of the many efforts Jones is implementing to combat equity issues in the district is the use of graduation success coaches, or grad success coaches for short. There are five grad success coaches total, one housed in each of the four traditional high schools in the district, and an additional coach housed in one of the district's middle schools as part of a pilot program to help students transitioning from middle to high school. The grad success coaches use digital learning to personalize academic and social-emotional support systems to help students succeed. Students use a digital learning platform to recover credits and are asked to sign a contract when they begin to work with their coach. Each grad success coach is trained in racial equity, inclusion, social emotional learning, guidance counseling, and data analytics, and supports about 50 students. Grad success coaches have office space within their respective school and communicate regularly with their students and their students' families. Coaches will either have students come to see them or they'll go to the students' classrooms and check in with them to see how they're doing and what supports they need to stay on track.

In addition to the grad success coaches, the district uses digital learning for a program known as RISE to ensure students who are on long-term suspension (longer than 10 days) continue to progress in their learning. As Jones explains, "systemic barriers [are] in the way for lots of people, and my job is to remove them."

This profile was developed through correspondence with Shomari Jones of Bellevue School District and with the help of a 2019 Education Leaders to Learn From article from *Education Week*.

Providing World Languages in a small district

Charlo School District

Charlo, Montana

Charlo is a town of approximately 400 in Lake County, located within the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation. Agriculture and ranching drive the local economy, and a significant number of residents commute to work in other towns, some as far away as Missoula, 50 miles to the south. The Charlo School District has about 264 students across three schools, including Charlo Elementary, Charlo Middle School, and Charlo High School. Although located on the Reservation, Charlo has only a few Native American students and is predominantly white.

The bulk of online activity in the district occurs in Charlo High School, where roughly a quarter of the 94 secondary students are taking an online course. Bonnie Perry, the K–12 Principal, employs online learning specifically to address teacher availability issues in foreign language courses. "We offer all of our Foreign Language courses to any high school student seeking a foreign language credit online through the Montana Digital Academy [the state virtual school]. We do not have the means to hire full-time language teachers, so this fills a very critical need for our students," said Perry. "We have had students complete German, French, Spanish, and Latin all online."

Students work in either a computer lab or in a dedicated classroom on Chromebooks with a teacher in the classroom who provides supervision. Learners make a recording of language readings and pronunciation once per week. Using the technology poses one of the more significant challenges, as students continue to develop necessary technical skills to take full advantage of digital learning opportunities.

In Fall 2017, Charlo made an online Middle School Language Sampler course available to sixth graders. "We learned a lot from this first year. It gave the students a chance to get to know the basics of French, how to navigate the Montana Digital Academy online environment, and how to communicate with their teachers online," reports Shane Bartshi, Counselor. "Our sixth graders have previously taken tests online, but learning to use online curriculum is very different. It was great for the students to learn new skills." Both students and teachers felt comfortable and successful by the end of the 10-week course. "Our teachers thought this was beneficial on many levels: academic rigor, organization, persistence, academic stamina," notes Perry.

Online learning addresses several equity and instructional challenges faced by small districts like Charlo, but it is not without its challenges outside of school. Many Charlo students have limited access to computers and Internet at home. Consequently, Charlo provides online students with a flexible schedule, computer access, and supervision to complete their online coursework during the school day on campus. "We have to have a place for students to access their courses—sometimes in a computer lab or on Chromebooks in a standard classroom—and since this is on campus, the students must be supervised," noted Perry. "I am thankful for flexible teachers willing to go the extra mile and take on [online] students...Without online learning available to our students we would have a tough time meeting accreditation standards, and course offerings would be limited for our rural students."

This profile was developed from a case study published in the *Digital Learning Strategies for Rural America* report.

Increasing graduation rates

City School District of Albany

Albany, New York

City School District of Albany in New York is a high-needs district serving 10,000 students, and nearly 85% of them qualify for free or reduced lunch. Albany High School enrolls approximately 2,800 students. Thanks to the implementation of the Online Success Program, Albany High School has gone from a 50% graduation rate to 72% over a nine-year period. Founded in 2010, the Online Success Program first focused solely on seniors who were not motivated to graduate; by May of 2011, all 20 students who had taken part in the pilot program graduated, offering students flexibility to complete their work when and how they wanted to.

The school realized that the Online Success Program could provide flexibility for all students, so the district put together a task force to plan for roll out to the entire high school. As of 2011, Albany High School was offering 80% of their course titles as part of the Online Success Program. As Thomas Vacanti, Albany High School's Online Learning Coordinator, explains, "The program is no longer just for struggling students. It also offers mastery-based options to help higher-achieving students earn the additional points they need to raise their grades." The program now serves over 500 students a year. Students can either self-refer into the program or be referred by teachers, their counselor, or a parent. Upon entry into the program, students sign a contract and review their prospectus with Vacanti and the teacher's assistant to decide what the best path is for success. Students enroll in online courses for credit recovery as well as for original credit for electives.

A typical day for a student in the program includes one to three study halls mixed into a regular schedule of face-to-face classes. Upperclassmen get more study halls if they need to recover more credit or need more flexibility for electives. During the study halls, students work in the program's dedicated lab, which offers 25 computers. The teacher's assistant checks in and helps motivate students to work through their coursework and keep them on task. Vacanti is also able to see every student's computer screen on his monitor, so he can keep students accountable. The courses themselves offer a minimum amount of instructional support, so Vacanti as well as a teacher's assistant are available to students all day in the lab; other content-specific teachers also provide help as needed after school and during Saturday sessions.

In the 2018–19 academic year, the program is working on offering students support specific to soft skills, such as reflection, self-regulation, study skills, and time management. Some students have emotional and mental support needs or are second- or third-year freshmen; they may come to school for a shortened day and only work in the lab on online courses and not have traditional courses. Based on students' needs, the program continues to make adjustments as needed. The most important component for the students' success is the relationship that Vacanti and the other supporting educators have with the students. Because of the Online Success Program's increase in graduation rates, Albany High School has been removed from the Receivership list as of the 2018–19 academic year.

This profile was developed through correspondence with Thomas Vacanti of City School District of Albany.

Powering personalized learning

Horry County Schools

Conway, South Carolina

Horry County serves a growing and diverse community; on the east end of the county is Myrtle Beach, a hub of the state's tourism industry, and on the west end of the county is a more rural community. The county's school district—Horry County Schools—serves over 42,000 students, and central to their mission is personalizing learning to engage students in their education. Edi Cox, Executive Director of Online Learning, shares that the school district's vision came from collaboration "with the business community, the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, and what employers were telling the South Carolina Department of Education they were looking for in new employees." The profile included not only academic skills but the ability to think critically, work well with others, and bring an intrinsic motivation to a career.

Armed with that knowledge, the district began with a pilot of personalized learning in a middle school in 2014. Following that, they worked with digital learning leaders to build an infrastructure that would scale across the district. The approach included a rotation model featuring whole group, small group, and individual support with the teacher as key learning facilitator, and a 1:1 device initiative. In 2015, the effort spread to the district's high schools, and in 2016 and 2017, they expanded to elementary grades (beginning in grade five). They used an organic approach by layering in digital learning opportunities where it made the most sense, and they continue to explore new ways of integrating technology. Teachers are supported in developing skills and resources to use with students so much so that now it is a fluid daily process of incorporating digital learning and monitoring learning metrics, such as grades and progress.

Funding for the personalized learning program stems from a penny sales tax. Digital support resources include a teacher laptop initiative, 1:1 student device initiative for all students grades 3–12, interactive white boards, a district technology fair, a competitive robotics program, a district virtual school, and extensive teacher training in using technology tools. The use of digital learning has helped the district accelerate student achievement, increase student engagement with peers, build students' and educators' skills with a variety of digital learning tools, and individualize the learning experience for all students and educators.

Since implementing personalized learning in 2013–14, district educators are seeing positive shifts in the culture and climate of the schools, including an increase in attendance rates and student engagement, and a decline in discipline issues. As Brandice Gore, a former Instructional Coach at Conway Middle School says, "They [students] are thinking past high school, which is what you want as an educator."

This profile was developed through correspondence with Edi Cox of Horry County Schools and with the help of resources and information on the Horry County Schools' website.

Reducing drop-out rates

Keller Independent School District

Keller, Texas

Keller Independent School District (Keller) has 42 schools serving more than 35,000 students in a growing suburban community situated north of Fort Worth, Texas. One of the schools—New Direction—is a small alternative high school that serves students who need an alternative style of learning in order to graduate. The school offers students a reduced schedule of two online courses at a time. Since its inception, the school has seen positive results, says Elaine Plybon, Keller's Virtual and Blended Learning Coordinator because "students are doing high school the way they need to do high school." Because of the positive results, Plybon and other educators and administrators in Keller saw a need to expand the program, but the district didn't have the space onsite at New Direction. Consequently, other high schools in the district started creating their own programs that were modeled after the one started at New Direction so that they could better serve students who were at risk of dropping out.

Over the last three years, three Keller high schools have adopted a similar program, each with their own unique spin. To participate, students move from enrollment in their home high school and are enrolled into the new hybrid program. Students are able to access digital courses that are imported into the district's learning management system. Students are supported by a paraprofessional in a separate learning area with additional teacher support throughout their scheduled time at school. Students are also able to take a traditional class (for example, a unique elective) if the course is not available digitally.

Fossil Ridge High School started Panther Academy three years ago. Students are onsite all day, and teachers rotate through the learning space to provide direct instruction and hands-on learning with a focus on credit recovery. Timber Creek High School began its program, known as Flight School, two years ago. Students in Flight School spend four hours a day on campus with a learning coach and teachers in a dedicated lab space. In order to be admitted to Flight School, students have to apply for admission and sign a contract to pledge their accountability to their learning progress. The students in the program have grown supportive like a family and cheer each other on and hold each other accountable. In fall 2018, the school started with 20 students and by mid-year, 18 had graduated, so the program admitted 18 more students in spring of 2019. Because of the program's success, Timber Creek is piloting the Launch program that identifies freshmen who are failing and need additional support to stay on track for graduation. Similar to Timber Creek's Flight School, Central High School's Ignite program takes a hybrid approach focused on supporting meaningful learning processes.

All three programs have visuals on the wall that track student success, and each student has their own unique reasons for needing the hybrid program. When credits are completed, students get to walk the stage at a graduation ceremony with family and friends, or they can choose to attend the end of year graduation at their school along with their peers. In the 2018–2019 academic year, some schools expanded their program to include students who want to take original credit courses with a goal of graduating early and starting college or career. Plybon shares that what they have learned is that this program is less about drop-out prevention and more about realizing that some students need a different way "to do school," and this hybrid program gives them that option.

This profile was developed through correspondence with Elaine Plybon of Keller Independent School District.

Addressing community needs

Piedmont City School District

Piedmont, Alabama

Alabama ranks as one of the poorest states in the nation, with poverty ranging from 20% to 35% in the state's most rural areas. A *Montgomery Adviser* article helps paint a picture of rural education where Piedmont City School District is located: "98% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Test scores are low, there's little diversity, teachers struggle to get parents involved, and there are few after-school programs because it's difficult for students to get transportation." The state ranks lowest in the nation for both 4th and 8th grade math on the NAEP. The Piedmont City School District has one elementary school, a middle school, and a high school, enrolling a total of approximately 1,240. In an effort to improve student outcomes, the district adopted a formal digital learning program in 2009; it soon found that the program could help transform the entire community.

Piedmont was once a thriving rural town, as it served as a crossing for two stagecoach routes and as a hub of the cotton textile industry for many years, according to the *Montgomery Adviser* article. However, in recent years, the town took economic hits when two major employers moved or shut down. Many local businesses suffered as well. The impact on families was severe, forcing regional struggles in employment and future opportunities.

The mPower Piedmont movement (mPower) started with a pilot program at Piedmont High which provided 150 laptops to students; in 2010, this plan expanded to include grades 4–12. In 2012, a check-out program for laptop computers was implemented for grades K–3. Today, Piedmont City School District is fully 1:1 with a device for every student in district. Early elementary students use a variety of mobile devices appropriate to their grade level, while students from grades 4–12 are issued a laptop for their own designated use.

mPower, while initially focused on students' access, expanded beyond just the school. From the start former superintendent Matt Akin saw mPower as nothing short of a community transformation initiative—to boost the self-esteem and self-efficacy of the entire community. While devices for schools was a starting point, the school district's leadership realized quickly that they needed to address Internet access and connectivity disparities within the community as a whole. Many students in the district live in rural areas where Internet connection is unavailable; for other students, a broadband connection may be available but the expense puts it out of their family's reach. Initially, the school district partnered with a virtual service company to expand broadband access across Piedmont and later was funded to build a citywide wireless network, providing every student and their family 24/7 access. When the grant supporting this infrastructure ran out, the district had to figure out different ways to get access. Today, the schools use MiFi boxes or cards to support at-home access for students and families. The district also partnered with local entities to create a support network; some local businesses, restaurants, and churches offer free wifi for students and their families to work online. Rachel Smith, Piedmont's Curriculum Coordinator and Administrator for Federal Programs says, "This initiative—both the connectivity and the devices—is a game-changer, not just for our students, but their families. We hear stories of parents who completed a GED or college classes on the school-issued devices after the kids were in bed."

This profile was developed from a case study published in the *Digital Learning Strategies for Rural America* report.

Serving at-risk students

Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District

Placentia, California

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District (PYLUSD) serves approximately 24,000 students in Orange County, California. An independent study program at one of PYLUSD's high schools—La Entrada—originally provided digital curriculum for college prep, offering minimum instructional support because the students who were partaking in the program were all self-regulated and motivated. Carrie Bisgard, PYLUSD's Director of Instructional Support, says over time, the district started to recognize that this model was not going to serve a wide variety of students, so they added in another path known as the hybrid pathway. While La Entrada serves 100 students grades 9–12, the hybrid pathway specifically serves 30 of those students. Students are typically referred to the hybrid pathway by their home high school's academic counselor because of underlying mental health needs. The students may have a hard time making it through a full day on a full-time comprehensive high school campus and they may also have a hard time in an online, independent study program; so this flexible approach provides a hybrid alternative and an individualized way to learn. Without the hybrid approach, these students would be at-risk for dropping out of school.

The hybrid pathway allows students to come into a lab every day for two hours to work on online curriculum alongside a teacher. The teacher has an independent study credential as well as a single content area and special education credential. When the student starts the hybrid pathway, the teacher works with the student to help set a realistic pace and expectation; each week, the teacher and student talk through the pacing guide for that week's coursework. Students are typically working on one academic course and a social emotional course at the same time. In addition to the courses, La Entrada offers a face-to-face workshop once a week on a variety of topics like mindfulness, college essay writing, and career matching.

In the lab setting, the teacher does whole group meetings once a week along with one-on-one meetings with each student, and sometimes pulls together a small group lecture or discussion. In addition to the teacher who is always available in the lab, three teachers serve as teachers of record for the online courses. These teachers are also available onsite as students need the support. The line between the fully online independent study program and the hybrid pathway is fluid, so students have the flexibility to move from one to the other as needed. For instance, students who begin to fall behind in the fully online independent pathway are counseled to enter the hybrid pathway for additional support. As Bisgard emphasizes, this flexible approach between the two paths allows students to build the skills they need to possess to do independent study or integrate partially again on their home campus for a concurrent class, team sports, or band.

This profile was developed through correspondence with Carrie Bisgard of Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District.

Increasing dual enrollment opportunities

Putnam County School District

Cookeville, Tennessee

During the 2009–10 school year, Upperman High School in rural Putnam County, Tennessee, transformed their online credit recovery program into the *VITAL Program: Virtual Instruction To Accentuate Learning*, with a goal of developing "Future Ready" students. The program began with four high school students. The school's decision to start small was intentional; they wanted to learn as they grew in an organic way, taking the time to reflect and giving them the space to continually assess opportunities to build a solid foundation to support meaningful program growth. They purposefully selected teachers who were comfortable using technology for learning and known for building strong relationships with students. They borrowed ideas from partner digital learning providers to organize and structure the program. Originally launched as a program for high school juniors and seniors, the program expanded to high school sophomores by offering high school credit courses to middle school students who were ready for next-level hybrid math and science courses.

"Enrollment in the *VITAL* program grew quickly, largely from word-of-mouth from students and families that experienced learning success," says Sam Brooks, Personalized Learning Supervisor. By spring 2010, enrollment grew to 74 enrollments. Putnam County added more schools and expanded programs in the 2010–11 academic year, resulting in 150 enrollments. By 2012, *VITAL* expanded district-wide, and two more high schools were added, which grew the enrollment by an average of 100 students per year. Fast forward to 2018–19, an estimated 800 students are enrolled in VITAL. The outcome of *VITAL* has been the opportunity to create truly individualized learning paths for K–12 students who need it.

Over time, the opportunities for students to finish high school courses earlier enabled them to take dual enrollment courses starting in their sophomore year of high school. To expand this dual enrollment part of the program, Putnam County Labs are facilitated by a learning coach, and some of the dual enrollment courses are taught by high school teachers while others are taught by professors from local community and technical colleges, including Volunteer State Community College, Tennessee College of Applied Technologies, and Tennessee Tech. Courses are offered online, face-to-face, or blended depending on the school. Thanks to these partnerships, students can now graduate from high school with their Associates Degree (AA) and industry certifications in a variety of areas, including Health Sciences, Information Technology, and Engineering.

Funding through a state higher education grant covers costs for two dual credit courses if a student meets academic qualifications. If a student is interested in a third course, the grant pays $200 of the total $498 cost of the course. As the program continued to gain steam, Volunteer State Community College (VSCC) offered to pick up the remaining cost of the third course as well as cover the bill of the fourth course if the student chose to enroll in VSCC. Some schools offered less expensive tuition per course, and access to the Hope Scholarship is another option for some students. Families pay the cost of additional dual enrollment courses not covered by the various financial assistance programs. These collaborative partnerships have built a clear and supportive path for students who want to be Future Ready.

This profile was developed through correspondence with Sam Brooks of Putnam County School District.

Continuing learning during snow days

Tri-City United Independent School District

Montgomery, Minnesota

With an average of 36 to 70 inches of snowfall annually, Minnesota students have seen their fair share of snow days. While a joy to many, snow days can lead to end-of-year make-up days required to meet the state-specified days for learning, which subsequently eat into not only the students' time off over the summer but also into the district resource budget. To combat this, Tri-City United Independent School District (Tri-City United), which as of mid-March has already experienced six snow days during the winter of 2018–19, developed a district-wide blended learning plan to provide opportunities for students to continue their learning during snow days.

Tri-City United is a 1-to-1 district located in South Central Minnesota with approximately 1,925 students, a K-8 school located in each of their three communities, and one shared high school. Matt Flugum, the Teaching and Learning Facilitator, shares, "Four years ago Tri-City United began focusing on empowering learners through purposeful digital learning tools and techniques including teacher professional development and summer personalized professional development projects. This has enabled flexibility as students and teachers are able to transition to learning with technology during snow days."

During winter of 2017–18, Tri-City United held discussions with district personnel and the Teachers Union about the blended learning plan, and out of that discussion, a shared vision of what e-learning would look like was born. Superintendent Dr. Teri Preisler says the district began communicating with students and parents in spring 2018 about the blended learning plan that would be used for snow days. In summer and fall 2018, newsletters were sent out and shared during parent-teacher conferences as a reminder. The blended learning plan included a "practice blended learning day" at school in November.

The blended learning day starts with an automated phone call announcing the snow day. The day itself is set up mostly asynchronously with the exception of when a student wants to reach out to a teacher and/or fellow students to get help. For middle and high school students, the teachers post lessons by 10 a.m. on the learning platform. Students log in and navigate through the resources. Elementary school students are provided learning resources digitally in addition to physical packets, which are sent home in advance of the snow season to be used for snow days. Work assigned on a snow day follows the same requirements as any lesson assigned (due dates, quality of work completed, etc.). To address equity and access, families without Internet or reliable Internet communicated with school personnel and were supported through a collaboration with T-Mobile for community area "hot spots."

Preisler reflected on lessons learned from the feedback they received from teachers, parents, and students so far. Their first experience with a real snow day included four snow days in a row, so they are working on having more resources in place for next year. They also discovered that the communication plan was overwhelming to parents, so they consolidated their messages together with clear subject lines. The program has already saved days from being added to the end of the school year.

This profile was developed through correspondence with Teri Preisler and Matt Flugum of Tri-City United Independent School District and with the help of resources and information from a news article published in the *Lonsdale News Review*.



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