

Virtual High Schools

By Melodye Bush

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Statewide virtual high schools are state-led schools created by state legislatures or state-level departmental agencies. Most programs are administered by a state's education department. Other programs such as North Dakota's — administered by the Division of Independent Study — fall outside of departmental control.

Virtual high schools serve a variety of functions: Some schools focus on providing core curriculum and credit recovery classes, while others are designed to meet the needs of students who want accelerated learning opportunities and/or more rigorous classes (such as Advanced Placement). Regardless of the curriculum's focus, it needs to meet state quality assurance standards to help ensure that students enrolled in virtual courses meet state graduation standards. Some state programs limit student enrollment to only a few courses per school year, while others give students the opportunity to complete most, if not all, of their education online. As virtual high school programs are expanded, greater attention is needed to ensure that the curriculum is aligned to state standards; that teachers have been trained to teach online courses and that they are properly certified by the state; and that quality is ensured through both evaluating programs and requiring virtual high school students to participate in state assessments.

Highlights:

- Twenty-eight states have established statewide virtual high schools.
- Twenty-five states maintain the local school district as the diploma granting entity. Only four grant diplomas directly.
- Twenty-four state programs offer core curriculum, seven offer supplemental curriculum and 24 offer advanced placement classes as well. Supplemental curriculum is defined as enrichment curriculum.
- Sixteen states provide monetary and/or technical support to the virtual high schools for hardware and software.
- Five states have set a cap ranging from three to six credits per year on the number of courses a student may take.
- Nineteen states have specific requirements or limitations for programs.
- Nine states use off-the-shelf curriculum (i.e. K12). Eight states develop curriculum internally. Six states use half established curriculum and half internally developed curriculum.
- Twenty-seven states of the 28 states with statewide virtual high schools align the virtual high school curriculum to the state's academic standards.
- All but one of the programs are state funded.
- Twenty-two states require teachers to have completed appropriate training for teaching online.
- Twenty-five states require online teachers to meet the same requirements as classroom teachers.
- Twenty-three states require evaluation of programs.
- Twenty-five states require students seeking a diploma to participate in state assessments.

**Summary Table
Fifty States and the District of Columbia**

State	Established	Issue Diploma	Focus			Cap # courses	Curriculum			Curriculum Alignment	Teach Online	Certified	Evaluation	Assessment
			Core	Supplemental	AP		Commercial	Mixed	Internal					
AL	X		X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
AK														
AZ	X	X	X		X		X			X	X	X	X	
AR	X		X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
CA	X		X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
CO	X		X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
CT														
DE														
DC														
FL	X		X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
GA	X		X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
HI	X			X	X	X		X		X		X	X	
ID	X		X ¹		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
IL	X			X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
IN														
IA	X			X	X			X	X	X	X		X	
KS														
KY	X		X ²	X				X	X	X	X	X	X	
LA	X		X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
ME														
MD	X		X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	
MA														
MI	X		X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
MN													X	
MS	X		X		X		X		X	X		X	X	
MO	X		X			X		X	X	X	X	X		
MT														
NE														
NV														
NH														
NJ														
NM	X	X							X		X	X	X	
NY														
NC	X		X		X		X		X	X	X	X		
ND	X	X	X		X				X		X			
OH														
OK														

NOTES:

¹ Idaho also focuses on remediation and dual credit in their online courses.

² Kentucky also offers online courses for credit recovery.

State	Established	Issue Diploma	Focus			Cap # courses	Curriculum			Curriculum Alignment	Teach Online	Certified	Evaluation	Assessment
			Core	Supplemental	AP		Commercial	Mixed	Internal					
OR	X		X ³		X		X			X	X	X	X	
PA														
RI														
SC	X		X	X ⁴	X	X				X	X	X	X	
SD	X		X		X		X			X		X	X	X
TN														X
TX	X		X		X		X			X	X	X	X	X
UT	X	X	X							X		X		X
VT														
VA	X		X		X					X		X		X
WA														
WV	X		X		X		X			X			X	X
WI	X		X ⁵	X	X		X			X	X	X		X
WY														

NOTES:

³ Oregon also offers college preparatory courses online.

⁴ South Carolina also offers online courses for credit recovery.

⁵ Wisconsin also offers online courses for credit recovery.

This StateNote was originally compiled by Melodye Bush, researcher with the Education Commission of the State, August 2008.

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