

# National snapshot and the year in review

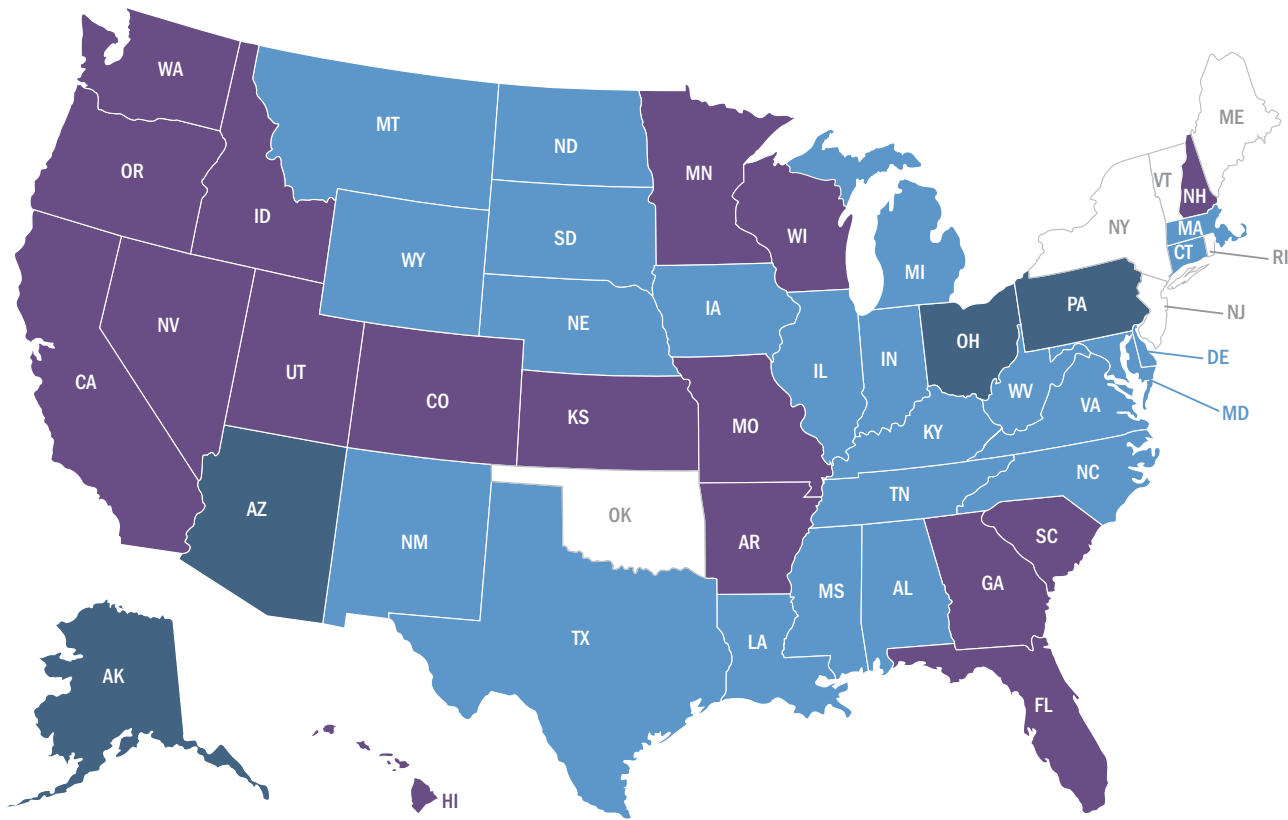
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Late 2007 and the first half of 2008 saw the continued growth of online learning, in terms of new programs being created, existing programs growing, and new legislation being passed to facilitate further growth. As of fall 2008, all but a handful of states offer significant online learning opportunities for students.

As shown in Figure 1:

- Seventeen states offer significant supplemental **and** full-time online options for students (purple). Many of these states have both a state-led program and full-time, online schools. For example, Florida offers the supplemental Florida Virtual School, and the full-time Florida Connections Academy and Florida Virtual Academy. Similarly, Colorado offers the state-led Colorado Online Learning, and numerous full-time district programs and charter schools.
- Twenty-three states offer significant supplemental opportunities—but not full-time (light blue). Most of these states have state-led programs, such as the Michigan Virtual School, Illinois Virtual School, and Virtual Virginia. Some of these states have a few full-time online options, such as the Chicago Virtual Charter School and the Traverse City (Michigan) School District, but these programs are not available to students across the state.
- Four states offer significant full-time opportunities—but not supplemental (dark blue). These states have extensive charter schools and/or district online programs, but do not have a state-led supplemental program that offers courses to students across the state.

In sum, as of fall 2008 there are 44 states that offer significant full-time or supplemental online learning options for students, and only six states that do not offer either of these.



- States with significant supplemental state-led or multi-district online programs or initiatives
- States with significant full-time, multi-district programs
- States with both
- States with neither

**Figure 1: National Summary of How Online Learning is Being Implemented Across the Country**

### What do we mean by “significant” online learning options?

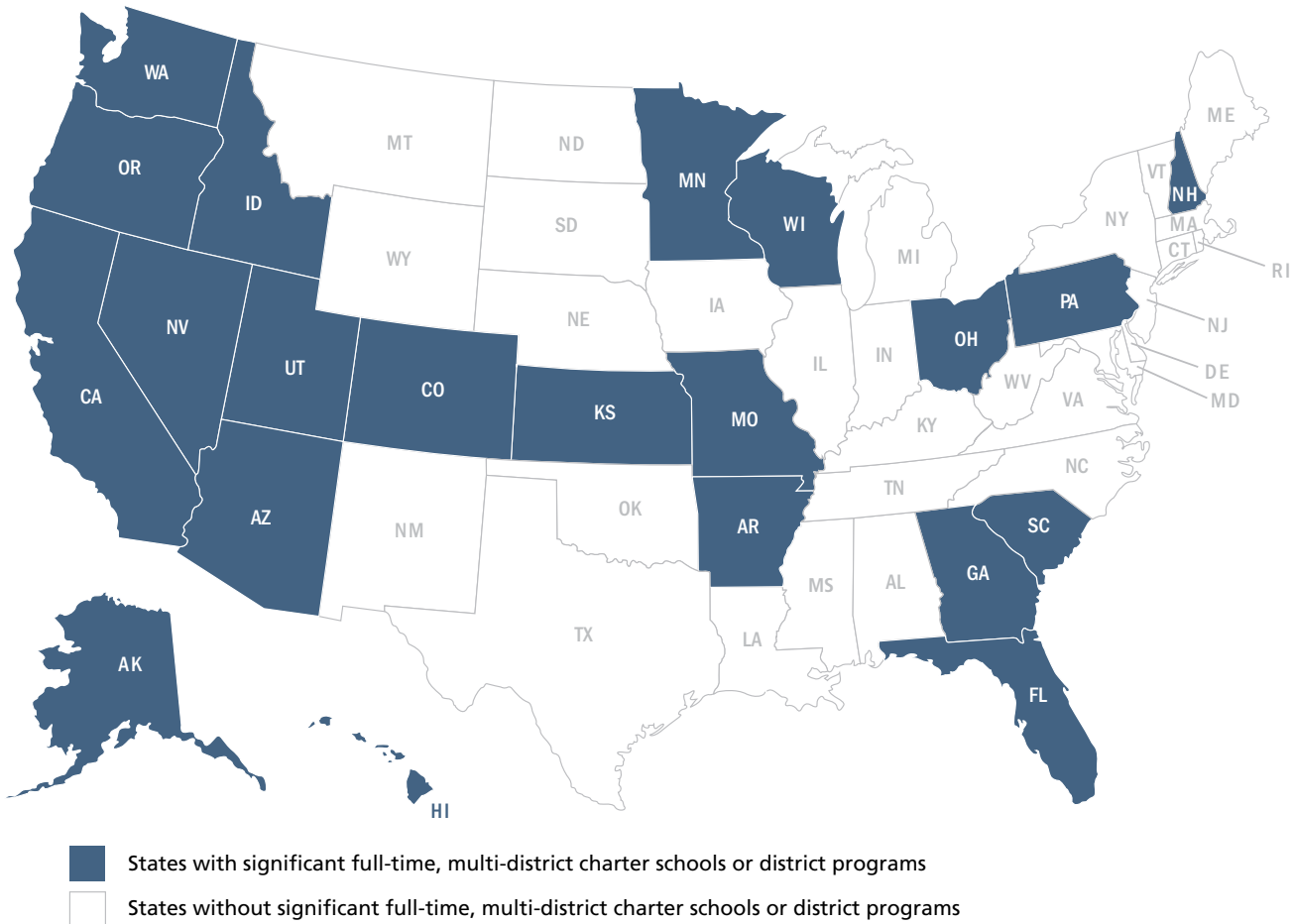
There are now so many schools, districts, state agencies, and nonprofit organizations offering online courses at the K-12 level that tracking them all is nearly impossible, and all states have at least some minor online learning options. Our test for “significant” takes a student’s point of view and is based on the following question: If students (or their parents) from anywhere in the state are seeking a publicly funded online course, or full-time online school, are they likely to have access to these opportunities? The elements that go into answering that question are:

1. Do online schools and programs exist in the state? What percentage of school districts have a student in an online course?
2. Are online opportunities available to students across the entire state?
3. Are they sufficiently large relative to the state’s population or otherwise prominent such that most students are likely to know about these options?



## Full-time, multi-district online schools

A second common online learning option for students are full-time online schools that are available throughout much, or all, of the state. As of fall 2008 there are 21 states that have these types of schools. They are often charter schools, although there are also some non-charter, district-run programs that are available to students across the state.



**Figure 3: States with Full-time, Multi-district Online Programs**

# Online learning policy developments

Late 2007 and the first half of 2008 saw many new policy developments related to online learning. Among the most notable were:

- In Florida, the state legislature passed a new law that requires school districts to provide virtual learning programs “to make online and distance learning instruction available to full-time virtual students in grades kindergarten through grade 8 by 2009-2010.” Following the lead established by the Florida Virtual School (FLVS), the School District Virtual Instruction Program (K-8) will be funded based on successful completions (there will still be a seat time component as providers under the new K-8 legislation will have to take attendance and adhere to a 180-day school year). FLVS continued its rapid growth, reaching over 120,000 course registrations in 2007-2008.
- Alabama became the second state in the country after Michigan to create an online learning requirement, when the State Board of Education passed a resolution that “beginning with the ninth-grade class of 2009-2010 (graduating class of 2012-2013), students shall be required to take and receive a passing grade in one on-line/technology enhanced course in either a core course (mathematics, science, social studies, or English) or an elective with waivers being possible for students with a justifiable reason(s).”<sup>1</sup>
- Wisconsin gained national attention when an appeals court ruled in December 2007 that the Wisconsin Virtual Academy (WIVA), a charter school established by the Northern Ozaukee School District and affiliated with K12 Inc., violated state laws and was not eligible for state funding. To prevent online charter schools across the state from being denied funding and closing, the legislature responded by enacting Act 222, which makes changes to charter school, open enrollment, and teacher licensing laws to allow virtual charter schools in Wisconsin to operate with public funding.
- South Carolina clarified the law passed in 2007 that had led to confusion as to whether full-time online schools were allowed in the state. In fall 2008 the first three online charter schools are opening, joining the South Carolina Virtual School Program (the state-led, supplemental online program).
- Hawaii and Wyoming both established task forces to research online learning options for their states. Both reported to their respective state legislatures, which in 2008 passed legislation supportive of the task force recommendations. Wyoming created the Wyoming Switchboard Network to create and oversee online and other distance learning courses, while Hawaii’s legislation supports both a state-led supplemental program and full-time online schools.
- The legislatures in Kansas and Idaho both responded to concerns raised in state audits about practices of a few online programs and oversight by state agencies. The laws created new reporting and oversight requirements and allowed the continued operation and growth of online programs.

Notably, in all the states that have experienced questions about the practices or oversight of online programs (via state audits or lawsuits), after the state legislature has reviewed the programs it has passed laws that allow the online options to continue. In cases such as Wisconsin and Colorado there were initial concerns that online schools would be shut

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.alsde.edu/html/boe\\_resolutions2.asp?id=1413](http://www.alsde.edu/html/boe_resolutions2.asp?id=1413)

down (the result of the court case in Wisconsin) or that new schools would not be allowed (a suggested moratorium in Colorado). Instead, in Wisconsin, Colorado, Kansas, and Idaho, after the initial questions raised by the state audit were explored in more depth, the legislatures decided that oversight and reporting of online schools needed some changes, but overall the online programs were successfully serving students and filling an unmet educational need, and should be allowed to continue and grow.

There have been a few exceptions to the pattern of consistent growth in online programs. Both Connecticut and Delaware established state-led online programs in the past year, but budget cuts did not allow either program to grow nearly as large or as quickly as planned. Both are going forward with online courses in fall 2008, but with small numbers of students and courses. The experiences of the state-led programs in these states reflect concerns of such programs in other states that are dependent on yearly appropriations from the legislature and therefore also reliant on the health of state budgets and economies.