



Arkansas has one main supplemental program, one fully online school, and a digital learning graduation requirement. In SY 2013–14 Virtual Arkansas served 3,734 online supplemental courses to students in 149 schools, an 87% enrollment increase. In summer 2014 Virtual Arkansas assumed the responsibilities of the former Arkansas Distance Learning (ARDL) Consortium, and now manages all state distance learning services.¹³⁵ There is one fully online statewide charter school, Arkansas Virtual Academy (ARVA), which served 1,334 students in grades K–8 in SY 2013–14. A statewide digital (online or blended) learning requirement that was piloted in some districts in SY 2013–14 is in effect for all students statewide as of SY 2014–15 for students graduating in 2018.

In SY 2014–15 Virtual Arkansas is completing a transition into the role of primary coordinator of digital learning services, replacing first Arkansas Virtual High School (AVHS, the state virtual school since 2000) in 2012, and then the former Arkansas Distance Learning Consortium (ARDL) in 2013. In addition to serving 3,734 supplemental course enrollments in SY 2013–14, there were roughly 12,000 digital students enrolled through the ARDL consortium (the same number as in SY 2012–13). These will all be Virtual Arkansas students from SY 2014–15, as ARDL is now part of Virtual Arkansas. Arkansas school districts pay a \$2,500 annual membership fee to schedule courses with state-approved, state-funded providers, which is supplemented by an additional charge of \$25 per student (reduced to \$15 per student for content-only services). Previously four providers delivered courses synchronously using compressed interactive video. However, from SY 2014–15 no synchronous courses are available; all materials are available through the Moodle learning management system only.

¹³⁵ Personal communication with Virtual Arkansas; July 20, 2014

Virtual Arkansas is managed by the state coordinator of K–12 digital learning, in partnership with the education service cooperatives (ESC) of Arkansas. It is funded through an annual Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) grant, managed by the Arch Ford ESC, the fiscal agent for Virtual Arkansas. In SY 2013–14, it added two new campuses (for three total), located and managed by other cooperatives.¹³⁶ “Team Digital,” newly established for SY 2014–15, is comprised of the state coordinator and six digital learning support specialists who work within designated ESCs. School districts and schools not participating in Virtual Arkansas may offer digital courses through state-approved providers. Courses offered by providers not already approved by the state must be approved by ADE through a separate process.¹³⁷

Arkansas’s only statewide virtual charter school, ARVA, is operated by K12 Inc. The ARVA enrollment cap was raised from 500 to 3,000 for SY 2013–14;¹³⁸ the school is allowed to have no more than 500 non-prior public students. In SY 2013–14 it served 1,334 fully online students, a 167% increase.¹³⁹ ARVA operates as its own school district and is funded through the same student average daily membership (ADM) formula as other open-enrollment public charter schools.

Online learning is guided by the ADE Rules Governing Distance Learning that were updated in 2012, which established guidelines requiring a calendar and bell schedule aligned with local schools to allow students to “optimally participate in synchronous distance learning and local courses.”¹⁴⁰ Act 1280 (2013),¹⁴¹ the Digital Learning Act of 2013, expanded on these rules as follows:

- Presented criteria for becoming an approved digital provider, including mapping to state standards and utilizing teachers not necessarily certified by the state, and required the ADE annually publish a list of approved providers; 23 providers were approved for SY 2014–15 as of August 1, 2014.¹⁴²
- Created a digital learning requirement that was piloted in SY 2013–14, and expanded statewide in SY 2014–15. All public school districts and charter schools must provide at least one digital (online or blended) learning course with outcomes measurable through student assessment. Students graduating in 2018 are the first with this requirement in place.
- Prevented the SBE from limiting the number of digital learning courses for which a student may receive credit and ensured that courses may be used as both primary and secondary methods of instruction.
- Directed the house committee on education and the senate committee (in collaboration with the ADE, the department of information systems, and Arkansas service providers) to prepare a study on methods to deliver a quality digital learning environment in each school district and public charter school. The report was delivered in May 2014.¹⁴³

To address the urgency of implementing the statewide digital learning requirement (and putting in place a provider approval process), “emergency basis” rules were in effect from February 13, 2014 to June 18, 2014. These, in conjunction with the May 2014 study, resulted in the Rules Governing the Digital Learning Act of 2013 (June 2014), which clarifies the definitions of “online learning,” “blended learning,” “digital learning,” and “digital learning provider.” A full digital learning provider application is included.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁶ Arch Ford Annual Report 2013–14; retrieved July 20, 2014; [http://www.archford.org/vimages/shared/vnews/stories/47067a8c5408a/Annual%20Report%202013-2014%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.archford.org/vimages/shared/vnews/stories/47067a8c5408a/Annual%20Report%202013-2014%20(1).pdf)

¹³⁷ Course approvals; retrieved July 21, 2014; <http://www.arkansased.org/divisions/learning-services/curriculum-and-instruction/course-approvals>

¹³⁸ The virtual school enrollment caps in Act 1309 (2013) will eventually apply to all schools. Retrieved July 21, 2014; <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly/2013/2013R/Acts/Act1309.pdf>

¹³⁹ ADE Data Center Enrollment Count by School; retrieved August 12, 2014; <https://adedata.arkansas.gov/statewide/Schools/EnrollmentCount.aspx?year=24&search=virtual&pagesize=10>

¹⁴⁰ ADE Rules Governing Distance Learning; retrieved July 2, 2014; <http://170.94.37.152/REGS/005.15.12-001F-12833.pdf>

¹⁴¹ Act 1280 (2013); retrieved July 21, 2014, http://www.arkansased.org/public/userfiles/Legislative_Services/Quality%20Digital%20Learning%20Study/Facts/Act%201280%20Digital%20Learning%20Opportunities.pdf

¹⁴² Digital Learning Approved Provider List; retrieved July 21, 2014; http://www.arkansased.org/public/userfiles/Learning_Services/Digital_Learning/DLP_AR_Approved_List_041414.pdf

¹⁴³ Quality Digital Learning Study; retrieved July 21, 2014; <http://www.arkansased.org/divisions/policy/quality-digital-learning-study>

¹⁴⁴ ADE Rules Governing the Digital Learning Act of 2013; retrieved July 21, 2014; <http://www.sos.arkansas.gov/rulesRegs/Arkansas%20Register/2014/may14Reg/005.23.14-002.pdf>. See also emergency basis rules at http://www.arkansased.org/public/userfiles/rules/Current/Digital_Learning_Rules_Emergency_Adoption_for_Posting_February_2014.pdf.