

KEEPING PACE LEARNING

WITH K-12
ONLINE &
BLENDED

An Annual Review of Policy and Practice

2012



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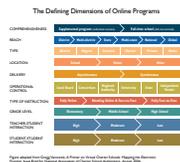
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Opening snapshot: K-12 online and blended learning in 2012

We provide here a snapshot of the K-12 online and blended learning landscape as of late 2012, along with suggestions for where to find more on these topics throughout this report.



Definitions p. 7 and State-level snapshot of online learning activity p. 14

Program Type	Program Description	Notes
Single-district programs	Programs operated by a single school district, often in partnership with private providers.	• May be the most common type of online program.
Multi-district programs	Programs operated by multiple school districts, often through a consortium or state-level agency.	• May provide a wider range of course options.
State-level programs	Programs operated by a state-level agency, often providing a wide range of course options.	• May provide a wide range of course options.

Single-district programs p. 20



Planning for quality p. 44

Issue	Policy and Practice
Accountability	States must invest in data systems, student tracking, and new accountability measures to ensure that online and blended learning provide both opportunities and positive outcomes, and that all stakeholders can accurately assess student and school performance.
Investment	States must invest in data systems, student tracking, and new accountability measures to ensure that online and blended learning provide both opportunities and positive outcomes, and that all stakeholders can accurately assess student and school performance.

Key policy and practice issues p. 34

Four themes that *Keeping Pace 2011* introduced largely hold true a year later, with some updates for 2012:

Many states have created or allowed some online and blended learning opportunities, but no state has yet created or allowed a full range of online learning options for students—with one exception. Florida in 2012 has passed laws that, in theory at least, make a full range of supplemental and full-time online options available to all K-12 students. At the other end of the spectrum, in many states at least some students still have few or no online options; their educational opportunities continue to be determined by their zip code.

Innovators sometimes overlook the benefits, and challenges, of “traditional” online learning such as single online courses that are made available to students in physical schools. These courses and programs continue to deliver new opportunities to hundreds of thousands of students across the country. They are increasingly being offered by individual districts, often working in conjunction with private providers and/or public agencies such as state virtual schools.

Developing an online or blended program requires a high level of investment to be successful, or a willingness to work with an experienced partner. Expecting positive student results without the necessary investment is unrealistic. In the “Planning for quality” section we highlight key issues and suggest timelines for implementation under different program development scenarios.

States must invest in data systems, student tracking, and new accountability measures to ensure that online and blended learning provide both opportunities and positive outcomes, and that all stakeholders can accurately assess student and school performance. As of 2012, robust measures of student achievement do not exist in most states.

Beyond these themes, discussion of the landscape in late 2012 can be divided into categories of growth, important developments, and trends to watch for in 2012-13.

Growth and numbers

More students are taking online and blended courses than ever before, but because so many of these students are in programs that are not tracked the exact number is unknown. Some segments are better known than others. We estimate 275,000 students attended fully online schools in SY 2011-12, however, growth has slowed somewhat. There are only two new states allowing fully online schools in SY 2012-13 for a total of 31 states. The annual increase in the number of students attending these schools in the largest states is typically hovering around 15%.

We count 619,847 course enrollments (one student taking a one-semester-long online course) in 28 state virtual schools in SY 2011-12, an increase of 16% since last year. Further, we see state virtual schools continuing to diverge into those that are large and growing, and those that are small and may be fading—and for the first time some that are closing (Kentucky, Nebraska, and Tennessee).

Blended schools, and blended programs in districts, are again a fast-growing and high-profile segment. This is the first year our subtitle explicitly includes blended learning. At the same time, the actual number of students in these programs is less understood than in fully online schools or state virtual schools because it is not yet reported in a discrete and consistent way. We estimate perhaps two-thirds of districts are offering some online or blended program, and the large majority have relatively few students and rely on external course providers.

The total number of students taking part in all of these programs is unknown, but is likely several million, or slightly more than 5% of the total K-12 student population across the United States. We stress, however, that we estimate this by triangulating from close to a dozen sources. No single source is comprehensive.

Important developments in 2012

New laws and policies are being created and implemented at a dizzying pace. These policy changes are among the key developments in 2012, but by no means the only ones. Beyond the spread of online courses and schools, among the significant developments in the past year are:

Provisions to allow students to choose online courses from multiple providers are being implemented in about a half-dozen states. By the end of SY 2012-13 we will be seeing the first results.



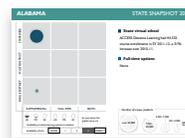
Multi-district fully online schools p. 24



State virtual schools p. 29



Blended learning p. 17



State profiles p. 64



Student choice at the course level p. 37



Online learning requirements p. 41

BLEND

Full-time blended schools p. 23

Established blended school providers Rocketship Education and Carpe Diem Schools are moving into new states, and experienced providers of fully online schools are opening new blended schools. Given that there is likely a limit to the number of students who want to attend a fully online school, we expect blended schools to be an area of considerable growth and innovation in the near future.

States continue to consider, and in some cases pass, online learning high school graduation requirements. In some instances the states appear to be weakening the requirements, making it easier for students to meet the requirement.

The spread of the Common Core State Standards is helping online course providers who operate across many states, and the growing focus and expectations around the national assessment consortia PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) and Smarter Balanced are pushing schools and states to evaluate their technology infrastructure. Both of these will ease the way for additional online and blended course implementations.

Common Core and national assessments are not discussed in detail in the report, but we anticipate addressing them in future reports or on our blog at www.kpk12.com.

What to watch for in 2013

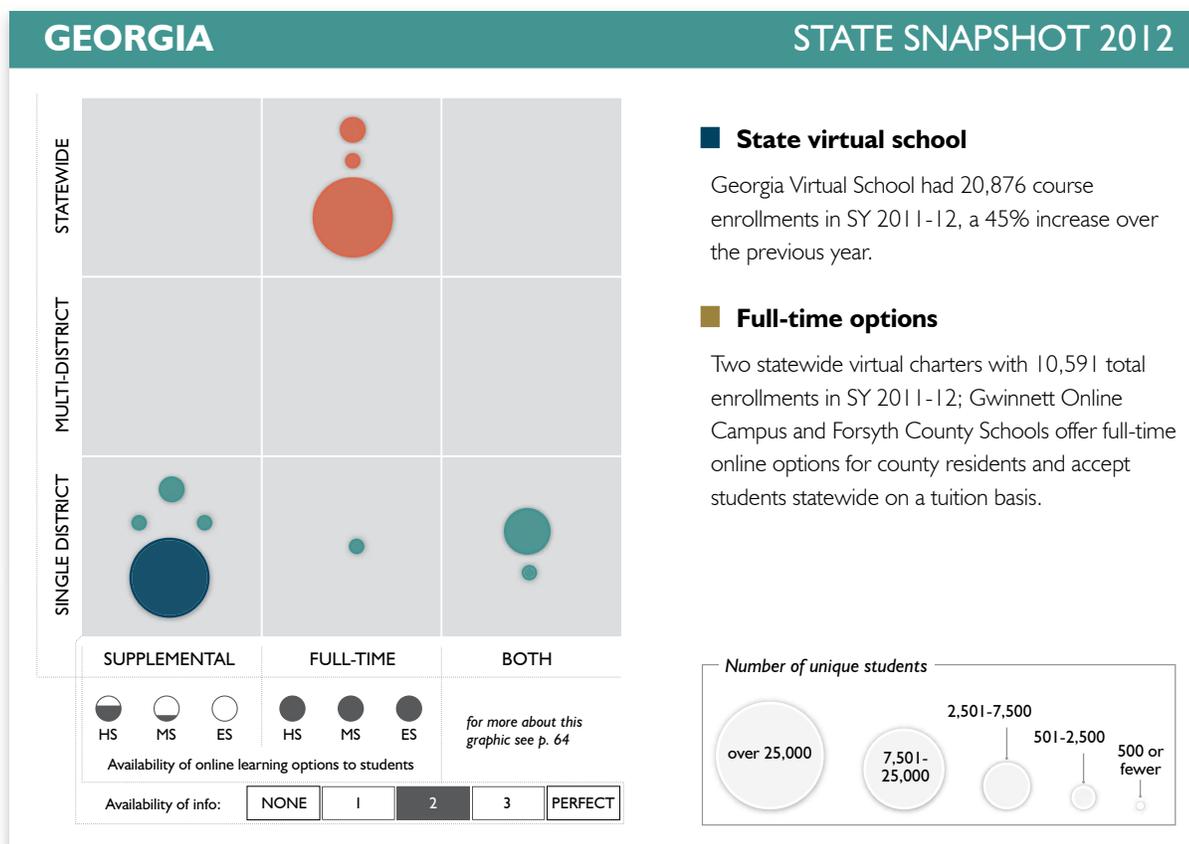
Because developments in online and blended learning are difficult to predict, *Keeping Pace* puts a heavier emphasis on what happened in the 2011-12 school year than on predicting the future. Still, several trends and developments will be worth watching in 2013.

One of these will be what happens in states that are considering allowing fully online schools but have not yet done so, such as Maine, North Carolina, and New Jersey, and states that have limited fully online schools, such as New Hampshire, Arkansas, and Virginia. In 2013 we may see a significant slowing of the spread of fully online schools, and political activities in these states will be an early indication.

We will also be watching for the growth of new blended schools. This may take the form of further expansion of charter schools managed by organizations such as Rocketship, Carpe Diem, Connections, or K12 Inc., or it may be based on new organizations or new independent blended schools. Further growth in this category may spur increased activity by individual school districts, state virtual schools, intermediate districts, and other public education agencies.

These changes will be reflected in next year's version of Table 1: State-level snapshot of online learning activity. We will be watching to see the progress in expanding more opportunities, to more students, across more states.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly but not easily reflected in a single table or image, we will be assessing how well state accountability and data systems are able to capture student outcomes. This will undoubtedly be a multi-year process, but we are hopeful that we will see noteworthy advances in 2013, with the goals that students will have expanding opportunities in online and blended learning, and these schools and courses will show improved quality based on student outcomes.



Georgia has online learning activity through the state virtual school, Georgia Virtual School, (GAVS); several large district programs; and several statewide virtual charter schools.¹¹³

In 2012, the Georgia legislature passed three bills that significantly impacted online learning policy. SB289¹¹⁴ affects all school districts in Georgia and includes the following provisions:

- All students in grades 9-12 may enroll in online courses through GAVS without the approval of the student's home district, "regardless of whether the school in which the student is enrolled offers the same course." The district pays the State Department of Education (SDE) for the cost of the GAVS course, but the total cost cannot exceed \$250 per student per semester. SB289 also removes the one-course-per-semester limit on the number of GAVS courses a student may take.
- Beginning with SY 2012-13, all districts must provide both part-and full-time online learning options to all students in grades 3-12. Districts must provide written information on online learning options to parents of all students. To meet this requirement, districts may use private online education providers, online courses offered by other districts or consortia, multidistrict contractual arrangements executed by a regional educational service agency, state colleges, or GAVS.
- All providers must be approved by the SDE, which will publish a list of approved providers each year. The process and responsibility for provider approval was still being defined as of September 2012. GAVS will submit courses for approval even though SB289 exempts it from the approval process.
- To become approved, providers must 1) demonstrate prior success offering online courses in grades K-12 through "quantified student performance improvements for each subject

¹¹³ State charter schools; retrieved June 11, 2012, <http://archives.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/Master%20Charter%20School%20Database%202012-02-02.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6BCD13A7711B923A00118CC29B27A42B17D31E7E235DE8A64&Type=D>

¹¹⁴ SB289 (2012); retrieved May 24, 2012, http://www1.legis.ga.gov/legis/2011_12/versions/sb289_SB_289_APP_9.htm

area and grade level,” 2) assure program quality through a detailed curriculum and student performance accountability plan, and 3) publish a public report based on a set of information to be adopted by the SBE. Additional approval criteria may be established by the SDE. Providers retain approved status for a period of five years. SB289 also establishes a minimum set of contract requirements between a district and a provider.

- Local school boards cannot enact policies to keep students from online learning classes during the school day.
- The SDE must submit a report to the governor and legislature by December 1, 2012, that identifies the best methods for the SDE to aid districts in acquiring digital learning at reasonable prices, increase student access to digital learning, and identify decision-making criteria to help districts assess various aspects of digital learning.
- Publishers of textbooks recommended by the SBE “shall provide an electronic format version of such textbook, which may include a digital version.”

Virtual charters have a tumultuous history in Georgia, particularly regarding authorization and funding. In May 2011, the Supreme Court of Georgia found HB881¹¹⁵ to be unconstitutional, finding that only school districts had the right to authorize charter schools based on the state constitution. The finding dissolved the authority of the Georgia Charter Schools Commission to grant charters and establish funding levels for statewide virtual charter schools, thus voiding the existing commission charters for new virtual schools and some other schools. The SBE took action to restore charters to those schools that had been stripped of them by the Supreme Court decision, allowing virtual charter schools to operate for SY 2011-12. Details of the history of virtual charter school legislation can be found at www.kpk12.com/states/.

HB797¹¹⁶ (2012) is enabling legislation for a constitutional amendment, the Georgia Charter Schools Amendment, to be voted on by Georgia citizens in November 2012. If the amendment is not passed, portions of HB797 related to the establishment and operation of a new state charter commission will not take effect. The law establishes a new State Charter Schools Commission operating under the SBE and defines its duties and powers, which include developing and disseminating best practices and accountability standards for state charter schools, publishing an annual review and evaluation of state charter school academic and financial performance, and making public information on state charter schools available to parents. HB797 also establishes a new funding formula¹¹⁷ for state charter schools based on state per-pupil funding for school districts. Virtual charters will receive the same per-pupil funding as brick-and-mortar schools per the Quality Basic Education funding formula, plus supplemental funding for all charter schools established in HB797. Virtual charter funding for 2012-13 is projected to be about \$4,460 per enrollment.¹¹⁸ HB797 also repeals all conflicting laws related to state charter schools.

HB175 (2012), the Online Clearinghouse Act, directs the SDE to create an online clearinghouse through which local school systems and charter schools may offer online courses to students in other schools and districts.¹¹⁹ HB175 directs the clearinghouse to:

- Establish procedures and requirements for offering a course through the clearinghouse.
- Provide a mechanism for enrollment in clearinghouse online courses, the payment of course fees, the assignment of grades, and for offering dual enrollment courses.

¹¹⁵ HB881 (2008) created the “Georgia Charter Schools Commission as an independent, state-level charter school authorizing entity ... empowered to approve commission charter schools.” It authorized the Commission to set charter funding levels. HB881; retrieved May 29, 2012, http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2007_08/pdf/hb881.pdf.

¹¹⁶ HB797; retrieved June 11, 2012, http://www1.legis.ga.gov/legis/2011_12/versions/hb797_HB_797_APP_16.htm

¹¹⁷ The funding portion of HB 797 went into effect July 1, 2012, and is not contingent on passage of the constitutional amendment.

¹¹⁸ Total per pupil funding of \$4,460 includes \$2,744.80 in QBE funding and \$1,715.57 supplemental funding based on the state calculation for all Georgia charter schools established by HB797.

¹¹⁹ HB175 (2012); retrieved August 28, 2012, http://www1.legis.ga.gov/legis/2011_12/sum/hb175.htm

- Include courses in the clearinghouse by a “local school system or charter school.”
- Insure courses meet state standards, are taught by a highly qualified teacher, and meet technical specifications prescribed by the SDE.
- Provide for rules and regulations.
- Provide for statutory construction.

The SDE must approve courses for inclusion in the clearinghouse, although criteria for approval had not been established as of September 2012. A timetable for implementation of the clearinghouse is uncertain because HB175 did not establish funding for the clearinghouse.

Online programs

Online programs include the Georgia Virtual School (GAVS), the Georgia Cyber Academy (GCA), and Georgia Connections Academy (GACA), as well as several suburban Atlanta districts that operate online programs. GCA served 9,993 enrollments in grades K-8 in SY 2011-12 and GACA served 598 students in grades K-8 in SY 2011-12; GACA is authorized to serve K-12 in SY 2012-13. The Provost Academy Georgia is a new virtual charter serving grades 9-12 in SY 2012-13. Gwinnett County Online Campus (GOC) was granted charter authorization in 2011, allowing it to offer full-time options for Gwinnett County students in addition to supplemental courses. The full-time school enrollment for 2011-12 was 107. GOC supplemental course enrollments totaled about 5,000 in 2011-12, with nearly half generated by summer school enrollments. Forsyth County Schools’ iAchieve Virtual Academy also offers a full-time online program for county residents; it accepts out-of-district students on a tuition basis. iAchieve had 121 full-time enrollments in SY 2011-12. Cobb Virtual Academy, a program of Cobb County Public Schools, had 1,903 supplemental course enrollments with 1,023 unique students in SY 2011-12.

GAVS was created by legislation in 2005, and in 2006 the SBE created the rule that governs the school.¹²⁰ GAVS had 20,876 course enrollments¹²¹ in SY 2011-12, a 45% increase over the previous year. GAVS expanded to serve grades 6-12 beginning with SY 2012-13 and will serve grades 3-12 in 2013-14. GAVS offers summer school courses on a tuition basis only, with no cap on summer enrollment. GAVS is unusual for a state virtual school in that its supplemental students take state end-of-course exams,¹²² allowing for a comparison of test scores between students in online courses and state averages. In SY 2011-12, students taking end-of-course exams through GAVS scored higher than the state average on each of the eight end-of-course tests administered.¹²³

GAVS funding changes significantly with SB289 (2012). In the past, GAVS received an annual state appropriation based on the per-pupil funding a district would have received for a course. When a student took a course, funds equivalent to the district’s full-time equivalent portion for each course segment were diverted from the home district to the SDE and held for payment to GAVS. With SB289, districts receive all of the per-pupil funding and now pay GAVS (through the SDE) \$250 per student per online course. GAVS will receive annual line-item funding for operations plus the per-course funding from districts. Annual line-item funding will remain about \$5 million (GAVS 2011-12 budget was about \$5.4 million), but will become a smaller percentage of GAVS overall funding over time as per-course, per-student funding from districts increases. The new funding model went into effect in July 2012, but the percentage of budget reduction will not be quantified for 12-18 months. Per SB289, there is now no limit on the number of GAVS courses a student may take. A limited number of state funded seats will be offered to homeschooled and private school students as part of the annual line item funding.

¹²⁰ 160-8-1-.01 Georgia Virtual School; retrieved June 12, 2012, <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/External-Affairs-and-Policy/State-Board-of-Education/SBOE%20Rules/160-8-1-.01.pdf>

¹²¹ Course enrollment numbers retrieved from GAVS, a new source in *Keeping Pace 2012*, which may explain the decrease from 2009-10 reported numbers.

¹²² Georgia Virtual School, end-of-course exams, retrieved July 15, 2012, <http://www.gavirtualschool.org/CourseInfo/EndofCourseTestInformation.aspx>

¹²³ Unpublished data provided by Georgia Virtual School