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2009 Report on State Virtual Schools in SREB States

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2009 Report on State Virtual Schools in SREB States

Summarizing the responses from all 16 SREB states to SREB's 2009 state virtual school survey, this report provides policy-makers and virtual learning practitioners with information on current trends that are shaping the future of online education. It is the latest offering in SREB's long history of providing information to help states monitor their progress in achieving education goals.

Online learning continues to grow and change at a rapid pace. Likewise, the *Report on State Virtual Schools in SREB States* has grown and changed since it was first published in 2005. In past years, the report provided only survey-based reference information. This new edition provides an overview and analysis of survey results on the following pages, with data for summer 2008 through spring 2009. Additional, more comprehensive information is available under "Educational Technology" on the SREB Web site at www.sreb.org, including details on each SREB state virtual school.

Definitions

In 2009, SREB developed a partnership with Evergreen Education Group, authors of *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning: An Annual Review of State-Level Policy and Practice*, to reduce both the constituent time spent responding to surveys and the research time spent analyzing information. Through this partnership, some common and helpful definitions emerged that have increased the consistency and clarity of data reported by SREB.

In **full-time online programs**, students earn credit that is issued by the school, based on successful course completion. Full-time programs award diplomas and generally are designed to provide all educational services to students. While some state virtual schools have full-time students with unique circumstances (homebound, professional athlete or performer, home-schooled, etc.), they are primarily supplemental programs.

Supplemental online programs do not award credit but work in conjunction with a student's full-time school to provide courses that are not offered in the full-time program, resolve scheduling conflicts, alleviate overcrowding and give students the opportunity to recover credits.

Generally, student numbers are counted differently for full-time programs and supplemental programs. For full-time programs, a **student enrollment** is defined as one, yearlong, full-time-equivalent (FTE) student. For supplemental programs, a **course enrollment** is one student taking one semester-length course after a predetermined drop date, and a **unique student** is one student taking one or more semester-length courses after a predetermined drop date. For example, a supplemental program could have 50 unique students and also report 70 course enrollments. Finally, a **unique course** is the equivalent of a half-credit of content, regardless of the number of sections.

Regional Snapshot

SREB analyzed the 16 SREB states' responses to inquiries about enrollment, operations, funding, professional development, instruction, accountability and policies. Responses indicate that state virtual schools continue to increase course offerings, enrollment and services.

Findings of special interest to policy-makers and practitioners include:

- Eight state virtual schools employ full-time teachers in addition to adjunct faculty.
- All SREB state virtual schools offer at least one Advanced Placement (AP) course, and 10 state virtual schools offer at least a dozen AP courses.
- All SREB state virtual schools have formal requirements regarding teacher-student communication. For example, all state virtual schools require teachers to respond to student communications within 24 hours.
- Fourteen state virtual schools provide access to digital library resources.
- While guidance services are provided to all students by their full-time schools, six state virtual schools also provide supplemental guidance services to students enrolling in their courses.

All SREB state virtual schools offer a wide variety of courses at many grade levels, including AP courses. (See Table 1.)

Table 1

Comparative Data on SREB State Virtual Schools Summer 2008 - Spring 2009

	Fully Online	Blended	Grade Levels	Tuition	Self-Paced Courses	Unique Courses	AP Courses	Full-Time Teachers	Guidance Services	21 st Century Skills	Information Literacy	Digital Library Resources	Strategic Plan	Intellectual Property Policy	Annual Accountability Report
ACCESS (Alabama)	N	Y	9-12	N	N	68+	12	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Arkansas Virtual High School	Y	N	9-12	N	N	42	4	5	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N
Florida Virtual School	Y	Y	K-12	Y	Y	124	13	898	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Georgia Virtual School	Y	N	6-12	Y	N	107	21	10	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Kentucky Virtual High School	Y	N	K-12	Y	Y	86	23	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Louisiana Virtual School	Y	Y	6-12	N	Y	56	13	16	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Maryland Virtual School	Y	N	6-12	Y	Y	51	21	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
Mississippi Virtual Public School	Y	N	7-12	N	N	139	18	5	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y

Table 1 (continued)

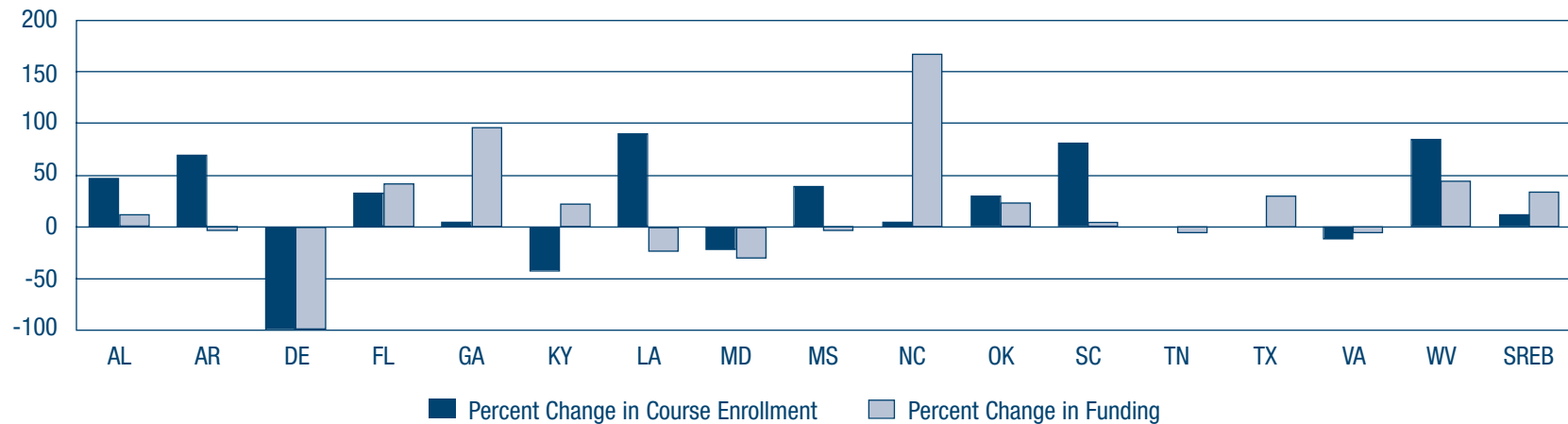
**Comparative Data on SREB State Virtual Schools
Summer 2008 - Spring 2009**

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North Carolina Virtual Public School	Y	Y	6-12	N	Y	123	19	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
University of Oklahoma High School	Y	Y	9-12	Y	Y	138	8	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
South Carolina Virtual School Program	Y	N	7-12	N	Y	60	1	12	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
e4TN (Tennessee)	Y	N	6-12	Y	Y	88	1	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Texas Virtual School Network	Y	N	9-12	Y	Y	21	2	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Virtual Virginia	Y	N	6-12	Y	N	46	23	24	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
West Virginia Virtual School	N	Y	K-12	Y	Y	161	27	6	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N

Enrollment and Funding

Online course enrollments in SREB state virtual schools increased by more than 12 percent from 2008 to 2009, the survey showed. Although this pace of growth is somewhat slower compared with previous years, it is still noteworthy. In the past year, SREB states, like others, have experienced declining education budgets in general. These declines have resulted in less funding for online courses, despite increasing demand. Also in 2009, national interest in full-time, online charter schools and in blended learning — the combination of traditional learning and online learning — has surged. These trends may account, in part, for the slower growth in enrollment and decreases in funding for supplemental programs such as state virtual schools.

Changes in Enrollment Compared With Changes in Funding, 2007-08 to 2008-09



	SREB States	AL	AK	DE	FL	GA	KY	LA	MD	MS	NC	OK	SC	TN	TX	VA	WV
Percent Change in Funding 2007-08 to 2008-09	34.3	13.7	-4.6	-100.0	41.7	96.3	22.2	-24.4	-32.0	-2.7	167.4	23.4	3.2	-6.8	30.0	-7.0	44.4
Percent Change in Enrollment 2007-08 to 2008-09	12.2	47.8	69.8	-100.0	32.8	4.9	-44.0	91.0	-23.4	39.7	4.6	29.8	82.1	0.1	NA	-13.5	86.0

“NA” indicates data not applicable. For the period shown, Texas reported no enrollments, making a calculation meaningless.

Policy

Policies may be defined in legislative code, state board policy and/or rules and procedures established for instruction and operation. Two SREB states reported that they adopted notable policies related to online learning in the past year.

Alabama: The Alabama State Board of Education established a rule 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 online/technology-enhanced course in either a core course (math, science, social studies or English) or an elective with waivers being possible for students with a justifiable reason(s).” Alabama was the second state in the nation to do so. For more information, go to: <https://docs.alsde.edu/documents/54/OnlineGuidance.pdf>.

Florida: A Florida statute, passed in 2008, required school districts “to make online and distance learning instruction available to full-time virtual students in grades K-8” by 2009-2010. In 2009, this statute was amended to require districts to expand full-time online programs to grades K-12. Florida was the first state in the nation to take this action.

Most schools are established by legislative code and governed by either the state’s department of education or board of education. (See Table 2.)

Table 2

**Organization and Policies of SREB State Virtual Schools
Summer 2008 - Spring 2009**

	Initial Action	Governance	Innovative Policies and Programs
ACCESS (Alabama)	Legislative code; governor's initiative	Alabama State Board of Education	In 2008, Alabama became the second state in the nation to create an online learning graduation requirement for public school students.
Arkansas Virtual High School	Arkansas Department of Education	Arkansas State Board of Education	In 2009, a three-year pilot program was created that will equip up to three school buses in participating public school districts with wireless Internet service, 15 laptop computers, 40 portable video storage devices, two media screens, and math and science software. The purpose of the pilot is to explore the benefits of mobile learning for students who ride a bus long distances to and from school.
Delaware Virtual School	Pilot began in 2008; funding was eliminated in 2009		
Florida Virtual School	Legislative code	Board of Trustees appointed by the governor	In 2008-2009, Florida became the first state in the nation to pass legislation that requires all districts to offer full-time online programs for grades K-12.
Georgia Virtual School	Legislative code; governor's initiative	Georgia Department of Education; accountable to the state superintendent of schools and governor	In 2007, Georgia became the first state in the nation to create standards for an online teaching certificate endorsement. The first cohort of teachers to be eligible for the endorsement is on track to complete requirements in spring 2010.
Kentucky Virtual High School	Governor's initiative	Kentucky State Board of Education	Kentucky Virtual Schools is collaborating with Appalachian Educational Laboratory and the Collaborative for Teaching and Learning to compare student performance and teacher engagement levels in a blended learning classroom and a traditional, face-to-face classroom.
Louisiana Virtual School	Louisiana Department of Education	Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE)	Louisiana Virtual School is in its eighth year of implementation of its Algebra I Online Program. The program provides students with a certified math instructor and standards-based curriculum. It also provides teachers with professional development opportunities that will assist with the facilitation of the Algebra I Online Program and support their efforts to achieve mathematics teaching certification.
Maryland Virtual School	Legislative code	Maryland State Department of Education	The Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities Program encompasses three programs, the Maryland Virtual School, Online Professional Development and online High School Assessment.

Table 2 (continued)

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	Initial Action	Governance	Innovative Policies and Programs
Mississippi Virtual Public School	Legislative code	Mississippi Department of Education	In 2008-2009, 170 students participated in a free Algebra Readiness program through Mississippi Virtual Public School.
North Carolina Virtual Public School	Legislative code	North Carolina State Board of Education	Legislation requires that all state-funded online learning opportunities be consolidated under North Carolina Virtual Public School. In 2008, North Carolina Virtual Public School became the coordinator of Learn and Earn Online, a dual enrollment program that allows high school students to earn college credits. More than 5,000 students were enrolled in the program in the 2008-2009 school year.
University of Oklahoma High School		University of Oklahoma	In 2009, a task force was created to “study the efficiency and accountability of the state’s Internet-based instruction program. The task force will review Internet-based instruction programs offered throughout the state and make recommendations for any statutory or regulatory changes necessary to improve the accountability and effectiveness of the program.”
South Carolina Virtual School Program	Legislative code; governor’s initiative; South Carolina Department of Education	South Carolina Board of Education	South Carolina currently has five full-time, online charter schools in operation.
e4TN (Tennessee)	Tennessee Department of Education	A partnership exists between the United States Department of Education (Ed Tech Grant), the Tennessee Department of Education and eight school districts.	In 2008, legislation was passed that states “a virtual school would be provided equitable treatment and resources as any other public school in the state.”
Texas Virtual School Network	Legislative code	Texas Commissioner of Education with Texas Education Agency staff	In January 2009, the Texas Virtual School Network began offering courses for students in grades nine through 12. The Electronic Course Program, which is a full-time online program for grades three through nine, will be phased into Chapter 30A, which established the Texas Virtual School Network, beginning in 2009-2010.
Virtual Virginia	Legislative code; governor’s initiative; Virginia Department of Education	Virginia Department of Education	Students who qualify as Early College Scholars may take AP courses free of charge through Virtual Virginia.

Table 2 (continued)

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	Initial Action	Governance	Innovative Policies and Programs
West Virginia Virtual School	Legislative code; West Virginia Department of Education	West Virginia Legislature; West Virginia Board of Education; West Virginia Department of Education	In 2008, State Board Policy was amended to recommend that students complete an online learning experience as part of high school graduation requirements.

References

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