



OVERVIEW OF ONLINE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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In Colorado, three types of online educational choices are available for students: online schools and programs; supplemental online education; and blended learning. This *issue brief* covers each type of online education, as well as recently passed legislation related to supplemental online and blended learning.

Online Schools and Programs

Types of online schools. There are two categories of online schools: those that serve students from a single district and those that serve students across multiple districts. Single-district online schools include schools that operate with their own administrator, budget, and instructional program, and programs with fewer than 100 students that are operated by a brick-and-mortar school. Multiple-district online schools serve students from around the state and are authorized by either a school district, the Charter School Institute, or a Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES).

In Colorado, there are currently 33 multi-district online schools serving about 16,700 students, and 34 single-district online schools and programs serving approximately 1,500 students.

Certification. If a school district, BOCES, or the Charter School Institute wants to authorize a multi-district online school, it must apply to the Office of Blended and Online Learning within the Colorado Department of

Education (CDE) for certification. The State Board of Education (SBE) may waive the requirement for certification if the program being authorized will serve ten students or fewer from outside the district. In reviewing certification applications, the office must consider:

- whether the authorizer possesses adequate resources and capacity to oversee the multi-district program;
- whether the plan for operating and monitoring the program addresses areas such as governance, student support, staff development, financial practices, and other administrative issues; and
- the degree to which the program will satisfy the SBE quality standards for online programs.

Other requirements. Online schools and programs are required to submit information concerning sound financial and accounting practices to both their authorizer and CDE annually. Students who attend online schools are subject to the state's compulsory attendance law and assessment requirements.

Funding. Online schools and programs are funded through the Public School Finance Act of 1994. Single-district online programs and schools are funded at the same level as brick-and-mortar schools in the school district. Multi-district schools receive funding based on an online per-pupil funding rate. In FY 2016-17,

multi-district online schools received \$6,796 per pupil.

Supplemental Online Education

Supplemental online education is a program that offers one or more online courses to students to augment an educational program provided by a school district, charter school, or BOCES. Courses must be taught by a licensed teacher, delivered remotely via the internet, and purchased by a school district, charter school, or BOCES to supplement its existing courses. These programs are not full-time online schools, but rather supplement a student's regular curriculum.

Blended Learning

Blended learning is a formal education program through which a student learns partly through digital content with some element of student control and partly at a supervised physical location that is not the student's home. Blended learning covers a wide range of formats and models and varies among schools and districts. Examples include students:

- alternating between different stations within the classroom or school that include online learning or time in a computer lab;
- watching lectures online at home and applying the lessons in the classroom with guidance from teachers; or
- taking online courses with differing amounts of face-to-face instruction.

Implementation of Supplemental Online and Blended Learning

Under House Bill 16-1222, CDE must designate a BOCES to design and implement a statewide supplemental online and blended learning program. The BOCES must contract with providers to provide the necessary courses and resources, and meet the following goals:

- expand the availability of blended learning and supplemental online courses;
- increase the number of students enrolled in supplemental online courses;
- work with school districts, charter schools, and BOCES to offer their own supplemental online and blended learning programs;
- assist teachers with increasing their competency in digital learning strategies; and
- document and share best practices.

Under the statewide program, all school districts, charter schools, and BOCES must have access to supplemental online courses, professional development resources, and consulting assistance, including models for integrating online education into physical school-based education. Currently, the Mountain BOCES is designated to implement the state supplemental online and blended learning program.

Colorado Digital Learning Solutions (CDLS) is the current state provider of supplemental online courses and professional development for teachers. Some online schools also offer supplemental online courses, in addition to their full-time programs. CDLS offers approximately 200 online courses and typically enrolls between 200 and 300 students per semester. In the fall of 2015, 203 students were enrolled in at least one supplemental online course. CDLS charges schools and school districts for each course taken by a student. As of August 1, 2016, CDLS charges \$100 per core content area and electives course and \$150 per advanced placement course.

Funding. In recent years, the General Assembly has appropriated \$480,000 annually from federal mineral lease revenue to support supplemental online education. Through the passage of HB 16-1222, an additional \$480,000 was designated for online supplemental and blended learning in FY 2016-17. Up to 10 percent may be used for administration by the BOCES designated to implement the statewide program.