

The Washington State Board of Education

Governance | Achievement | High School and College Preparation | Math & Science | Effective Workforce

Title:	<u>Online Learning Policy and High School Credit</u>	
As related To:	<input type="checkbox"/> Goal One: Advocacy for an effective, accountable governance structure for public education <input type="checkbox"/> Goal Two: Policy leadership for closing the academic achievement gap <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Goal Three: Policy leadership to increase Washington's student enrollment and success in secondary and postsecondary education	<input type="checkbox"/> Goal Four: Effective strategies to make Washington's students nationally and internationally competitive in math and science <input type="checkbox"/> Goal Five: Advocacy for policies to develop the most highly effective K-12 teacher and leader workforce in the nation <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Relevant to Board Roles:	<input type="checkbox"/> Policy Leadership <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> System Oversight <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication <input type="checkbox"/> Convening and Facilitating
Policy Considerations / Key Questions:	<p>SBE's 2011-14 Strategic Plan calls for the Board to assist in oversight of online learning programs and Washington State diploma-granting institutions. SBE established two objectives related to online learning, stating that it would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine policy issues related to the oversight of online learning for high school credits. • Determine SBE's role in approval of online private schools. <p>SBE also has a specific oversight role from 2009 legislation that requires it to collaborate with OSPI in the development of approval criteria for multidistrict online providers and to receive OSPI's annual online learning report.</p>	
Possible Board Action:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Review <input type="checkbox"/> Adopt <input type="checkbox"/> Approve <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Materials Included in Packet:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Memo <input type="checkbox"/> Graphs / Graphics <input type="checkbox"/> Third-Party Materials <input type="checkbox"/> PowerPoint	
Synopsis	<p>Policy questions about high school credits for online courses center on the question: Who ensures the quality of the courses and takes responsibility for student outcomes? The answer to both questions is school districts. Public, online schools exist within Washington State school districts, and as such, are accountable for meeting all state requirements. However, there is one exception. Federal requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) allow districts with schools that have more than 50 percent of students coming from outside a district to request that student performance on state assessments and graduation rates for that school or schools be excluded from district totals. The exemption was created so that there would be no disincentive for districts to provide programs to challenging students, but it also means that for AYP purposes, there is no district accountability for the performance of students enrolled in those schools. Of the 32 schools on the 2011 AYP exemptions list of "50 percent" schools, at least 12 were online school programs. Initial student outcomes data suggests that online student performance needs improvement, although there are some challenges with the availability of complete and reliable data. For these reasons, SBE in its oversight role may want to pay particular attention to issues of student achievement in online schools, and who is being held accountable for them.</p>	

ONLINE LEARNING POLICY AND HIGH SCHOOL CREDIT

BACKGROUND

The State Board of Education's (SBE) role in online education is part of the Board's strategic oversight of public education. SBE's 2011-14 Strategic Plan calls for the Board to assist in oversight of online learning programs and Washington State diploma-granting institutions¹. SBE established two objectives related to online learning, stating that it would:

- Examine policy issues related to the oversight of online learning for high school credits.
- Determine SBE's role in approval of online private schools.

The 2009 Legislature gave SBE a specific oversight role² when it took action to assure quality in online learning, both for the programs and for the administration of those programs. These first quality assurance steps included: 1) providing objective information to students, parents, and educators regarding available online learning opportunities; 2) creating an approval process for multi-district online providers; 3) enhancing statewide equity of student access to high quality learning opportunities; and 4) requiring school district boards of directors to develop policies and procedures for student access to online learning opportunities (RCW 28A.250). The legislation called for the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to:

- Collaborate with SBE in the development of approval criteria for multidistrict online providers, a monitoring process, and an appeals process.
- Submit an annual report to SBE, the Legislature and the Governor.

OSPI consulted with SBE in September 2009 before adopting criteria and processes into rule³ in December 2009. OSPI also included in rule⁴ that SBE, along with an online learning advisory committee, would review initial criteria, and any subsequent modifications, "to allow online courses that have not been approved by the Superintendent of Public Instruction to be eligible for state funding if the course is in a subject matter in which no courses have been approved and, if it is a high school course, the course meets Washington high school graduation requirements."

The full [2009-10 Online Learning Annual Report](#), which will be discussed by OSPI staff Martin Mueller and Karl Nelson, is included in the FYI folder; the executive summary is attached to this memo.

This staff memo focuses on policy issues related to earning high school credits.

SUMMARY OF POLICY ISSUES RELATED TO EARNING HIGH SCHOOL CREDITS

¹ Goal 3-D

² [28A.250.020](#), [28A.250.040](#)

³ [WAC 392.502](#)

⁴ WAC [392.502.080](#)

Policy questions about high school credits for online courses center on the question: Who ensures the quality of the courses and takes responsibility for student outcomes? The answer to both questions is school districts. Public, online schools exist within Washington State school districts, and as such, are accountable for meeting all state requirements. Courses in Washington's public online schools are taught by Washington-certificated teachers. (Beyond certification, there are no other state requirements for teaching in an online environment.)

The approval process provides quality control for multi-district online course providers,⁵ who must provide assurances that all of their high school courses advertised as being worth high school credit are eligible for high school credit per SBE's [WAC 180.51.050](#). Final decisions regarding the awarding of high school credit remain the responsibility of school districts. The providers must also assure that all course content is aligned with at least 80 percent of the current applicable grade/subject area Washington standards. For courses with content that is not included in state standards, the courses must be aligned with at least 80 percent of nationally accepted content standards set for the relevant subjects.

During the 2011 Legislative session, [HB 2065](#) amended current law to stipulate that school districts must award credit for online high school courses successfully completed by a student that meets the school district's graduation requirements and are provided by an approved online provider. The implications of this new provision to mandate the award of transfer credit is unclear.

How students take online classes. Essentially, students have two options to earn credit through online learning. They can attend an online school program through their local school district, or transfer to a program offered by another school district. Students determine whether they want to take a few online courses in addition to their face-to-face classes, or enroll in an online learning school program. Students pursuing individual courses may want to take a class that isn't available in the regular school catalog, or they may want the scheduling flexibility that online learning provides. Others may need to recover credit.

Most students will explore options for online learning within their local school district first. Their local school district may offer "homegrown" online courses (courses created by the district), or may contract for courses through the [Digital Learning Department](#) or through another third-party provider.

If a student takes a course as part of a regular course load, no tuition is charged. If a student takes a course in addition to a full student load, district policy will determine whether a tuition charge is passed on to the student.

If the local school district does not offer online courses, a student can petition to take courses through another school district. In this case, the online provider may try to broker an interdistrict agreement to share the FTE for that student. Both districts must agree to enter into such a contract.

Alternatively, a student could exercise a "choice" transfer to another district in order to participate in an online school program offered by another district. In this case, the student becomes the responsibility of the district offering the online program.

⁵ Defined as a company, non-profit organization or school district that provides online courses to districts.

More detail is provided below about different types of online learning providers:

- A single district online school program.
- The Digital Learning Department.
- A multi-district online school program.
- A private online school.

Online courses through a Single District Online School Program. Students can take online courses provided through their resident school or district. These courses may be offered during the regular school day, in addition to the regular school day, or on demand. While single district online school programs currently do not require approval from OSPI, approval will be required beginning in the 2013-2014 school year.

One example of a single district online school program is Everett's Online High School (OnlineHS.net). OnlineHS, in operation since 2001, enables students to take one to five online classes as part of their high school schedule. Students are on campus for their high school classes and at home for their online classes. In-district students may take courses in addition to their six-period day; however, they must pay tuition, currently \$200.00 for .5 credit. Students from outside the district pay \$300.00 for .5 credit. (District policies governing payment for tuition vary.) Students may also enroll full-time in Everett's OnlineHS by registering through one of the district's high schools, Sequoia High School. Before becoming a full-time online student, a student must successfully pass one course online.

Students may elect to take courses for enrichment, credit retrieval, or to accelerate their learning. Everett's year-round program offers core, elective, Advanced Placement, College In the High School, and Career/Technical Education classes. OnlineHS teachers are certified, Everett School District teachers. According to Everett's website, all online teachers have taught a minimum of five years and receive training, twice a year, in "best practices" for online learning. The district monitors and awards the credits students earn.

Everett School District staff will present to the Board at the July meeting about its online school program.

Online courses through the Digital Learning Department. OSPI's [Digital Learning Department](#) (DLD) offers over 600 online courses for grades 6–12 through approved multi-district online course providers. All instruction delivered through the DLD online courses is assured by the provider to be delivered by Washington state-certificated, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) highly-qualified teachers and according to policies for the assignment of classroom teachers outlined in WAC [181-82](#).

In 2010-2011, 91 school districts offered courses at one or more schools through the DLD. Students stay at their local school and enroll through the school into the DLD courses. Credits are granted by the student's local school. Schools determine which courses are available to their students and which students are eligible to take online courses. Students may be required to pay tuition if the district chooses to pass some or all of the course costs on to the student.

Online courses through a Multi-district Online School Program. A multi-district online school program serves 10 percent or more non-resident students and is a "district-run online school that offers online courses in a sequential program—a set of courses or coursework that may be taken in a single school term or throughout the school year in a manner that could

provide a full-time basic education program.”⁶ Beginning with the 2011-12 school year, multi-district online school programs must be approved by OSPI in order for school districts to claim state basic education funding.

Students who enroll in an online school program run by a district other than their local district must transfer out of their local district and into the district providing the program. Fees are paid by the state as part of basic education funds, and follow the student. When a student “choice” transfers from their resident district to the district providing the program (“non-resident district”), the non-resident district becomes fully responsible for the student and is able to collect state funds for that student.

The district running the online school program is responsible for assuring that courses are taught to state standards and for awarding credit. Among the 41 online school programs in 2009-2010, at least 14 programs served students across the state.

Online courses through a Private Online School. Students may elect to take courses provided through a private online provider, and must conduct their own consumer research into the quality of the product they are purchasing. Private online providers are not approved by any state entity, although they may be accredited by a variety of independent accreditation associations. Any private, online providers seeking approval in Washington must meet the requirements for private schools outlined in statute.⁷ This statute, originally written in 1977, was created with only brick-and-mortar schools in mind. Only one private online provider has sought approval from the State Board of Education in the last five years, and that request was denied based on an assessment that the provider could not demonstrate that they had met all of the statutory requirements⁸.

POLICY CONSIDERATION

Accountability for the quality of credits earned by students in online courses rests with the district that is awarding the credits. The “home” district (whether it is a single district school program or a district-run multi-district school program) monitors the quality of teaching and learning, how state standards are incorporated into the curriculum, and how credits are earned and recorded. However, for several reasons, SBE in its oversight role may want to pay particular attention to issues of student achievement in online schools, and who is being held accountable for them.

The OSPI [2009-10 Online Learning Annual Report](#) notes that the available data, although incomplete,⁹ raises several concerns about student achievement.

1. A significantly higher number of students fail online courses in comparison to the state as a whole. The report (pp. 41-42) suggests that this outcome may be due, in part, to:
 - a. More proficiency-based models of learning; students can move forward only when they demonstrate mastery of content.
 - b. Rigor; students may experience an increased amount of material and teacher monitoring than in face-to-face classes.

⁶ Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. February 2011. *Online Learning Annual Report 2009-2010*, p. 7

⁷ [RCW 28A.195.010](#)

⁸ March 2010 SBE Board meeting

⁹ Washington CEDARS (Comprehensive Education Data and Research Systems) data is limited to grades 9-12, and 2009-2010 was the first year for reporting data to CEDARS. The district data was incomplete. (see p. 33-34 of the February 2011 report.)

- c. Student diversity and preparation; online students may be more diverse in their prior academic achievement and motivation for using online learning (e.g., credit recovery).
 - d. A mismatch between the medium and the student.
2. Student performance in online school programs, particularly in math and science, “lags behind the state averages” (p. 44). SBE staff review of online school programs represented in the Achievement Index, confirmed concerns about performance. However, there are a few challenges in examining the performance of online programs. First, some districts have not established a separate four-digit school code for their online program, so their online students are not distinguishable from students in another school. Second, the rapid development of online learning means that districts are adding or changing programs quickly so it is difficult to get a comprehensive list of programs. Third, there is turnover in third-party online providers due to programs being purchased by other providers.

OSPI’s report also noted that although online schools are accountable for testing their students, online schools test their students at significantly lower rates than the state average, particularly at the high school level. This is largely due to the logistical issues of determining where students are taking the assessments (and therefore where to send the test booklets). OSPI formed a task force of district assessment coordinators and online school leaders to address these issues for the 2011 assessment period, and made changes to allow online schools to register their students in brick and mortar schools. Test materials were sent directly to the brick and mortar schools where students could take the tests.

Finally, SBE staff looked at another accountability issue related to federal requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). When more than 50 percent of students in a school come from outside a district, the district can request that student performance on state assessments and graduation rates for that school be excluded from district totals. The exemption was created so that there would be no disincentive for districts to provide programs to challenging students. On the other hand, it also means that, for AYP purposes, there is no district accountability for these students.

Districts apply to OSPI to be recognized as a “50 percent” school. Of the 32 schools on the 2011 AYP exemptions list of “50 percent” schools, at least 12 were online school programs. Three schools with the highest online enrollments (Washington Virtual Academy K-8—Steilacoom, Insight School of Washington—Quillayute Valley, and Washington Virtual Academy (9-12)—Monroe) were among them.

EXPECTED ACTION

No action; for information purposes only.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY from *OSPI Online Learning Annual Report, 2009-2010*

The emerging field of online learning continues to play an important role in the state's education landscape, providing schools with much needed flexibility to meet the educational needs of a variety of learners.

This report covers:

- The multi-district online provider approval process, which forms the heart of the accountability structures set up by the Legislature in 2009 through Substitute Senate Bill 5410.
- Demographics for online students.
- Statewide assessment results for online students.
- Course taking patterns and course achievement results for online students.

APPROVAL

Beginning with the 2011–12 school year, school districts may claim state basic education funding, to the extent otherwise allowed by state law, for students enrolled in online courses or programs only if the online courses or programs are:

- Offered by an approved multi-district online provider; or
- Offered by a school district online learning program if the program serves students who reside within the geographic boundaries of the school district, including school district programs in which fewer than 10 percent of the program's students reside outside the school district's geographic boundaries; or
- Offered by a regional online learning program where courses are jointly developed and offered by two or more school districts or an educational service district through an interdistrict cooperative program agreement.

If a provider is not approved, starting in the 2011–12 school year, their ability to operate in the state of Washington could be severely constrained.

Spring 2010 Approval Cycle

Three providers were approved (out of five applicants) during the initial spring 2010 approval cycle. The providers are:

- Blue Ridge International Academy
- DigiPen Institute of Technology - Online Academies
- Olympia Regional Learning Academy (iConnect Academy) (Olympia School District)

Fall 2010 Approval Cycle

Thirteen providers were approved (out of eighteen applicants) during the fall 2010 approval cycle. The approved providers are:

- Bethel Online Academy (Bethel School District)
- Columbia Tech High (White Salmon Valley School District)
- Columbia Virtual Academy (consortium of districts led by Valley School District)
- Giant Campus of Washington
- iQ Academy of Washington (Evergreen School District)
- Kaplan Academy of Washington (Stevenson-Carson School District)
- Kaplan Virtual Education

- Marysville Online Virtual Education (Marysville School District)
- National Connections Academy
- Productive Learning Online Corporation
- Washington Academy of Arts & Technology and EV Online Learning (East Valley School District, Spokane)
- Washington Virtual Academy (Monroe School District)
- Washington Virtual Academy (Omak School District)

A complete list of currently approved providers is available at:
<http://digitallearning.k12.wa.us/approval/providers/>.

DATA AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY

For the Demographic and Student Achievement sections of this report, we have drawn upon a number of data sources. Each source varies slightly in what it collects as well as in the maturity, and therefore quality, of the data. This makes it difficult to draw conclusive statements about online programs. Despite the concerns, we are able to draw some high-level conclusions about the demographics and achievement issues in online learning, and are working with school districts to improve the quality of the data we receive in each collection.

The data quality problems should improve over time, as school districts begin to comply with the new reporting regulations introduced in 2009. As the data improves, so will our ability to monitor the online programs and providers operating in the state.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Given the multiple data sources and their attendant limitations, it is impossible to determine an exact number of students who participated in online learning during 2009–10. On the low end of the count, approximately 10,000 students participated in either individual courses or online school programs. On the high end, more than 16,000 students may have participated in online learning. Based on these ranges, up to 2 percent of the state’s K–12 student population appears to have participated in online learning.

At least 41 online school programs operated in the state during 2009–10. See Appendix A for the complete list. While many of those programs served only students in the district offering the program, at least 14 programs served students across the state.

Some key demographic conclusions:

- Female students are over-represented (54 percent) among students who take online courses, as compared to the population of K–12 students as a whole (48 percent).
- Approximately two-thirds of online students are in Grades 9–12, with the remaining third in elementary and middle school.
- White students are significantly over-represented amongst students enrolled in online courses (77.1 percent) as compared to the state as a whole (62.8 percent). Hispanic and Asian populations were significantly under-represented.
- Of the 16,169 students listed in CEDARS as participating in an online course, 694 (4.3 percent) are special education students. This is a much lower percentage than the state student population as a whole, where 12.6 percent of students were special education students in May 2010.
- Of the 16,169 students listed in CEDARS as participating in an online course, 1,267 (7.8 percent) were part-time homeschooled and part-time enrolled in a public school district. By way of comparison, 9,671 (0.9 percent) of the 1.1 million students in the state were in the same category.

- Based on the interdistrict transfer data collected for “Internet ALE programs,” an average annual headcount of 6,452 students transferred from one district to another to attend an online school program. That represents two-thirds of the 9,684.5 students reported in this data collection. Those students represented an annual average FTE of 5,528.3 students.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Statewide Assessment Results for Online Students

Online schools have had significant difficulty in administering the assessments to their students. All of the programs for which we have data served students statewide through interdistrict “choice” transfers or inter-local agreements between two districts. The logistical challenges of arranging for testing in dozens, even hundreds, of local districts are daunting. As a result, online schools test their students at significantly lower rates than the state average. The disparity is especially striking at the high school level, and more concerning given the concentration of high school students involved in online learning. Between 48.1 percent and 60.0 percent of online tenth grade students were tested, depending on the subject area, as compared to a state average of above 92 percent.

With the “no score” students removed from the equation, the percentage of students meeting standard in the online schools is very close to the state average for both the reading and writing assessments. In math and science, however, the online schools fell short of the state average. In tenth grade math, for example, students in online schools met standard at a rate of 26.3 percent, as compared to the state average of 43.5 percent. In tenth grade science, students in online schools met standard at a rate of 37.2 percent, compared to 48.4 percent statewide.

Online Course Completion and Passing

Of the 50,829 online courses where CEDARS has grade history data, 92.2 percent were completed. As a comparison, 98.3 percent of the 3,152,733 courses, statewide, for which CEDARS has grade histories, were listed as completed.

Of the 46,872 completed courses, 46 percent passed with a C- or better, and 59 percent passed with a D or better. Statewide, of the 3,097,826 completed courses, 80.6 percent passed with a C- or better and 89.9 percent passed with a D or better. An analysis of the grades given shows that the distribution for online students looks dramatically different from the state as a whole, with a significantly higher number of students failing online courses in comparison to the state as a whole.