AN EXAMINATION OF STATE FUNDING MODELS REGARDING VIRTUAL SCHOOLS FOR PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

By

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AN EXAMINATION OF STATE FUNDING MODELS REGARDING VIRTUAL SCHOOLS FOR PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

By
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Chairman: R. Craig Wood
Major: Educational Leadership

This study contains an analysis of virtual schools, public policy, and funding in the United States. The purpose of this study was to determine what public policies and legislation were in place regarding the funding models of virtual education on a state by state basis. Furthermore, this study addressed how allocations were being made by state legislatures and if individual state public policies allowed for private/publicly-funded virtual school options.

The analysis of the public policy was grouped into three models with the following classifications: Centralized Virtual School Model, Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model, and Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model. Each model contained the name of the state’s primary virtual school, its year of inception, funding source information, and if there were evidence of any alternatives to a state’s primary virtual school. Furthermore, this study contained a breakdown and analysis of data in terms of how a given state viewed its virtual school public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s).
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Virtual Education in the United States has grown in attractiveness with the emergence of the Internet and World Wide Web. This growth has caused state legislatures to enact policies that attempted to take advantage of the perceived opportunity to improve the quality of student education, and the use of educational funding more efficiently. In 1997, the Florida Legislature passed legislation creating the Florida Virtual School. The Florida Virtual School’s motto was “any time, any place, any path, and pace.” This concept exemplified a model for students to be able to progress at their own pace, and convenience. Since the Florida Virtual Schools inception, it has become the largest virtual school in the United States and the continued growth of virtual education has increased nationally.

Virtual Schools and School Districts

In order for state legislatures to maximize the effectiveness of virtual schools, public education policymakers must inspect the constant growth of the virtual school concept and the development of educational technology. With the inherent inequity of the digital divide, state-funded virtual schools could become the great equalizer in order to ensure all students are afforded the same educational opportunities—regardless of socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity.

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2 FRS §1002.37.


The continued growth of distance education required critics to examine whether voucher programs, in lieu of failing public schools, have been replaced by virtual schools. One could argue students who were previously home-schooled would no longer save school districts money because virtual schools offered a viable educational alternative funded by a state or local agency. As a result, virtual schools that received money from local school districts for each student enrolled would subsequently cause traditional public schools to experience a reduction in funding that could cause adverse effects for local education in many states.

One could suggest that a result of the unwavering focus on technological advancement and distance education, virtual schools have become the de facto educational vouchers of the Twenty-First Century. Since the inception of the Florida Virtual School in 1997, the evolution of virtual schools throughout the country has been explosive. With the exponential growth of virtual education over the past decade, state policymakers were forced to forecast educational costs reflecting greater potential school choices found in virtual school options. Virtual schools operating outside of the traditional school district structure complicated data collection related to the significant growth in the number of public, private, and for-profit providers of online learning.

Virtual education for elementary and secondary students has grown into a $507 million market and continues to grow at an estimated annual pace of 30 percent. In 2000, there were approximately 40,000-50,000 enrollments in elementary and

secondary online education courses. In 2006, the Sloan Consortium reported approximately 700,000 enrollments in elementary and secondary virtual education. The overall number of elementary and secondary students enrolled in virtual education courses in 2007-2008 was estimated at approximately 1,030,000—which represented a 47 percent increase since 2005-2006. Currently, there are an estimated 3 million enrollments in online and blended courses in elementary and secondary education. With the steady and continual growth of virtual education, policy and funding for virtual schools are becoming critical issues for state policymakers.

Researchers also have indicated an increased need for virtual education to be structured in a blended fashion. The North American Council for Online Learning’s John Watson stated that the “blended approach combines the best elements of online and face-to-face learning. It is likely to emerge as the predominant model of the future.” While not every state offered courses taught in a blended fashion, the literature suggested that blended courses should be viewed in the following manner:

Blended learning should be viewed as a pedagogical approach that combines the effectiveness and socialization opportunities of the classroom with the technologically enhanced active learning possibilities of the online environment, rather than a ratio of delivery modalities. In other words, blended learning should be approached not merely as a temporal construct,
but rather as a fundamental redesign of the instructional model with the following characteristics:

A shift from lecture- to student-centered instruction in which students become active and interactive learners (this shift should apply to the entire course, including face-to-face contact sessions); Increases in interaction between student-instructor, student-student, student-content, and student-outside resources; Integrated formative and summative assessment mechanisms for students and instructor.\(^\text{12}\)

**Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine state policies regarding the funding of virtual schools within the United States. The policy analysis allowed the researcher to further examine the following research questions:

1. Did a given state utilize a virtual school funding model?
2. Did a given state utilize a Centralized Virtual School Model, Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model, or a Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model?
3. When a state virtual school existed, did policy/statute allow for students to enroll in alternatives to the statewide virtual school?
4. What were a given state’s virtual schools public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s)?

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study was twofold. First, the study determined what type of virtual school funding model was being used in a given state. State policies and actions were then divided into three separate categories classified by what form of virtual school model a given state utilized. The results were classified concerning these attributes.

Second, the collective analysis of all fifty states’ virtual school funding formulas allowed the researcher to create an overview of how virtual schooling was being used.

financed in the United States. The virtual school funding formula synopsis itself can be used to address how state funding mechanisms can offer more flexibility and educational options for elementary and secondary level students.

Limitations of the Study

Due to virtual school funding being a moderately new educational concept, there was a limited amount of research in regard to how to properly fund virtual schooling. The researcher pursued to advance the level of knowledge in the area of education finance by conducting this study. This study was limited to elementary and secondary level virtual education in the United States. Furthermore, this study did not discuss in specific detail issues of equity and adequacy in regard to the funding mechanisms for virtual education in every state because of the varying degrees of state policies and data. The study also did not attempt to measure the cost-efficiency of virtual schooling or student achievement.

Definitions of Terms

**Blended Learning** – Blended learning was defined as a method “which combines self-paced learning, live e-learning and face-to-face classroom learning.”

**Virtual Education** – Virtual education was defined as a formal online educational program for elementary and secondary students structured differently than traditional brick and mortar schools.

**Virtual School** – A virtual school was defined as an educational organization that offered elementary and secondary level courses through Internet or Web-based methods.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 was written to introduce the policy analysis that was conducted regarding the funding of virtual schooling in the United States. The methodologies and

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structural design of the study were explained in Chapter 2. A review of the literature regarding financing virtual education, state policies, and litigation was presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 contained a breakdown and analysis of data that were examined in this study and how a given state viewed its virtual school public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s). Furthermore, Chapter 4 findings were discussed in Chapter 5 and were as follows: significance of the study, implications of the study, topics for further research, and conclusions that were based on the outcome of the study.
CHAPTER 2
METHODS AND MATERIALS

Given the design of the public policy analysis, the method and materials were discussed prior to the traditional literature review. In this manner, the organization of the literature review was deemed to be more applicable to the research questions. Chapter 2 explained how the structural design of the study was developed to answer the research questions. The research questions were divided into four sections as a means of understanding how state policies impacted the funding of virtual education within the United States. This study was designed as a review of educational policy and case law with an emphasis on materials published in federal and state courts as well as various state Departments of Education. However, at the time of the study there was no evidence of federal or state court cases involving the funding of virtual education. Furthermore, large assortments of secondary sources were used to provide background information, state requirements, content, and evidence to further answer the research questions. It was important to note that there was a lack of substantive evaluation methodologies regarding the impact of virtual schooling on reducing the achievement gap.

Public Policy Analysis

The most in-depth portion of this study was to determine the primary funding sources of virtual schools in the United States. In doing so, combinations of sources were used to obtain the most all-inclusive results as possible. The following list represents the most commonly used sources that were collected to conduct this research study.

- Individual State Statutes. Every state statute regarding virtual schooling was studied on a state-by-state basis. All virtual school statues were analyzed to
reference what was legally required of an individual state Department of Education and its affiliated K-12 school districts. Furthermore, each state was analyzed on the basis of being its own individual case study.

- **Department of Education Policies.** Every state Department of Education policy concerning virtual schooling was researched on an individual state basis. All policies were referenced manually by the researcher and the appropriate policies were analyzed on the basis of being an individual state-by-state case study.¹

- **West Law.** Every subject for this source was researched using the key terms of “virtual schools,” “virtual charter schools,” “K-12 online education,” “(state name) virtual school,” and “virtual school funding.” Collectively these terms determined what court cases dictated virtual school law in a given state. The court cases were then referenced manually by the researcher and verified for their appropriateness in regard to answering the research questions.

- **LexisNexis.** Similar to West Law, every subject for this source was researched using the key terms of “virtual schools,” “virtual charter schools,” “K-12 online education,” “(state name) virtual school,” and “virtual school funding.” Collectively these terms determined what court cases dictated virtual school law in a given state. The court cases were then referenced manually by the researcher and verified for the appropriateness in regard to answering the research questions.

- **Education Resources Information Center (ERIC).** Similar to LexisNexis and West Law, every subject for this source was researched using the key terms of “virtual schools,” “virtual charter schools,” “K-12 online education,” “(state name) virtual school,” and “virtual school funding.” Collectively these terms determined what court cases dictated virtual school law in a given state. The court cases were then referenced manually by the researcher and verified for there appropriateness in regard to answering the research questions. ERIC was also used to locate peer-reviewed scholarly materials to further provide background information, state requirements, content, and additional evidence to answer the research questions.

- **Multiple Virtual School webpages.** The use of multiple virtual school webpages provided background information, content, requirements, and additional evidence to answer the research questions.²

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² Virtual School webpages included the following: Colorado Online Learning, Community College System of New Hampshire, Connections Academy, E²TN, Florida Virtual School, Francis School, Hawaii Virtual Learning Network, iAchieve Academy, Idaho Digital Learning Academy, Illinois Virtual School, Innovative Digital Education and Learning New Mexico, Intermountain Center for Education Effectiveness, Iowa
Multiple educational organizations. The use of content from multiple educational organizations provided background information, content, requirements, and additional evidence to answer the research questions.\(^3\)

Every state was reviewed and categorized on the basis of what type of funding model was used to fund virtual education. The researcher then categorized the funding of virtual education into three distinct models: the Centralized Virtual School Model, the Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model, and the Privately/Publicly Funded Virtual School Model. As previously noted, there were no definitions in the literature that addressed the definition of virtual school funding models. Absent any definitions, the researcher examined all fifty state’s statutes, Department of Education policies, and virtual school webpages, and determined that forty-eight of the fifty states individually fit into one of the three funding models. The only state funding models that did not fit into one of the three funding models were New York and Delaware.

States that utilized the Centralized Virtual School Model were as follows: Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, and Wyoming. Each of these states contained evidence of a single state virtual school with a single public primary funding source. In addition, a

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\(^3\) Multiple Educational Organizations included the following: Connections Academy, Distance Learning Resource Network, EdSource, North American Council for Online Learning, International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL), Southern Regional Education Board, Great Lakes Center for Education Research & Practice State Educational Technology Directors Association, American Institutes for Research, and The Heritage Foundation, Liberating Learning, Distance Learning.
Centralized Virtual School Model referred to an online school that was derived from, or was under the control of a single central authority.

States that utilized the Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model were as follows: Alaska, Arkansas, Georgia, Kansas, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Ohio, South Carolina, and South Dakota. Each of these states contained evidence of multiple public virtual school options that were funded by a single public primary funding source. Furthermore, a Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model referred to multiple public virtual schools within a given state that were derived from, or were under the control of a single central authority.

States that utilized the Privately/Publicly Funded Virtual School Model were as follows: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Each of these states contained evidence of either a single state virtual school or multiple public virtual schools. In addition to the publicly funded virtual schools, states that utilized the Privately/Publicly Funded Virtual School Model offered a private/for-profit and non-profit alternative virtual school option for students.

The analysis for this study was conducted in a Post-Hoc manner. The study did not address the concept of creating new laws or policies to fund virtual education, but rather to examine what laws and/or polices were already in place. The time period of the data used in this study was from July 1, 2010 – December 31, 2011 for a total of eighteen months. It is important to note that legislative sessions may have created new
laws and/or policies after December 31, 2011 which were not reflected in this study. A complete fifty state analysis was conducted to strengthen the validity of the study because the research questions dictated the need for the entire United States to be used as the sample size. Within the context of the study, public policy mission statement(s) were viewed as political, social, and economic agendas for a given states virtual school format. It is important to note that even if a given state did not mention a specific public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s), it did not mean that state would be opposed to another states public policy mission statement.

Summary

Chapter 2 explained the design and methods used for this study. Furthermore, it began with a list of the most commonly used sources that were collected to provide background information, state requirements, content, and evidence to further answer the research questions. Chapter 2 also further explained how the researcher classified each individual state by its virtual school funding model into one of the following three models: the Centralized Virtual School Model, the Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model, and the Privately/Publicly Funded Virtual School Model.
CHAPTER 3
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter 3 contained an investigation of case law, policy, and literature applicable to the research questions. This literature review was divided into four parts that addressed the following concepts: a brief background of online education, national trends of online education, principles of education finance, and an in-depth overview of state-level policy regarding virtual education. Absent a sound theoretical base, Chapter 3 contained state statute and policy as well. Each section further addressed the research questions regarding the funding for virtual schooling throughout the United States.

Background of Online Education

In 1992, the invention of the World Wide Web allowed online education to give students increased access to course content and new pedagogical methods of instruction.\(^1\) The concept of the World Wide Web itself has enabled individuals to connect with one another on both a more international and personal basis. The very structure of digital communication has in a sense revolutionized the realm of learning for elementary and secondary students because they are now able to receive accredited instruction outside of a traditional brick-and-mortar classroom.\(^2\)

The literature states that online education at its core consists of three primary pedagogical modes of online delivery:

- **Adjunct mode** uses networking to enhance traditional face-to-face or distance education.

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Mixed mode employs networking as a significant portion of a traditional classroom or distance course.

Totally online mode relies on networking as the primary teaching medium for an entire course or program.³

Virtual Education in the United States essentially has grown from these three primary modes of delivery to a variety of virtual school options for elementary and secondary students.

**National Trends of Online Education**

The State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA) released its 7th annual report on the national technology trends of 2010.⁴ Over the course of the previous seven years, SETDA has conducted an annual national survey that examined the states’ implementation of the technology sections of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965—as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Title II-D).⁵ The 2010 report summarized survey data from state education agency technology directors from all fifty states.

According to State Educational Technology Directors Association, “the purpose of this report is to inform federal, state, and local policymakers on trends related to SEA and local education agency (LEA) implementation of programs funded through Title II-D.”⁶ With that in mind, the current technology trends throughout the United States of

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America were identified via the aforementioned annual report that lists the following five national trends as critical to fully comprehending the educational technology movement:

**Trend 1 - Scaling Up Success**
States continued to provide educational technology leadership by focusing Title II-D investments on student-centric, research-based, technology-rich learning environments that advance state and federal goals.

**Trend 2 - Enhancing Teacher Effectiveness**
For the seventh year in a row, states reported offering a wide range of professional development, positioned as a key leverage point for extracting a learning return on their Title II-D technology investments.

**Trend 3 - Using Data to Inform Learning, Teaching, and Leadership**
Title II-D investments are increasing the capacity of educators to access, analyze, and use data effectively to inform learning, teaching, and leadership.

**Trend 4 - Increasing Academic Achievement**
Title II-D investments continue to focus on technology-enhanced teaching and learning innovations that demonstrate positive gains in the core academic areas.

**Trend 5 - Driving Innovation and New Educational Models**
Educators are taking advantage of Title II-D investments in Web 2.0, interactive technologies, and broadband, by embracing technology-enhanced learning strategies that include online learning, use of digital content, and web-based professional communities of practice.⁷

The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) also developed a set of standards to regarding the quality of online learning. The standards were created by a “team of experts consisting of online teachers, professional developers, instructional designers, researchers, course developers, and administrators.”⁸ The iNACOL organization itself is highly respected in the field of Educational Technology and its standards for ensuring quality online education are as follows:

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A. The online teacher knows the primary concepts and structures of effective online instruction and is able to create learning experiences to enable student success.

B. The online teacher understands and is able to use a range of technologies, both existing and emerging, that effectively support student learning and engagement in the online environment.

C. The online teacher plans, designs, and incorporates strategies to encourage active learning, application, interaction, participation, and collaboration in the online environment.

D. The online teacher promotes student success through clear expectations, prompt responses, and regular feedback.

E. The online teacher models, guides, and encourages legal, ethical, and safe behavior related to technology use.

F. The online teacher is cognizant of the diversity of student academic needs and incorporates accommodations into the online environment.

G. The online teacher demonstrates competencies in creating and implementing assessments in online learning environments in ways that ensure validity and reliability of the instruments and procedures.

H. The online teacher develops and delivers assessments, projects, and assignments that meet standards-based learning goals and assesses learning progress by measuring student achievement of the learning goals.

I. The online teacher demonstrates competency in using data from assessments and other data sources to modify content and to guide student learning.

J. The online teacher interacts in a professional, effective manner with colleagues, parents, and other members of the community to support students' success.

K. The online teacher arranges media and content to help students and teachers transfer knowledge most effectively in the online environment.  

The International Association for K-12 Online Learning and overall literature regarding trends in formal virtual education mainly focused on staff development, pedagogical skills, and ways for teachers to improve student achievement. Actual funding allocations for online education were rarely mentioned outside of general claims.

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9 International Association for K-12 Online Learning, “National Standards for Quality Online Teaching.”  
that schools or organizations needed more funding to close the achievement gap, improve educational quality, student achievement, and professional development. This was a common theme and limitation for the literature review of the overall study. The concept of virtual schooling itself has embraced the concept of personalized education for elementary and secondary students as well. The literature stated that the efficiency of digital technology for elementary and secondary student development depended on targeted outcomes, how technology was integrated into instruction, and the evaluation of student successes by properly trained instructors.¹⁰

**Principles of Virtual School Finance**

Education Finance Researchers considered education as an investment in human capital.¹¹ A close examination of the literature indicated the public school system in the United States was a big business traditionally funded on an annual basis.¹² Philosophical goals of funding high quality education for every student were widely believed to be a function of states rather than local populations. The more centralized funding concept was rooted in the idea of all students having access to a quality education regardless of socioeconomic status.

In education ones beliefs, values, and the basic economic concept of scarcity played a major role in public education finance. “School finance is not simply a matter of dollars and cents. Rather, the amount of funding available, the way those funds are

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allocated, and the resources they provide are indicators of our collective hopes and priorities for public education." The literature suggested that the concept of further education could be equated with improving one's quality of life and benefiting society.

Concepts of equity and adequacy were critical to public school finance. Legislatures and education policy officials were forced to fund a variety of ideals in order to fund an adequate education within a given state. Since the early 1990s school accountability movement, which was later amplified by the federally mandated No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the goal of state policy makers has been to improve financial efficiency and develop a funding formula to achieve a greater sense of equality. The funding of an adequate education must be viewed within the context of funding formulas that are developed to create equality regardless of school size or socio-economic status.

The conceptual framework of school finance was rooted in both the concepts of horizontal and vertical equity as well. Horizontal equity was referred to as an equal treatment of equals in regard to the funding distribution to a comparable number of students. Whereas, vertical equity was referred to as the differential treatment of students with measurable different education needs. Therefore, vertical equity did not

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15 As evidence by the state overview, statute and educational policies are primarily from the viewpoint of legislatures, department of educations, or school policy maker’s perspectives and do not uniformly address virtual education. Furthermore, each state and policy within that state should be viewed as an individual case study.


17 Ibid.
view all students as being equal and addressed the concept of some students needing an increased number of resources to properly fund their education. In essence, the research indicated there were differing opinions about how to measure educational equality. However, there was a strong relationship between cost and quality of education. Yet, the difficulty was being able to determine a difference between the “cost” of online education, verses actual expenditures. Bruce Baker highlighted this concept in the following statement:

the kid goes to school in the kitchen in their house, and the parent is simply in the next room working from home, as opposed to the child being in a brick and mortar school for the day. Well, even that's not a $0 expense endeavor. To nitpick, it's likely that the increased monitoring role of the parent in this case would reduce the parent’s work productivity to some extent – an opportunity cost. The opportunity costs become potentially much larger if the parent’s productivity depends more on not being at home, but they can no-longer be away from home. Then there’s the marginal increase to utilities associated with having the child at home and online, and potential increased food expense (a little hard to judge). Additional computer hardware, etc. This kind of “little” stuff adds up across large numbers of kids.¹⁸

The point that Baker made was that legislatures were not actually “lowering the cost” of education with the use of online schools. In reality, the actual “expenditures” for online education were simply being transferred to someone or something else. Baker also mentioned that “[s]pending less to get less doesn’t reduce costs. It reduces only expenditures and that distinction is important.”¹⁹ Future research must take into account evaluating the entire cost of online education as opposed to just the general concept of creating more access as a means of lowering cost.


¹⁹ Ibid.
State Overview

The researcher categorized the funding of virtual education into three distinct models: the Centralized Virtual School Model, the Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model, and the Privately/Publicly Funded Virtual School Model.20 There were no definitions in the literature that addressed online funding models. Absent definitions, the researcher examined all fifty states and determined that forty-eight of the fifty states fit into one of three funding models. The only exceptions were the states of New York and Delaware.

Centralized Virtual School Model

The Centralized Virtual School Model was defined as a unified virtual school option for public elementary and secondary students within a given state—no matter the school district or local authority.21 Whether full-time or supplemental, state virtual schools were funded and authorized by the state legislature, the governor’s office, or a state education agency.22 Based on reviewing funding formulas, the centralized models were publicly funded and offered one primary virtual school option for elementary and secondary students.

Centralized Virtual School Model States

Alabama. Since 2004, in Alabama, all online education activity was mandated through the state virtual school—Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators, & Students Statewide (ACCESS). Concerning legislation, the Alabama State Legislature


21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.
included a section on online education that governed ACCESS.\textsuperscript{23} The ACCESS state appropriation for FY 2009-2010 was $22.5 million—a decrease from the previous year's virtual school budget. An annual state appropriation comprised the majority of virtual school funding—$11 million from the Education Bond Issue for statewide expansion of the ACCESS program.\textsuperscript{24}  

\textbf{Florida.} In 1997, the state of Florida created the Florida Virtual School,\textsuperscript{25} which has become the largest virtual school in the United States.\textsuperscript{26} Although there was evidence of private/for-profit and non-profit alternatives, the state of Florida exhibited a highly centralized model. Florida Statute\textsuperscript{27} required school districts to make virtual learning education accessible to full-time virtual students in grades Kindergarten through Grade 8 or to full- or part-time students in grades 9-12.\textsuperscript{28} As a method of dropout prevention for high school students who struggle in a traditional classroom setting, Florida Statute amended the statute to expand virtual instruction coverage to grades 9-12.\textsuperscript{29}  

\textsuperscript{23} Alabama State Dept. of Educ., “§ 290-3-1 Public School Governance.” http://www.alabamaadministrativecode.state.al.us/docs/ed/290-3-1.pdf.  


\textsuperscript{27} FRS § 1002.45.  


\textsuperscript{29} FRS §1002.45.
Pursuant to Florida Statute, the board of trustees shall be responsible for the Florida Virtual School’s development of a state-of-the-art technology-based education delivery system that is cost-effective, educationally sound, marketable, and capable of sustaining a self-sufficient delivery system through the Florida Education Finance Program. Regarding the funding allocation for virtual education in Florida, state legislators recently reduced 10 percent of per-pupil funding for virtual education in Florida.

Idaho. Since its inception in 2002, the state of Idaho has exhibited a highly centralized model for virtual education as evidenced by the Idaho Digital Learning Academy. Idaho Digital Learning Academy was the state virtual school for Idaho. In 2009, Idaho established new funding provisions, incorporating a blend of virtual and traditional instruction, and allowed school districts to use up to 5 percent of the funding for teacher salaries through the “total support units” formula to afford teachers the opportunity to offer virtual instruction or a blended learning option to their students. The state of Idaho defined a virtual school as “a full-time, sequential program of synchronous and/or asynchronous instruction primarily through the use of technology via the Internet in a distributed environment. Schools classified as virtual must have an

30 FRS §1002.37.
31 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
online component to the school with online lessons and tools for student and data management.\textsuperscript{36} The superintendent shall disburse the funds to the Idaho Digital Learning Academy Board of Directors who shall use the moneys to develop courses and maintain operations of the academy.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{Illinois.} In 2009,\textsuperscript{38} the Illinois state legislature created the Illinois Virtual School.\textsuperscript{39} The Illinois Virtual School was funded though the Illinois State Board of Education’s annual state appropriation\textsuperscript{40} to meet operation and capital need costs. The Illinois Virtual School was a division of the Peoria County Regional Office of Education and utilized a centralized funding model.\textsuperscript{41} It was also the responsibility of the student to pay $250 per course in the Fall / Spring semesters and $225 per course for the summer semester.\textsuperscript{42} In addition to the Illinois Virtual School, the Chicago Public School offered courses that were delivered to students in a blended fashion.\textsuperscript{43}


\textsuperscript{37} Idaho Digital Learning Academy, “Title 33 Education Chapter 55 Idaho Digital Learning Academy.” http://www.idahodigitallearning.org/Portals/0/Files/Board/2009_IDLA_Legislation%5B1%5D.pdf.


\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40} John Adsit. “A Report to the Colorado Online Education Programs Study Committee.” http://www.dkfoundation.org/pdf/FundingOnlineEd-Jadsit.pdf.


**Kentucky.** In 2000, the state of Kentucky passed legislation that created the Kentucky Virtual School. The Kentucky Virtual School was funded through an annual state allocation of $800,000 with an additional average of $300,000 from student tuition and district payments. These student fees were $165 for a single semester courses and $330 for two-semester courses. The state of Kentucky used a centralized funding model and did not have policy regarding the development and funding of virtual charter schools.

**Louisiana.** In 2000, the Louisiana Legislature formally created the Louisiana Virtual School. The Louisiana Virtual School primary funding model was centralized by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. In the Fall of 2010, the Louisiana Virtual School started collecting a “Materials and Technology fee” of $150 per course. The Louisiana Department of Education stated that the fee can be “paid for by the student’s district, school, or Local Educational Authority.”

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48 Ibid.


52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.
Maine. In 2009, the Maine Legislature created the Main Online Learning Program with SP0531. Funding for the Maine Online Learning Program was primarily through the Maine Department of Education. Additionally, in 2011, the Maine Legislature developed legislation that allowed for the creation of publicly funded virtual charter schools for elementary and secondary students.

Michigan. In 2000, the state of Michigan passed legislation that created the Michigan Virtual School. In 2006, Michigan was the first state to require students to complete an online course as a graduation requirement. The Michigan Virtual School utilized a centralized model that was funded with annual legislative appropriations, and course fees. The course fees for students ranged from $89 for a “student direct course” to $350 for an AP course with an enrollment of one to nine students. The legislative council for Michigan also established the Cyber School Act which allowed for

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private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school alternatives to Michigan State Virtual School’s centralized funded model.⁶³

**Mississippi.** In 2006,⁶⁴ the Mississippi legislature created the Mississippi Virtual Public School.⁶⁵ The Mississippi Virtual Public School was funded on an annual basis with a centralized model through state appropriations and additional state provided through grant funding.⁶⁶ Students had access to free online classes unless all of the money allotted for virtual education was used. Then, “districts/schools and parents can purchase approved courses … for $215 per half credit.”⁶⁷ In May 2010, the Mississippi Department of Education selected Connections Academy, a third party, to operate and manage the MVPS.⁶⁸ There was no evidence of virtual charter schools in Mississippi.

**Missouri.** In 2007,⁶⁹ the Missouri legislature formally created the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program.⁷⁰ In the 2009-2010 academic year, the state legislature allocated 4.8 million dollars for the funding of MoVIP.⁷¹ Missouri legislation did allow for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school alternatives to the Missouri Virtual

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⁷⁰ Ibid.

Instruction Program’s centralized funding model. The legislature permitted this practice in statute stating “The school district may develop a virtual program for any grade level, kindergarten through twelfth grade, with the courses available in accordance with district policy to any resident student of the district who is enrolled in the school district.” 72 Thus, a local school district had the authority to create a virtual school that was an alternative option to the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program.

**Montana.** In 2009, 73 the Montana legislature created the Montana Virtual Academy. 74 In 2010, it was renamed the Montana Digital Academy. 75 There were no costs for students to take courses 76 and $2 million dollars was annually allocated by the legislature for the continued development of the Montana Digital Academy. 77 In 2011, the “Provide for Public Charter Schools Act” was voted down by the Senate Education Committee. 78 If passed, it would have permitted virtual charter schools to be created. However, since the act was not passed, there were still no alternatives to the Montana Digital Academy.

**North Carolina.** In 2002, 79 the state of North Carolina passed legislation that established the North Carolina Virtual Public School. 80 It was the second largest state

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74 Mont. Code Ann. §20-7-1201.
78 Ibid.
virtual school in the United States, and trailed only the Florida Virtual School in total enrollment.\textsuperscript{81} The primary funding source for the North Carolina Virtual Public School was the North Carolina State Board of Education.\textsuperscript{82} There were no tuition costs for students to enroll in the North Carolina Virtual Public School.\textsuperscript{83} According to the North Carolina General Assembly, “The North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS) program shall report to the State Board of Education and shall maintain an administrative office at the Department of Public Instruction.”\textsuperscript{84} The State Board of Education was also in charge of the overall funding formula for the North Carolina Virtual School which was installed in 2010.\textsuperscript{85} Prior to 2010, the North Carolina Virtual Public School received an annual appropriation of $11.2 million each year.\textsuperscript{86} At the beginning of the 2010-2011 academic year, the North Carolina General Assembly voted to eliminate a 100 school limit of virtual charter schools in order to offer more virtual school options for students.\textsuperscript{87} There were also online alternatives that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options for students.

\begin{footnotes}
\item North Carolina Virtual Public School, “History.” \url{http://www.ncvps.org/index.php/about-us/history/}.
\item Liberating Learning, “North Carolina.” \url{http://sites.google.com/site/liberatelearn/home/north-carolina}.
\item N.C. Gen. Stat. §105-134.6(d).
\item North Carolina Virtual Public School, “Home/Private School.” \url{http://www.ncvps.org/index.php/parents/homeprivate-school}.
\item Liberating Learning, “North Carolina.” \url{http://sites.google.com/site/liberatelearn/home/north-carolina}.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
**Wyoming.** In 2008, the Wyoming legislature passed legislation that created the Wyoming Switchboard Network. The Wyoming Department of Education was responsible for the funding, maintenance, and development of the Wyoming Switchboard Network. According to the organization, “The Wyoming Switchboard Network is a collection of distance education providers that deliver coursework to K-12 students… provides access to the current distance education courses available and information about the various DE (distance education) program providers.” Table 3-1 illustrated every state that utilized a Centralized Virtual School Model. (Table 3-1)

Collectively, centralized virtual schools were funded and authorized by state legislatures, the governor’s office, or state education agencies. The Centralized Virtual School Models were for public elementary and secondary students within a given state—regardless of school districts or local authorities.

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89 Wyoming Secretary of State, “Chapter 41 – Distance Education.” http://soswy.state.wy.us/Rules/RULES/7334.pdf.

90 Ibid.


93 Ibid.
Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model

The publicly-funded virtual school options were funded and authorized by the state legislature, the governor’s office, or a state education agency. As in the Centralized Virtual School Model, whether full-time or supplemental, the state virtual schools were specifically funded through state appropriations. In order for a state to be judged within this system, elementary and secondary students must have been afforded the option of choosing from multiple publicly-funded virtual schools. Collectively, the Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model was similar to the Centralized Virtual School Model. However, in order for a state to fit within the Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model, students must be given an option of choosing from multiple publicly-funded virtual schools.

Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model States

Alaska. In 2008, the Alaska Virtual Network was created as a “non-profit educational service agency that provides educational services to every school district in the state.” The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development used $1.2 million of the annual funds allocated for Enhancing Education through Technology to

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95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.


finance the Alaska Virtual Network.\textsuperscript{99} Alaska statute also permitted accredited private/for-profit and non-profit alternatives to exist within the Alaska Virtual Network.

\textbf{Arkansas.} Since 2000, the Arkansas Virtual High School (AVHS) has served as the state virtual school for Arkansas.\textsuperscript{100} Additionally, the Arkansas Virtual Academy—funded by the state, leaving no tuition or supplemental costs to students—was a full-time, statewide charter school.\textsuperscript{101} The Arkansas Department of Education funded virtual schools and serves to oversee governance and accountability pertaining to virtual education throughout the state.

From 2007-2009, funding for AVHS was allocated through an annual Department of Education grant of $740,000—funding for the 2009-2010 academic decreased to $590,000, which subsequently resulted in decreased enrollment.\textsuperscript{102} The Arkansas Virtual Academy served grades K-8 throughout the state but was limited by legislation to serve 500 students. The Virtual Academy was funded through the same student FTE formula as a physical school—$5,905 per student—but did not receive fiscal remuneration from local property taxes.\textsuperscript{103} As a charter school, the Arkansas Virtual Academy must adhere to state-mandated regulations for other charter schools throughout Arkansas: “A limited public charter school shall receive funds equal to the


\textsuperscript{102} Legislative and Budget Committee, “Cost and Funding Models of A State-Led Virtual Learning Program.” http://lbfc.legis.state.pa.us/reports/2011/52.PDF.

amount apportioned by the district from state and local revenue per average daily membership.”

**Georgia.** In 2005, the Georgia Legislature passed legislation that created the official virtual school of Georgia—Georgia Virtual School. In addition to the Georgia Virtual School, another publically funded virtual school that received funding through the Georgia General Assembly was the iAchieve Virtual Academy. In 2006, SB 610 was passed to allow local school boards to act as local virtual charter schools. In essence SB 610 allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit schools to exist as alternatives to the Georgia Virtual School as well. In order to provide equity and adequacy of the charter schools, HB 881 established the Georgia Charter School Commission to provide equal funding guidelines for newly created charter schools.

**Kansas.** In 2008, the Kansas Virtual School Act created policies to structure the virtual schools funded through the Kansas State Department of Education.

According to the Virtual School Act’s funding guidelines were as follows:

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104 Arkansas Dept. of Educ., “Rules Governing Limited Public Charter School, 10.01 Funding.”

105 Georgia Dept. of Educ., “History of GAVS.”
http://www.gavirtualschool.org/Portals/2/PDFs/History%20of%20GAVS.pdf.

106 Georgia Dept. of Educ., “Georgia Virtual School.”
http://www.gavirtualschool.org/.

107 Georgia Dept. of Educ., “160-8-1-.01 Georgia Virtual School.”
http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/_documents/legalservices/160-8-1-.01.pdf.

108 iAchieve Academy, “Overview / About.”
http://www.forsyth.k12.ga.us/domain/2110.

109 Georgia General Assembly, “Senate Bill 610.”

110 Georgia General Assembly, “House Bill 881.”

111 Kansas State Dept. of Educ., “Kansas Approved Virtual Schools/Programs.”
http://www.ksde.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=0BJANZI0d3k%3d&tabid=455&mid=6785.

112 Kansas State Dept. of Educ., “Virtual School Education Requirements for Kansas Schools.”
http://www.ksde.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=vQyfSb4K6ig%3d&tabid=455.
Each school year that a school district has a virtual school, the district is entitled to Virtual School State Aid. Virtual School State Aid is calculated by multiplying the number of full-time equivalent pupils enrolled in a virtual school times 105.0 percent of the unweighted Base State Aid per Pupil.\(^{113}\)

The Kansas State Department of Education also required a log that confirmed elementary and secondary student enrollment/attendance be kept in order to better document expenditures.\(^{114}\)

**Minnesota.** In 2003,\(^{115}\) the Minnesota Department of Education\(^{116}\) was given the authority by the Omnibus K-12 Education Act of 2003\(^{117}\) to fund, develop, and approve online courses within the state. The state of Minnesota did not have a state virtual school, but it did have a state-led initiative called the Minnesota Learning Commons.\(^{118}\) There were sixteen K-12 Certified Online Learning (OLL) Providers in the state of Minnesota.\(^{119}\) Funding allocations for the Minnesota Learning Commons were determined annually by the Minnesota Department of Education.\(^{120}\) Minnesota also allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school alternatives to the Minnesota Learning Commons.

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\(^{115}\) Minn. Stat., §124D.09.

\(^{116}\) Minn. Stat., §124D.095.


\(^{118}\) Minnesota Learning Commons, “Minnesota Learning Commons.” http://mnlearningcommons.org/.


\(^{120}\) Minn. Stat., §124D.095.
New Hampshire. In 2007, the state of New Hampshire created The Virtual Learning Academy Charter School.\textsuperscript{121} According to the organization, The Virtual Learning Academy Charter School was “New Hampshire's first statewide, on-line high school that is available, free of charge, to all high school students who live in New Hampshire. . .The Academy has its own employees, teaching staff, Board of Trustees, and financial statement.”\textsuperscript{122} There was also an online community college program that offered dual enrollment courses for students that worked in conjunction with The Virtual Learning Academy Charter School.\textsuperscript{123} Multiple centralized funding was allocated for both of these programs through the New Hampshire State Board.\textsuperscript{124} Additionally, there was also alternatives to the state virtual school models that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options for elementary and secondary students.

Ohio. While Ohio enrolls students through twenty-seven eCommunity schools, the legislature did not create a statewide virtual school.\textsuperscript{125} A community school was similar to a charter school, but an eCommunity school was computer-based, and allowed students to work from home.\textsuperscript{126} Since 1997, the state of Ohio has supported


\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{124} N.H. Code Admin R. Ann. Section §194-B:11.


the inception and expansion of community schools as an alternative to the traditional model of public elementary and secondary education school programs.\footnote{127}{Ohio Dept. of Educ., “Legislation for Community Schools.” http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=879&ContentID=3364&Content=94438.}

Further, an eCommunity school in Ohio was funded by the state through per-pupil foundation payments, additional funds from grants (government or private), state start-up grants for developers with preliminary agreements, and the Public Charter Schools Grant Program through the United States Department of Education. In Ohio, eCommunity schools were funded by the same formula per-pupil as traditional programs within a district. For fiscal year 2010, funding allocation for eCommunity schools was set at $5,718.\footnote{128}{Ohio Dept. of Educ., “Community School Funding Information.” http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?Page=3&TopicRelationID=878&Content=100615.}

**South Carolina.** In 2007,\footnote{129}{South Carolina Leg., “Title 59 – Education Chapter 16 South Carolina Virtual School Program.” http://scstatehouse.net/code/t59c016.htm.} the South Carolina State Department of Education began operating the South Carolina Virtual School Program.\footnote{130}{South Carolina State Dept. of Educ., “South Carolina Virtual School Program.” http://scvspconnect.ed.sc.gov/.} The South Carolina General Assembly provided funding for the South Carolina Virtual School with a highly centralized model.\footnote{131}{South Carolina Leg., “Title 59 – Education Chapter 16 South Carolina Virtual School Program.” http://scstatehouse.net/code/t59c016.htm.} There were also multiple publicly funded options that utilized funding from the centralized model. The South Carolina Public Charter School District was in charge of authorizing alternative schools for elementary and secondary school
students as indicated by their organization’s review guide.\textsuperscript{132} There were also alternatives to the state virtual schools that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options.

**South Dakota.** In 2006,\textsuperscript{133} the South Dakota Department of Education\textsuperscript{134} started funding the South Dakota Virtual School.\textsuperscript{135} Within the South Dakota Virtual School itself, there were multiple publicly funded virtual school options that utilized state funding. South Dakota also offered elementary and secondary students non-profit virtual school alternatives to the publicly funded virtual schools. Table 3-2 illustrated every state that utilized a Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model. (Table 3-2)

**Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model**

In the Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model, virtual schools could either be funded or authorized by the state legislature, the governor’s office, a state education agency, or a private organization(s). As in the first two classifications, whether full-time or supplemental, the state virtual school could be funded through state appropriation. However, this classification recognized that elementary and secondary students must be afforded the option of choosing from multiple publicly-funded virtual schools or privately-funded virtual schools.

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\textsuperscript{133} Liberating Learning, “South Dakota.” [http://sites.google.com/site/liberatelearn/home/south-dakota](http://sites.google.com/site/liberatelearn/home/south-dakota).


Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model States

**Arizona.** In 2009, the state of Arizona passed legislation that created the Technology Assisted Project-Based Instruction Program. While the organization itself was not considered a state virtual school, it was viewed as the state’s first online educational program. In 2009, SB 1196 was passed changing the name of the Technology Assisted Project-Based Instruction Program to the Arizona Online Instruction. Senate Bill 1196 also eliminated the restriction on the number of charter schools and districts that could function under Arizona Online Instruction guidelines. The primary funding source for the Arizona Online Instructional programs was provided by the Arizona State Board of Education. There were alternatives to the state virtual school models that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options.

**California.** The state virtual school of California, University of California College Prep, was established in 1999. Many California virtual schools were supplemental and received funding based upon average daily attendance. The California Legislature, through Amended Bill 885, recognized the importance of online learning and allowed

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137 Ibid.


school districts to collect ADA for up to two online courses, which set up the funding of virtual education programs in California.  

In essence, charter school law and the independent study provisions governed online charter schools in the state of California. California State Legislature, passed in 2001, authorized “a charter school that has an approved charter to receive funding for non-classroom-based instruction, as defined for that purpose, only if a determination for funding is made by the State Board of Education.” California has a variety of private virtual school options available to public elementary and secondary students—e.g. Halstrom High School Online, Laurel Springs School, and Sycamore Academy.  

**Colorado.** In 1998, the Colorado state legislature created a statewide virtual school entitled Colorado Online Learning. The state of Colorado also had eighteen public virtual multi-district programs and seven public virtual single district programs in addition to allowing for private/for-profit and non-profit alternatives to the state virtual school. According to the Colorado Department of Education, “Total annual budgets for multi-district online programs ranged from a low of $72,440 to a high of $30,087,685.  

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Single district program budgets were not clearly defined because many of the programs’ budgets were included in the overall district budget.”\(^{150}\) The public virtual schools were funded with the use of a centralized model through the Colorado Department of Education.\(^{151}\)

**Connecticut.** In 2007, the Connecticut legislature appropriated $850,000 to launch the Connecticut Virtual Learning Center.\(^{152}\) Due to state budgetary restraints, no state funds were appropriated in 2008. As a consequence, Connecticut Virtual Learning Center then charged school districts $295 per semester course and $320 per semester for private school and home-schooled students.\(^{153}\)

In 2010, Connecticut passed Public Act 10-111, which served as the first piece of legislation concerning online learning in Connecticut.\(^{154}\) Regarding alternatives to the Connecticut Virtual Learning Center, the Connecticut Adult Virtual High School, a statewide online program, and a variety of private school options supplement the Connecticut Virtual Learning Center.

**Hawaii.** In 2008,\(^{155}\) the Hawaii state legislature developed policy that created the Hawaii Virtual Learning Network.\(^{156}\) The “Hawaii Virtual Learning Network was created


\(^{151}\) Colorado Online Learning, “About COL.” http://www.col.k12.co.us/aboutus/history.html.

\(^{152}\) Legislative and Budget Comm., “Cost and Funding Models of A State-Led Virtual Learning Program.” http://lbfc legis.state.pa.us/reports/2011/52.PDF.

\(^{153}\) Legislative and Budget Comm., “Cost and Funding Models of A State-Led Virtual Learning Program.”


by the Hawaii Online Task Force to expand and systematize online courses and to offer a wide array of online courses to Hawaii’s students.”

Unique to Hawaii, was the fact the state had a single statewide brick-and-mortar school district with several virtual schools that utilized the Hawaii Department of Education’s centralized funding model. There were a total of fourteen different schools that were members of the Hawaii Virtual Learning Network during the 2010-2011 academic year. There was also evidence of for private/for-profit and non-profit alternatives to the Hawaii Virtual Learning Network.

Indiana. In 2005, the Indiana State Department of Education allocated funding for elementary and secondary students to have virtual school options. Indiana had district level virtual schools, statewide third-party virtual supplemental programs, and two statewide online charter schools. The two major virtual charter schools in Indiana were the Hoosier Academy Virtual Pilot School and the Indiana Connection Academy Virtual Pilot School. The state legislature gave the Indiana State Department of Education the authority to fund and operate these schools. In addition, there were also alternatives that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options for students.

161 Ind. Code §20-24-7-12.
Iowa. Iowa first started offering online courses to students through the Iowa Online Advanced Placement Academy\textsuperscript{163} in 2001.\textsuperscript{164} According to the Academy:

An initial technology grant of $1.6 million was awarded to the Belin-Blank Center in 2001 by the Iowa Department of Education to aid in increasing student participation in AP courses and exams in Iowa high schools. The U.S. Department of Education (U.S. DOE) awarded the Iowa Online Advanced Placement Academy at The University of Iowa’s Belin-Blank Center $3.49-million in grant extensions to continue and expand this program through 2006. An additional $1.4-million was awarded to the Belin-Blank Center by the U.S. DOE to help maintain IOAPA support for rural Iowa schools through 2010. U.S. Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) was the leader in securing funds for this program for Iowa’s students.\textsuperscript{165}

In 2004,\textsuperscript{166} the Iowa legislature authorized the expansion of online education with the development of an online program entitled Iowa Learning Online.\textsuperscript{167} Therefore, in addition to offering Advance Placement courses online, the Iowa Department of Education allowed for all students to have online course options. According to Iowa Learning Online:

Students enroll in classes through the guidance counselor or administrator at their local school. Schools enrolling students in ILO classes are asked to designate a student coach who provides on-site support and encouragement to each student or group of students. Actively involved student coaches are essential to a student’s successful completion of ILO courses. Student grades and credits are awarded by the student’s home school based on the recommendation of the ILO instructor.\textsuperscript{168}

\textsuperscript{163} Iowa Online Academy, “The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development.” http://www.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank/programs/students/ioapa/.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{166} Iowa Learning Online, “About ILO.” http://www.iowalearningonline.org/about.cfm.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
Iowa did not use a centralized virtual school model and was primarily funded through the Iowa Department of Education.\textsuperscript{169} There were also online alternatives that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options for elementary and secondary students.

**Maryland.** In 2002,\textsuperscript{170} the Maryland Legislature passed legislation that created the Maryland Virtual School.\textsuperscript{171} It was primarily funded through the Maryland State Department of Education,\textsuperscript{172} and utilized a centralized model with multiple public options that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit alternatives to the state virtual school and its multiple public options. According to the Maryland Virtual School, “The credit earned by taking an MVS course is entered into the student’s record by the local public high school or school system. Students may take a course through MVS only with the permission of the local system and the school principal.”\textsuperscript{173}

**Massachusetts.** In 2003,\textsuperscript{174} the Massachusetts State Department of Education stated that “…it is up to each school district to decide if it will allow students to take online courses, determine which students can take online courses, and evaluate the available online course offerings. The following recommended criteria can be used by

\textsuperscript{169} Iowa Code 257.11.

\textsuperscript{170} Liberating Learning, “Maryland.” http://sites.google.com/site/liberatelearn/home/maryland.

\textsuperscript{171} Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities, “Welcome to Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities.” http://mdk12online.org/.


\textsuperscript{173} Maryland Virtual Learning Center, “Vision.” http://mdk12online.org/.

\textsuperscript{174} Massachusetts Dept. of Educ., “Massachusetts Recommended Criteria for Distance Learning Courses.” http://www.doe.mass.edu/edtech/news03/distance_learning.pdf.
districts in making those decisions.”

Massachusetts utilized a centralized model with multiple public options that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit alternatives to the state virtual school and multiple public options. Furthermore, the Massachusetts Online Network for Education (MassONE) was the state virtual school and it was primarily funded through NCLB Title II-D Competitive Grants.

**Nebraska.** In 2006, the Nebraska legislature created policies that outlined a framework for virtual education. Nebraska did not utilize a centralized funding model and did not have a state virtual school. Nebraska was however, at the time of this study, in the process of developing a centralized state virtual school. According to Governor Dave Heineman:

The Virtual School will provide Nebraska students a rigorous online high school curriculum with an emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, commonly referred to as STEM courses, and Advanced Placement courses in both rural and urban areas. Additionally, the Virtual School establishes a single, centralized website informing students, parents, teachers and schools of virtual learning opportunities in Nebraska.

There was a large variety of district level virtual school programs that were primarily funded through a Nebraska State Appropriation. There were also online

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alternatives that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options for elementary and secondary students.

**Nevada.** In 2007, the Nevada State Board of Education started funding a statewide program entitled the Nevada Virtual Academy. While the Nevada Virtual Academy was not considered a primary state virtual school, Nevada contained evidence of online district level programs and virtual charter schools. Thus, there were alternatives to the statewide virtual schools and the state of Nevada allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options.

**New Jersey.** In 2002, the New Jersey Virtual School began offering online courses for New Jersey elementary and secondary students. However, the New Jersey Virtual School was not considered the state virtual school of the state of New Jersey. In 2010, the state of New Jersey approved two virtual charter schools to offer additional online virtual school options for elementary and secondary students. Funding for the public virtual school options consisted of funds primarily through the New Jersey Department of Education. New Jersey also contained evidence of virtual school options that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options.

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184 Ibid.

New Mexico. In 2001,\textsuperscript{186} the state of New Mexico started offering online courses for students. The New Mexico state virtual school, IDEAL-NM (Innovative Digital Education and Learning New Mexico,\textsuperscript{187} was funded using a centralized model through the New Mexico State Legislature.\textsuperscript{188} Unique to New Mexico, was the concept of how “IDEAL-NM provides eLearning services to New Mexico PK-12 schools, higher education institutions, and government agencies. We reduce geographic and capacity barriers to educational opportunity while increasing the digital literacy skills students need to participate in a global economy.”\textsuperscript{189} Therefore, IDEAL-NM focused on a broad age range of students in New Mexico as opposed to just elementary and secondary students. New Mexico also had online alternatives to the IDEAL-NM program that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options for elementary and secondary students.

North Dakota. In 2000,\textsuperscript{190} the state virtual school, the North Dakota Center for Distance Education,\textsuperscript{191} was created. The North Dakota Center for Distance Education utilized a centralized model that was primarily funded by State Appropriation and


\textsuperscript{187} Innovative Digital Education and Learning New Mexico, “About IDEAL.” http://www.ideal-nm.org/home/get-content/content/about_ideal-nm.


\textsuperscript{189} IDEAL-NM, “About Ideal-nm.” http://www.ideal-nm.org/home/get-content/content/about_ideal-nm.


Course Fees.\textsuperscript{192} However, each school district had the authority over who paid for the actual cost of the courses—the district or student. The legislature stated that homeschooled students were required to pay tuition to attend the North Dakota Center for Distance Education.\textsuperscript{193} In addition to the North Dakota Center for Distance Education, there were multiple options that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit alternatives to the state virtual school available for elementary and secondary students.

\textbf{Oklahoma.} In 2000,\textsuperscript{194} Oklahoma started offering online courses to elementary and secondary students. While Oklahoma did not have a state virtual school, it consisted of two large statewide online programs: Oklahoma Virtual Academy\textsuperscript{195} and the Oklahoma Virtual High School.\textsuperscript{196} Both of these online programs were regulated and primarily funded through the State Board of Education.\textsuperscript{197} In addition to the two primary public virtual school options, there were also virtual schools that offered private/for-profit and non-profit alternatives for elementary and secondary students.

\textbf{Oregon.} In 2005,\textsuperscript{198} the Oregon State Legislature created the Oregon Virtual School District.\textsuperscript{199} Operated within the Oregon Department of Education, the Oregon

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{192}N.D. Cent. Code §15-19. \\
\textsuperscript{193}Liberating Learning, “North Dakota.” http://sites.google.com/site/liberatelearn/home/north-dakota. \\
\textsuperscript{194}The University of Oklahoma Center for Independent and Distance Learning, “Overview.” http://ouhigh.ou.edu/overview.cfm. \\
\textsuperscript{195}Oklahoma Virtual Academy, “We Ignite your Child.” http://www.k12.com/okva/. \\
\textsuperscript{196}Oklahoma Virtual High School, “About the Program.” http://www.oklahomavirtualhighschool.com/about.html. \\
\textsuperscript{197}Oklahoma Virtual High School, “Frequently Asked Questions.” http://oklahomavirtualhighschool.com/faq.html#howitworks. \\
\textsuperscript{198}Oregon State Legis., “Chapter 329 – Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century; Educational Improvement and Reform.” http://www.leg.state.or.us/ors/329.html. \\
\textsuperscript{199}Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
Virtual School District was primarily centrally funded through the Oregon Virtual School District Fund.\textsuperscript{200} In addition to the state virtual school, Oregon had many alternative statewide programs elementary and secondary students such as the Oregon Virtual Academy Charter School\textsuperscript{201} and an abundant of district level programs. Oregon also had a numerous number virtual school options that offered private/for-profit and non-profit alternatives for elementary and secondary students.

**Pennsylvania**. In 2000,\textsuperscript{202} the state of Pennsylvania started offering online courses for elementary and secondary students. Pennsylvania did not have a state virtual school but had twelve cyber charter schools.\textsuperscript{203} Primary funding for online education was provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.\textsuperscript{204} Per-pupil expenditures were budgeted through the student’s regular school district.\textsuperscript{205} Pennsylvania also had virtual school options for elementary and secondary students that offered private/for-profit and non-profit alternatives to the Pennsylvania Cyber Charter Schools.

**Rhode Island**. In 2010, the Rhode Island state Department of Education developed policy that was designed to redistribute funds into virtual education for

\textsuperscript{200} Oregon State Legis., "Chapter 329 – Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century; Educational Improvement and Reform." [http://www.leg.state.or.us/ors/329.html](http://www.leg.state.or.us/ors/329.html).

\textsuperscript{201} Oregon Virtual Academy, "Who We Are." [http://www.k12.com/orva/](http://www.k12.com/orva/).


\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.
elementary and secondary students. Rhode Island does not have a state virtual school. However, the Northern Rhode Island Collaborative was the state’s primary virtual school option and offered over eighty online course options for elementary and secondary students. Rhode Island also contained evidence of virtual school options that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options.

**Tennessee.** In 2006, e4TN was created as the state virtual school of Tennessee. Annually funded through a renewable federal grant, e4TN offered online courses for elementary and secondary students. Tennessee also had several statewide online programs and local district level virtual school options for students. In addition, Tennessee had virtual school options for elementary and secondary students that offered private/for-profit and non-profit alternatives to the states multiple public options.

**Texas.** In 2007, the Texas Legislature created policy for the Texas Education Agency to establish the Texas Virtual School Network and Electronic Course Program.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) offers state-supported online learning opportunities to students across the state through the Texas Virtual School Network (TxVSN) using a network approach that works in partnership with districts. TEA administers the TxVSN under the leadership of the commissioner of education, sets standards for and

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208 E4TN, “About E4TN.” [https://www.e4tn.org/home/about/](https://www.e4tn.org/home/about/).

209 Ibid.

210 Ibid.


approves TxDVSN courses and professional development for online teachers, and has fiscal responsibility for the network. Education Service Center (ESC) Region 10 conducts the review of TxDVSN courses and serves as Central Operations for the network, along with the Harris County Department of Education.\textsuperscript{213}

Funding for online elementary and secondary students was primarily allocated by the Texas State Legislature.\textsuperscript{214} There were additional online alternatives that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options in Texas as well.

**Utah.** In 1994,\textsuperscript{215} the state of Utah started offering online courses for elementary and secondary students. Utah had a state virtual school that utilized a centralized model—the Utah Electronic High School.\textsuperscript{216} In addition to the state virtual school, Utah had several statewide and district level online programs, that were primarily funded by Utah State Office of Education Funds.\textsuperscript{217} Utah also had online alternatives that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options for elementary and secondary students.

**Vermont.** In 2009, the Vermont State Board of Education established policy and a funding mechanism to provide elementary and secondary students access to a twenty-first century learning environment.\textsuperscript{218} The state virtual school of Vermont was called the


\textsuperscript{218} Liberating Learning, “Vermont.” http://sites.google.com/site/liberatelearn/home/vermont.
Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative.\textsuperscript{219} Additionally, the e-Vermont Community Broadband Project was created to bring increased educational access to students in rural communities with the use of broadband internet.\textsuperscript{220} Vermont also contained evidence of virtual school options that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options.

**Virginia.** In 2005,\textsuperscript{221} the Virginia legislature created an official state virtual school—Virtual Virginia.\textsuperscript{222} Funded primarily through annual Virginia state appropriations,\textsuperscript{223} Virtual Virginia utilized a centralized model. In addition to the statewide virtual school, Virginia had several statewide and district level online programs, that were accredited by the Virginia Department of Education and publicly funded.\textsuperscript{224} Furthermore, Virginia had online options that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school opportunities for elementary and secondary students as well.

**Washington.** In 2009,\textsuperscript{225} the Washington state legislature created the Digital Learning Department in the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction\textsuperscript{226} as the state virtual school of Washington. Funded predominantly through the Washington


\textsuperscript{220} Liberating Learning, “Vermont.” http://sites.google.com/site/liberatelearn/home/vermont.

\textsuperscript{221} Virginia CQ Commerce Quarterly, 10, no. 1 (2005): 1.

\textsuperscript{222} Virtual Virginia, “Welcome to Virtual Virginial.” http://www.virtualvirginia.org/.


\textsuperscript{225} Digital Learning Dept., “About the DLD.” http://digitallearning.k12.wa.us/about/.

\textsuperscript{226} Ibid.
State Board of Education, the Digital Learning Department in the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction utilized a centralized model. In addition to the state virtual school, Washington had several statewide and district level online programs. Washington had online options that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school opportunities for elementary and secondary students.

**West Virginia.** In 2000, the West Virginia legislature passed legislation that created the West Virginia Virtual School. The state virtual school of West Virginia was primarily funded through the West Virginia Department of Education. Even though the state of West Virginia did not have policy regarding online charter schools, there were still online options that allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school opportunities for elementary and secondary students.

**Wisconsin.** In 2008, the state of Wisconsin started structuring online education for elementary and secondary students. Primarily funded through the Department of Public Instruction and Cooperative Educational Service Agency, Wisconsin had a state virtual school—the Wisconsin Virtual School. There were several district level

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227 Wash. Rev. Code §28A.250.RCW.


229 West Virginia Dept. of Educ., “Distance Learning and the West Virginia Virtual School (2450).” [http://wvde.state.wv.us/policies/p2450.html](http://wvde.state.wv.us/policies/p2450.html).

230 Ibid.


and statewide programs in addition to the state virtual school. Furthermore, there were several online charter schools available to elementary and secondary students as well. Wisconsin also allowed for private/for-profit and non-profit virtual school options for elementary and secondary students.

In general, states that were classified in the Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model consisted of either a state virtual school or consortium, and had several private school options that were available to elementary and secondary students. Of the three primary virtual school funding models, this group was the most commonly used by state legislatures and school policymakers. Table 3-3 illustrated every state that utilized a Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model. (Table 3-3)

**Alternative Virtual School Models**

**Delaware and New York.** Delaware and New York were classified as states that had alternative virtual school models that did not fit into one of the three previous classifications. Delaware did not have a state virtual school, a statewide online program, or an online charter school. As a result, no legislation covered virtual education in the state. In 2008, similar to Connecticut, Delaware established online public elementary and secondary education programs designed primarily for credit recovery, but budget issues stifled the implementation and growth of virtual schools throughout the state.²³⁴

Specifically, the Delaware Virtual School was launched as a pilot program that offered six online courses through twenty-seven high schools and served nearly 300

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students. However, due to an $800 million budget deficit in Delaware, the pilot program did not receive funding for the 2009-2010 academic year. As a result, select districts used vendor courses on a limited basis, and certain high schools participated in the University of Delaware’s Online High School—which served to provide dual enrollment courses for high school students.

There was no state statute in New York regarding virtual schools. However, a public virtual school existed, and so did a private virtual school entitled the Francis School. In 2010, the state of New York issued several requests for proposals through legislation that would provide an emphasis on online coursework for public elementary and secondary students throughout the state—e.g. student support, professional development, online learning assessment, and the future of online education. As noted previously, Delaware and New York were states that had alternative virtual school models and did not fit into any of the three primary virtual school funding models.

Summary

Chapter 3 contained an examination of case law, policy, and literature applicable to the research questions. The literature review was divided into four parts that addressed the following concepts: a background of online education, national trends of online education, principles of education finance, and an in-depth overview of state-level

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236 Ibid.
policy regarding virtual schooling. Absent a sound theoretical base, Chapter 3 contained state statute and policy as well. Each section further addressed the research questions regarding the funding for virtual schooling throughout the United States.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Name of State Virtual School</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Primary Funding Source</th>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>2003</td>
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<td>Wash.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS

Chapter 4 contained a breakdown and analysis of data used to directly answer the forth research question of: What were a given state’s virtual school public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s)? Within the Centralized Virtual School Model, Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model, and Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model, the researcher was able to conclude that states funded virtual education for a variety of philosophical goals and objectives. Chapter 4 further defined what a given state proclaimed it was doing with its virtual school. Similar to Chapter 3, each individual state was grouped by its virtual school funding model to illustrate similarities and differences between states that utilized the same funding model.

Centralized Virtual School Model

States within the Centralized Virtual School Model had the following virtual school public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s). The following states also contained evidence of a centralized virtual school model but did not allow for private/publicly-funded virtual school alternatives: Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, and Wyoming.

Conversely, Michigan and Missouri had evidence of a centralized virtual school model and allowed for private/publicly-funded virtual school options. The researcher was able to conclude that states within the Centralized Virtual School Model funded virtual education for a variety of philosophical goals and objectives.

Alabama. In 2010, the Alabama State Board of Education required every high school student to take at least one core subject in an online manner to fulfill a
graduation requirement.\(^1\) The ACCESS program itself was accredited by the Alabama Department of Education.\(^2\)

In order to meet the increased demand for online course enrollments, the Alabama State Department of Education created a partnership with a third party management system to aid in the delivery of course content. The public policy mission statement that announced this decision was as follows:

STI, a leader in K-12 education data management solutions, announces today a partnership with the Alabama Department of Education to provide a Web-based statewide enrollment and scheduling system for the state-led online learning program. STI’s, Information LIVE (Learning In a Virtual Environment), will help the state manage scheduling and staffing for ACCESS (Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators, and Students Statewide).

The ACCESS distance learning program is an education initiative of the Alabama Department of Education. It provides opportunities and options for Alabama public high school students to engage in Advanced Placement (AP), elective, and other courses to which they may not otherwise have access.

Online learning in K-12 education continues to grow rapidly, with over 1 million students taking online courses in 2008, up 47 percent from two years earlier. However its continued success requires states to make policy and funding changes, and manage a new stream of data. This is particularly important as more states establish longitudinal data systems. During his recent “Listening Tour” this spring, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan frequently emphasized the importance of improving data collection systems and conducting data-driven decision making to improve education outcomes. Alabama has already taken steps to track and analyze data at the state level.\(^3\)

\(^1\) Ala. Code § 290-3-1.


**Florida.** The Florida Virtual School had the largest online student enrollment in the United States⁴ and had the following mission statement, “To deliver a high quality, technology-based education that provides the skills and knowledge students need for success.”⁵ The Florida Virtual School was accredited by two agencies: The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools⁶ and the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation.⁷ The Florida Virtual School did not offer a diploma but stated “credits are transferred back to the student's local school to count towards [sic] their graduation requirement. Home school students fulfill diploma requirements either through portfolios that often include national SAT I and II scores, or they use the services of an ‘umbrella school’ that offers the diploma.”⁸

**Idaho.** The state of Idaho was the first state to require secondary students to pass two online credits in order to fulfill graduation requirements.⁹ Every virtual school within the state of Idaho was required by the Idaho State Department of Education to be accredited by the Northwest Accreditation Commission.¹⁰ The Northwest Accreditation Commission’s public policy mission statement defined an online course for Idaho elementary and secondary students as follows:

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⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.


A common unit of measure that represents successful student achievement relevant to a predefined area of study. The standard for the predefined area of study shall be determined by the particular state, informed by national guidelines. A credit is often defined as a unit of credit awarded for successful completion of a course, which shall include not less than 120 hours of instruction or its equivalent per year.\(^\text{11}\)

**Illinois.** In 2009,\(^\text{12}\) the Illinois Legislature authorized a statewide and state accredited virtual school entitled the Illinois Virtual School.\(^\text{13}\) The virtual school’s public policy mission statement was as follows:

Illinois Virtual School increases learning opportunities for both students and educators throughout the state. The IVS contract objectives include activities to (1) administer, manage, and operate the Illinois Virtual School; (2) offer both synchronous and asynchronous online courses to all Illinois public, private, and home-school students, grades 5-12; and (3) provide an expanded selection of high-quality professional development opportunities for Illinois educators for certificate renewal purposes.\(^\text{14}\)

In addition to the Illinois Virtual School, the Chicago Public School offered courses that were delivered in a blended fashion for elementary and secondary students through the centralized funding model.\(^\text{15}\) Illinois policy makers were an advocate of the continued growth of virtual education as well. Collin Hitt of the Illinois Policy Institute stated:

The state introduced a virtual high school in 2001, intended mainly for students who wanted to take advanced classes their own schools didn’t offer. Today, its online program offers 120 courses to grades 5 through 12,


but only about 1,000 of the state’s 1.2 million public school students in that age range sign up each semester.\textsuperscript{16}

**Kentucky.** The Kentucky Virtual School\textsuperscript{17} stated, “KVHS does not grant credit. When a student completes a course, KVHS sends a final numeric score to the local school/home school that grants the credit. The local school/home school will determine the amount of credit to be awarded to students based on the school/district policies.”\textsuperscript{18}

Furthermore, the Kentucky Virtual School’s public policy mission stated it, “offers a range of online, e-learning services to help schools and teachers meet their goals for high quality teaching, high student performance, and a strong and supportive environment for every child.”\textsuperscript{19}

**Louisiana.** The Louisiana Virtual School\textsuperscript{20} curriculum consisted of year-long courses that increased access and were approved by the Louisiana State Department of Education. The virtual school stated the following public policy mission about increasing, “students access to standards-based high school courses delivered by certified Highly-qualified Louisiana teachers through The Louisiana Virtual School. Students in LVS courses utilize the web, e-mail, and other online and offline resources to complete a rich course of study in a multitude of courses.”\textsuperscript{21} Unlike traditional brick-and-mortar schools, the Louisiana Virtual School also detailed:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Liberating Learning, “Illinois.” http://sites.google.com/site/liberatelearn/home/illinois.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Kentucky Virtual School, “What IS KVHS?” http://www.kyvs.org/bbcswebdav/institution/About%20KVHS/KVHS_Q_%20A.pdf.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Kentucky Virtual School, “Welcome.” http://www.kyvs.org/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Louisiana Virtual School, “Frequently Asked Questions.” http://www.louisianavirtualschool.net/.
\end{itemize}
Credit is granted and posted by the student’s home school. The LVS is not a credit granting institution. Courses are either regular core courses or electives. A mid-term progress report and final letter grade is issued by the instructor and sent to the student’s home school via the Department of Education. The local school then handles all credits according to local policy.\(^\text{22}\)

**Maine.** The Maine Department of Education stated the following public policy mission and academic goals for virtual education:

The Maine Online Learning Program was established to provide high-quality educational options for kindergarten to grade 12 students in this State using online learning programs and courses. The goals of the program are to:

1. Create educational opportunities for students in this State that may not exist without such technology.

2. Close the achievement gap between high-performing and low-performing students, including the gap between minority and nonminority students and between economically disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers.

3. Use existing educational resources, along with technology, to provide parents a broader range of educational options and to help students in the State improve their academic achievement.

4. Increase the capacity of school administrative units to provide public school educational opportunities for students whose educational needs are not being met in the regular public school program.\(^\text{23}\)

**Michigan.** The Michigan Virtual School was accredited by the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation and North Central Association Commission on Accreditation.\(^\text{24}\) In 2006, Michigan was the first state to require


students to complete an online course as a graduation requirement.\textsuperscript{25} The Michigan Virtual School public policy mission statement defined the organization as follows:

The Michigan Virtual School is an online resource that enables Michigan high schools and middle schools to provide courses (all taught by certified teachers) and other learning tools that students wouldn't otherwise have access to. It was funded by the Michigan Legislature in July 2000 to be operated by the Michigan Virtual University, a private, not-for-profit Michigan corporation. MVS works in cooperation with individual school districts to grant course credit and diplomas.

Through MVS, Michigan high school and middle school students can take a variety of courses and learn any place there is a computer and an Internet connection. We're here to help prepare our children for a lifetime of integrating technology into their work and their lives.

Eligible students include:

Gifted and talented students
Special needs students
Students who need to “make-up” credit
Public and non-public school students
Home-schooled students.\textsuperscript{26}

In addition, the Michigan Virtual School course catalog stated that it “contains three course styles for high school students: MVS Plus (Instructor-led), which includes Advanced Placement and Fast Track (six-week courses); MVS Basic (Instructor-supported); and MVS Blended (Instructor-less).”\textsuperscript{27}

**Mississippi.** The Mississippi Virtual Public School\textsuperscript{28} defined its virtual education in the following public policy mission statement:

Mississippi Virtual Public School (MVPS) is a web-based educational service offered by the Mississippi Department of Education to provide Mississippi students with access to a wider range of course work, with more


\textsuperscript{28} Miss. Code Ann. §37-161-3.
flexibility in scheduling and with the opportunity to develop their capacities as independent learners. Students in grades 9–12 have access to FREE online courses through MVPS. Priority is given to seniors and juniors. Online courses will NOT be offered that are tied to a Subject Area Test (Algebra 1, Biology, US History, English I and English II). Students may take non-core content courses for elective credit only. MVPS is not a credit-issuing or a diploma-granting institution.\textsuperscript{29}

Additionally, in 2010, the Mississippi Virtual School became affiliated with the Connections Academy as a means to administrate the online courses offered to elementary and secondary students.\textsuperscript{30}

**Missouri.** According to the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program,\textsuperscript{31} “MoVIP’s mission is to offer Missouri students equal access to a wide range of high quality courses, flexibility in scheduling, and interactive online learning that is neither time nor place dependent.”\textsuperscript{32} The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and State Board of Education stated the following reasons in favor of Missouri Virtual School instruction:

The Missouri Virtual Instruction Program (MoVIP) offers online courses for K-12 students statewide. Missouri-certified teachers facilitate courses available via any Internet-connected computer. MoVIP provides Missouri students with equal access to a wide range of coursework, anywhere, any time.

MoVIP allows Missouri to:

- Expand the range of courses and opportunities offered to students
- Offer courses for students where there are no qualified teachers to teach the course


\textsuperscript{30} Liberating Learning, “Mississippi.” http://sites.google.com/site/liberatelearn/home/mississippi.

\textsuperscript{31} Mo. Rev. Stat. §161.670.

• Allow students to take a course not offered because there are not enough students to assign a teacher to teach the course at the school district

• Provide courses for students who have schedules that prevent them from taking a course when it is offered

• Present high quality instruction to students who are in alternative education settings or on home and hospital instruction

• Provide additional support and extended time to students who failed to achieve in regular courses

• Provides equity across programs and school in the quality of instruction MoVIP offers “any time, any place” learning for Missouri students.  

The Missouri Virtual Instruction Program offered elementary and secondary students “172 different courses including seven different foreign languages and 19 Advanced Placement classes” during the 2010-2011 academic year. 

Montana. The University of Montana at Missoula made the following public policy statement in favor of the Montana Digital Academy:

MTDA is specifically designed to provide unique educational opportunities to Montana students and schools. Need to make up a core class? MTDA offers many of the basics. For students looking for a new challenge, we offer AP classes. We also have elective courses that expose students to subjects that may not be available in their local schools.

MTDA puts no limits on learning. Students can access coursework whenever and wherever they want. This way course conflicts are completely eliminated allowing more students to graduate on time.

Our school year is uninterrupted, running through fall, winter, spring and summer. Students in our summer school classes can access courses at home or while traveling on vacation.

We have the flexibility to accommodate home-schooled children as well, as long as they register for MTDA courses at their local public school.

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34 Missouri Virtual Instruction Program, “MoVIP.” http://www.movip.org/.
In short, we’re breaking down the barriers to make learning as easy as possible.\footnote{Montana Digital Academy, "Why Montana Digital Academy." \url{http://montanadigitalacademy.org/program}.}

Each of the Montana Digital Academy courses were accredited and approved by the Montana Office of Public Instruction.\footnote{Montana Digital Academy, "FAQ." \url{http://montanadigitalacademy.org/faq}.} The academy issued the following statement regarding online education:

Online education allows students to learn at their own pace and gives them an increased amount of one-to-one attention from teachers. An extensive class list is available with options such as AP courses or electives that might not normally be available. Scheduling conflicts are eliminated. Credit recovery courses offer students the opportunity to make up credit when needed. There are even summer school courses students can complete from home or while away on vacation. Plus, all Montana Digital Academy (MTDA) courses are taught by qualified, Montana-licensed instructors and are aligned to state education standards.\footnote{Ibid.}

\textbf{North Carolina.} The North Carolina Virtual Public School\footnote{North Carolina Virtual Public School, "History." \url{http://www.ncvps.org/index.php/about-us/history/}.} released the following public policy mission statement about its virtual school program:

In just a few short years, NCVPS has grown to become the second-largest virtual school in the country, surpassing a number of schools that have been around longer. This growth can be attributed to the ever-expanding set of educational options we make available, including:

- hard-to-staff subjects like: Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, and German,
- over 100 courses, such as Advanced Placement (AP), credit recovery, blended courses for the Occupational Course of Study, and
- opportunities for participating middle schools to offer students a chance to gain high school credit

More importantly, NCVPS’s growth has been propelled by the spirit of partnership and collaboration with which schools and districts all over North Carolina have received us. School leaders have embraced NCVPS as a
service they can use to meet State Board of Education priorities, providing a 21st century learning environment for 21st century-ready students.\textsuperscript{39}

The North Carolina Virtual School primarily offered courses to elementary and secondary students in a blended fashion.\textsuperscript{40} The organization indicated the “blended Learning program allows the “best of both worlds;” the best of the live interaction of the face-to-face teacher is combined with the opportunities for these digital learners to engage with the content and be able to learn material in a variety of modalities.”\textsuperscript{41} In 2002,\textsuperscript{42} the North Carolina General Assembly created the North Carolina Virtual Public School.\textsuperscript{43} The North Carolina Virtual Public School utilized public funding and issued the following detailed description about its goals and mission:

The North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS) is committed to raising achievement and closing learning gaps with 21st century innovation by providing access to world class learning opportunities for all North Carolina students. We provide the vehicle for school districts to accomplish the State Board of Education’s goals of producing 21st century learners, professionals, leaders, and systems by providing easily accessible, online learning opportunities for our state’s most valuable resource: its children. Our mission is to provide skills, student support, and opportunities for 21st century learners to succeed in a globally competitive world. We offer over 100 courses-including Advanced Placement (AP), world language, Occupational Course of Study (OCS), and credit recovery courses-to students across the state of North Carolina. The courses utilize the Blackboard course management software to maximize student interaction in each class. Our courses are taught by highly qualified teachers who utilize

\textsuperscript{39} North Carolina Virtual Public School, “Director’s Welcome.” \url{http://www.ncvps.org/index.php/about-us/directors-welcome/}.

\textsuperscript{40} North Carolina Virtual Public School, “Blended & Mobile Learning.” \url{http://www.ncvps.org/index.php/blended-mobile-learning/}.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{42} North Carolina Virtual Public School, “History.” \url{http://www.ncvps.org/index.php/about-us/history/}.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
video, interactive whiteboards, wikis, active worlds, and online discussion tools to engage 21st century learners.\textsuperscript{44}

**Wyoming.** The Wyoming Switchboard Network’s\textsuperscript{45} goal was to increase student access and defined its online network as “a collection of distance education providers that deliver coursework to K-12 students.”\textsuperscript{46} During the 2010-2011 academic year, the Wyoming Switchboard Network increased student access by offering a total of 616 different online courses for elementary and secondary students.\textsuperscript{47}

In addition to the states shown in the Centralized Virtual School Model, the following states also had evidence of a centralized virtual school model but did not allow for private/publicly-funded virtual school alternatives: Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, and Wyoming.

Conversely, Michigan and Missouri had evidence of a centralized virtual school model and allowed for private/publicly-funded virtual school options. Table 4-1 illustrated every state within the Centralized Virtual School Model and public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s). (Table 4-1)

**Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model**

The Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model reflected a variety of virtual school public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s). Within the Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model itself, the following states had evidence of virtual school

\textsuperscript{44} North Carolina Virtual Public School, “About Us.” \url{http://www.ncvps.org/index.php/about-us/}.

\textsuperscript{45} Wyoming Secretary of State, “Chapter 41 – Distance Education.” \url{http://soswy.state.wy.us/Rules/RULES/7334.pdf}.

\textsuperscript{46} Wyoming Switchboard Network, “Wyoming Switchboard Network.” \url{http://www.wyomingswitchboard.net/Home.aspx}.

\textsuperscript{47} Wyoming Switchboard Network, “Statewide Courses.” \url{http://www.wyomingswitchboard.net/Courses.aspx}.
models with multiple public school options that allowed for privately/publicly-funded virtual school options: Alaska, Georgia, Kansas, Minnesota, and South Carolina. Similar to Arkansas, South Dakota had evidence of a centralized virtual school model with multiple public school options that allowed for non-profit alternatives to the state options.\textsuperscript{48} The researcher was able to conclude that states within the Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model funded virtual education for a variety of philosophical goals and objectives. However, a major noticeable exception in comparison to the Centralized Virtual School Model was the fact that no state within the Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model contained policy that addressed public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s) about reducing the achievement gap, helping diverse learners, or student diversity.

\textbf{Alaska.} In 2008,\textsuperscript{49} the state of Alaska began to offer a virtual school option for elementary and secondary students. This option contained a consortium that was comprised of eleven virtual schools with the goal of “distance delivered, closer connections. . . for community building & learning.”\textsuperscript{50} The consortium’s public policy mission stated that “Distance Learning has a definition that is indistinct. Here, it means that you have numerous INTERACTIVE tools for gaining skills, concepts, & ideas. These tools are selected specifically to meet a goal (learning objective) set by the


\textsuperscript{50} Alaska Distance Learning Network, “Resources on the akDLN.” http://www.akdistancelearning.net/Alaska%20Distance%20Learning%20Network%20akDLN/Alaska%20Distance%20Learning%20Network%20akDLN/resources.html.
instructor or facilitator. We call them ‘learning technologies’!"51 The Alaska Virtual Network was structured as a “non-profit educational service agency that provides educational services to every school district in the state.”52

**Arkansas.** The Arkansas Virtual Academy was funded as a full-time statewide charter school—offering no tuition or supplemental costs to elementary and secondary students.53 The Arkansas Department of Education funded virtual schools and served to oversee governance and all accountability pertaining to virtual education throughout the state. The Arkansas Virtual High School’s public policy mission statement was as follows:

The purpose of the Arkansas Virtual High School is to provide an online alternative learning environment for the students of Arkansas' public schools who need assistance in completing coursework that is difficult to receive due to factors such as schedule conflicts, homebound due to extenuating circumstances, and other factors that might impede a student’s progress through grades 9 - 12.54

Established in 2000,55 the Arkansas Virtual High School offered thirty-five different courses for secondary students and the Arkansas Virtual Academy offered courses56 for elementary students in the 2010-2011 academic year.

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51 [Alaska Distance Learning Network](http://www.akdistancelearning.net/), “Alaska Distance Learning Network.”
54 [Arkansas Virtual High School](http://avhs.k12.ar.us/tutorials/about_avhs.htm), “About AVHS.”
Georgia. The statewide Georgia Cyber Academy’s mission and goals were expressed interestingly in the following manner:

The Georgia Cyber Academy is the fastest-growing schools in Georgia, and here’s why:

- Our faculty of experienced, highly qualified Georgia-certified teachers, who work with students and parents to achieve exceptional results and are available online and by phone.

- The exceptional, individualized K¹² curriculum, which covers both the core subject areas and electives. Based on decades of education research, this curriculum packages high-quality lessons with mastery-based assessments that ensure students achieve success at each and every level.

- The online planning and assessment tools, resources, and hands-on materials ranging from textbooks to microscopes, from rocks and dirt to beautifully illustrated classic children’s stories, and much more.

- Our supportive school community, which organizes fun and informative monthly activities where GCA parents, students, and staff share their successes, helpful hints, and more.

- The high-quality, tuition-free public education that enables a learning experience that is individualized for each student.57

Kansas. The Kansas Online Learning Program was a statewide virtual school initiative that contained forty-five different district online programs which offered courses for the elementary and secondary students in Kansas.58 The mission statement of the organization was as follows:

The Kansas Online Learning Program (KOLP) offers innovative, effective educational experiences while utilizing state-of-the-art technology, an interactive and engaging curriculum provided by Lincoln Interactive and the guidance and support of highly qualified, Kansas Certified Instructors. Lincoln Interactive curriculum received corporate accreditation by


AdvancED the parent company of the North Central Association Commission and NCAA approved accreditation.\(^{59}\)

**Minnesota.** According to the Minnesota Learning Commons public policy mission statement, the organization was developed to “provide access to effective and efficient online learning. The public education partners include Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, University of Minnesota and Minnesota Department of Education along with Public K-12 schools. The partnership also enhances the collaborative efforts of faculty, administration and staff by providing free relevant online resources.”\(^{60}\) In the 2010-2011 academic year, there were a total of 1,892 different courses offered through the Minnesota Learning Commons for elementary and secondary students.\(^{61}\)

**New Hampshire.** The Virtual Learning Academy Charter School\(^{62}\) had the following mission and goals for its organization:

To use the latest technologies to provide New Hampshire’s high school students any time, any where access to a rigorous, personalized education that helps them learn today, graduate tomorrow and prepare for the future.

In addition, the Academy is also a viable option for high school dropout students who wish to earn a high school diploma while maintaining a job. Through the Academy, students can take the courses they need at times that accommodate their work schedule.\(^{63}\)

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Ohio. Since 1997,\textsuperscript{64} elementary and secondary students in Ohio have had the option of enrolling in twenty-seven different eCommunity schools.\textsuperscript{65} However, the Ohio state legislature never created a statewide virtual school.\textsuperscript{66} An eCommunity school was similar to a charter school, but the eCommunity school was computer-based, which allowed students to work from home.\textsuperscript{67} The state issued the following public policy mission statement concerning eCommunity schools:

Community schools in Ohio – known elsewhere as "charter schools" – are publicly funded and publicly accountable, but independently run, non-profit educational institutions. As public schools, they are open to any student up to age 21, free of tuition.

Separate from the traditional public district schools, community schools are required to abide by all state curriculum standards. However, community schools have the freedom to offer a wide variety of non-sectarian educational programs.\textsuperscript{68}

South Carolina. The South Carolina Virtual School Program\textsuperscript{69} proclaimed the following:

The mission of the South Carolina Virtual School Program (SCVSP) is to provide high quality, standards-based, online instruction to the students of South Carolina as a strategy for increasing the graduation rate in the state. By supplementing and expanding the conventional school day, the SCVSP


\textsuperscript{68} Ohio Council of Community Schools, "What Are Community Schools?" http://64.78.37.107/about/.

provides effective alternatives to districts and schools to deal with economic, staffing and scheduling issues.\textsuperscript{70}

The South Carolina Virtual School Program offered seventy-three different credited course options and five non-credited exam preparation classes for elementary and secondary students.\textsuperscript{71} In 2009, the state of South Carolina was ranked second in the nation for developing quality online programs by the Center for Digital Education.\textsuperscript{72}

**South Dakota.** The South Dakota Virtual School public policy mission statement identified that “the South Dakota Department of Education approves all courses, students can be assured that course offerings meet the state's high academic standards.”\textsuperscript{73} The state of South Dakota offered a total of 359 courses for elementary and secondary students through the South Carolina Virtual School in the 2010-2011 academic year.\textsuperscript{74}

In addition to the states listed in the Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model, the following states also had evidence of virtual school models with multiple public school options that allowed for privately/publicly-funded virtual school options: Alaska, Georgia, Kansas, Minnesota, and South Carolina. Similar to Arkansas, South Dakota had evidence of a centralized virtual school model with multiple public school options that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{73} South Dakota State Dept. of Educ., “South Dakota Virtual School.” http://www.sdvs.k12.sd.us/.
\item \textsuperscript{74} South Dakota State Dept. of Educ., “Courses.” http://www.sdvs.k12.sd.us/Students/Courses.aspx.
\end{itemize}
allowed for non-profit alternatives to the state options. Table 4-2 illustrated every state within the Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model and public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s). (Table 4-2)

Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model

States within the Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School model had the following virtual school public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s). Within the Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model itself, the following states also had evidence of virtual school models with public or private school options that allowed for private/publicly-funded virtual school alternatives to any state model: Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, North Dakota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. The researcher was able to conclude that states within the Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model funded virtual education for a variety of philosophical goals and objectives even though they were funded through the same funding model.

Arizona. According to the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) the Technology Assisted Project-Based Instruction Program was “Arizona’s primary approach to providing an Internet based alternative to learning in traditional brick-and-mortar schools.” Furthermore, the Arizona State Legislature defined the Technology Assisted Project-Based Instruction Program in the following public policy mission statement:


Technology Assisted Project-Based Instruction (TAPBI) is an educational pilot program in which participating schools may employ technology-assisted learning methodologies, such as computer assisted learning systems, virtual classrooms, virtual tutoring, electronic field trips, on-line help desks, group chat sessions and non-computer [sic] based activities to address the unique needs and learning styles needed in the information age. Currently, seven traditional public schools and seven charter schools in Arizona are authorized to offer the TAPBI program.77

The Technology Assisted Project-Based Instruction Program delivered course content to elementary and secondary students in a variety of ways. The North American Council for Online Learning issued the following public statement for the Arizona Legislature:

Education delivery takes many forms—TAPBI schools typically provide instruction through Internet-based applications that allow schools to create and deliver learning content, such as online reading materials, interactive exercises, discussion forums, video clips, and quizzes. Their comprehensive learning management systems also typically include tools for monitoring student participation and progress, such as instruction time logs and electronic grade books. To ensure that students can access and interact with learning management systems, the TAPBI schools generally require students to have access to a highspeed Internet connection and a computer that meets certain technical requirements. Most schools also provide small computer labs for student use, and three schools even lend students the needed equipment.78

California. In 1999,79 the state of California established a statewide initiative entitled University of California College Prep.80 The organization’s public policy mission statement proclaimed:

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University of California College Prep publishes free high-quality online courses and content to benefit California students, with a special emphasis on helping underserved students gain college eligibility. We make our UC-approved Advanced Placement and college prep courses freely available to California students, teachers and schools. Our courses are aligned to California content standards and are College Board certified.\(^81\)

The University of California College Prep was developed as a way to increase student access to Advanced Placement courses. The organization stated:

It’s UCCP’s goal to create courses that engage and stimulate students by integrating with the latest technologies and media. In this way students and teachers will find dynamic educational content easily accessible through the devices they use everyday. With UC College Prep’s courses, California educators have 21st century educational technology and top quality approved curriculum at their fingertips.\(^82\)

**Colorado.** The mission of the Colorado Online Learning\(^83\) organization was stated as follows “to provide high-quality online learning options for students, teachers, administrators, and others involved in education in Colorado.”\(^84\) There were a total of ninety-two different online course options for elementary and secondary students to take through the Colorado Online Learning program.\(^85\)

**Connecticut.** According to the Connecticut Virtual Learning Center,\(^86\) “The CT Virtual Learning Center offers online supplemental courses to CT high school and home schooled students as a complement as well as an alternative to traditional courses. Curriculum will engage students by connecting real world applications to learning


\(^{83}\) Colorado Online Learning, “About COL.” [http://www.col.k12.co.us/aboutus/history.html](http://www.col.k12.co.us/aboutus/history.html).  

\(^{84}\) Colorado Online Learning, “Welcome to COL.” [http://www.col.k12.co.us/](http://www.col.k12.co.us/).  

\(^{85}\) Colorado Online Learning, “Course Descriptions.” [http://www.col.k12.co.us/courses/coursedescriptions.html](http://www.col.k12.co.us/courses/coursedescriptions.html).  

through problem solving and/or project-based learning assignments.”\(^{87}\) In regard to online course offerings, the Connecticut Virtual Learning Center issued the following public policy mission statement:

The CT Virtual Learning Center has a variety of options for the diverse needs of CT’s High School students. From Credit Recovery and full High School courses, available on a flexible enrollment basis, to Advanced Placement and World Languages with fixed start and end dates, all of our courses are taught by CT certified teachers.\(^{88}\)

Hawaii. Hawaii was a unique state because it had a single statewide brick-and-mortar school district with several virtual schools that utilized the Hawaii Department of Education’s centralized funding model.\(^{89}\) During the 2010-2011 academic year, the Hawaii Virtual Learning Network increased online student access when it offered forty-nine different courses for secondary students.\(^{90}\) The organization’s public policy mission stated: “At this time, only high school ACCN credit courses are being offered by HVLN/E-School. As HVLN/E-School expands, future plans include offering supplementary middle and elementary courses as well as credit recovery courses.”\(^{91}\)

Indiana. The two major virtual charter schools in Indiana were the Hoosier Academy Virtual Pilot School,\(^{92}\) and the Indiana Connection Academy Virtual Pilot School.

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\(^{87}\) CT Virtual Learning, “About Us.” http://www.ctvirtuallearning.org/about.cfm.


School." The Hoosier Academy Virtual Pilot School public policy mission stated that, "Hoosier Academies is a tuition-free, statewide public charter school that uses the K¹² curriculum. Hoosier Academies offers two types of programs: hybrid and virtual." In addition, the Indiana Connection Academy Virtual Pilot School public policy mission stated that it "is a tuition-free, online public school that brings a fully accredited public education directly to your family's door—anywhere in Indiana." The state legislature gave the Indiana State Department of Education the authority to fund and operate these schools as well.

Iowa. The Iowa Online Advanced Placement Academy issued the following public policy mission statement about its purpose:

The Iowa Online Advanced Placement Academy (IOAPA) has been established to deliver Advanced Placement (AP) courses to high school students across the State of Iowa utilizing Apex Learning on-line technology and the Iowa Communications Network (ICN). AP gives students an opportunity to take college-level courses and exams while still in high school. The focus of IOAPA is on accredited rural and small schools in Iowa.

In 2004, the Iowa legislature authorized the growth of online education with the creation of an online program named Iowa Learning Online. In addition to offering

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98 Ibid.

Advance Placement courses online, the Iowa Legislature created policies that allowed students from every level access to online course options. Iowa Learning Online stated the following about its mission, “ILO provides distance education to high school students across the state. The Internet as well as the Iowa Communications Network (ICN) video classrooms are utilized to deliver distance education to students of different academic backgrounds: struggling learners to advanced placement students.”101

Maryland. The Maryland Virtual School102 had the following mission and opportunity statement about its virtual school opportunities for elementary and secondary students:

All students and educators in Maryland public schools have the opportunity and ability to enhance the educational experience through access to high quality web-delivered courses and instructional support.

The Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities Program (MVLO), an educational service managed by the Maryland State Department of Education, is designed to expand the access of Maryland public school students to challenging curricula aligned to the Maryland Content Standards as well as to other appropriate standards through the delivery of high quality online courses.103

There were forty-nine different virtual school course options for students during the 2010-2011 academic year.104

Massachusetts. Massachusetts Online Network for Education (MassONE) stated the following about its public policy mission, “The Department of Elementary and

100 Ibid.
102 Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities, “Welcome to Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities.” http://mdk12online.org/.
Secondary Education’s Massachusetts Online Network for Education (MassONE) is the Commonwealth’s set of web-based applications, resources, and tools for students, teachers and administrators.”\textsuperscript{105} Massachusetts also offered students charter school options which the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education described in the following manner, “Charter schools are independent public schools designed to encourage innovative educational practices. Charter schools are funded by tuition charges assessed against the school districts where the students reside. The state provides partial reimbursement to the sending districts for the tuition costs incurred.”\textsuperscript{106}

**Nebraska.** The Nebraska Virtual Partnership was developed in 2011 between the University of Nebraska, “Nebraska Department of Education, Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council, and Nebraska Educational Telecommunications.”\textsuperscript{107} The goals of the Nebraska Virtual Partnership were as follows:

- Establishing a statewide virtual/digital education initiative.
- Developing a plan and budget for state support of online high school courses in order to make opportunities available to all Nebraska high school students, with an emphasis on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), Advanced Placement, and other courses unavailable in rural and other high schools.
- Establishing a single statewide virtual education resources website.
- Organizing content and professional development and enhancing statewide equity of access to virtual education opportunities.

\textsuperscript{105} Massachusetts Dept. of Educ., “About MassONE.” \url{http://massone.mass.edu/about/}.

\textsuperscript{106} Massachusetts Dept. of Educ., “Charter School Finance.” \url{http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/finance/}.

\textsuperscript{107} University of Nebraska, “New Nebraska Virtual Partnership Will Increase Online Learning Opportunities for Students.” \url{http://nebraska.edu/media-resource-center/features/1725-new-nebraska-virtual-partnership-will-increase-online-learning-opportunities-for-students.html}.
• Promoting digital education resources and, where necessary, promoting policy reform to enhance and sustain virtual education in Nebraska.

• Leveraging existing resources in Nebraska to promote high quality and cost-effectiveness. ¹⁰⁸

**Nevada.** The Nevada Virtual Academy had a curriculum that stated the following educational goals:

• Use the K 12, Inc curriculum, which is approved by the Department of Education and aligns with Nevada standards

• Is staffed by highly qualified, licensed educators

• Combines powerful technology with great teaching

• Can be delivered anywhere internet access is available

• Combines both synchronous and asynchronous instruction

• Is not bound by the “bell schedule”

• Provides students and families with a choice

• Creates learning opportunities different from than the brick and mortar school

• Creates closer, more individualized attention and relationships between students, teachers, and parents.¹⁰⁹

**New Jersey.** The New Jersey Virtual School issued the following public policy mission statement about the objective of its institution:

The NJVS delivers quality, online instruction to high school and middle school students in grades 6-12 for remediation, promotion, or to meet New Jersey high school graduation requirements. Since 2002, NJVS has provided affordable courses to more than 450 school districts, agencies,

¹⁰⁸ University of Nebraska, "Making Quality Online Learning Accessible To More Nebraska Students." http://nebraska.edu/docs/features/virtual-partnership/VirtualScholarsPilotProgram.pdf.

alternative programs, and residential facilities in New Jersey with over 14,000 enrollments.\textsuperscript{110}

Additionally, the New Jersey Department of Education issued the following information about the objectives of its state virtual charter schools:

Charter school legislation was passed to give choice for all parents for their children's education. The intent of this legislation is to:

- Improve student learning and achievement;
- Increase the availability of choice to parents and students when selecting a learning environment;
- Encourage the use of different and innovative learning methods;
- Establish a new system of accountability for schools;
- Make the school the unit for educational improvement;
- Establish new professional opportunities for teachers.\textsuperscript{111}

\textbf{New Mexico.} The New Mexico statewide virtual school option's mission statement indicated “IDEAL-NM provides eLearning services to New Mexico PK-12 schools, higher education institutions, and government agencies. We reduce geographic and capacity barriers to educational opportunity while increasing the digital literacy skills students need to participate in a global economy.”\textsuperscript{112} New Mexico’s online structure was unique because the statewide virtual school offered courses for elementary students all the way through post-secondary aged students. IDEAL-NM stated the following public policy about how its organization “encompasses all aspects of learning from traditional public and higher education environments to teacher


\textsuperscript{112} IDEAL-NM, “About Ideal-nm.” http://www.ideal-nm.org/home/get-content/content/about_ideal-nm.
professional development, continuing education and workforce education. IDEAL-NM is a joint program of the New Mexico Public Education and Higher Education Departments.¹¹³

**North Dakota.** The North Dakota Center for Distance Education¹¹⁴ defined itself and its structure in the following public policy mission statement:

The North Dakota Center for Distance Education (ND CDE) is an accredited, non-profit, distance education school that has been providing educational opportunities to students around the world since 1935.

ND CDE’s courses are available to any students in grades 6-12. ND CDE is familiar and works well with a variety of educational arrangements including public, private, home, and charter schools. ND CDE provides instructional support for all its courses. All students receive one-on-one help.¹¹⁵

**Oklahoma.** Oklahoma did not have a state virtual school. However, it consisted of two large statewide online programs: the Oklahoma Virtual Academy¹¹⁶ and the Oklahoma Virtual High School.¹¹⁷ The Oklahoma Virtual Academy issued the following public policy mission statement about the structure of its online delivery:

At Oklahoma Virtual Academy, all students interact with one or more state-certified teachers (depending on grade level) and communicate regularly with their teachers through e-mail, telephone, online synchronized opportunities, and direct instruction. Each OKVA family receives all instructional materials, including a wide array of textbooks, CDs, videos, and other hands-on tools and resources. These materials complement the

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¹¹⁶ Oklahoma Virtual Academy, “We Ignite your Child.” http://www.k12.com/okva/.

interactive online elements of the program, ensuring that students receive instruction using the best method for each subject.\textsuperscript{118}

The Oklahoma Virtual High School, the other primary virtual school in Oklahoma, issued the following public policy mission statement:

Oklahoma Virtual High School partners with school districts across the state and is one of the largest virtual middle and high schools in Oklahoma. We use the Internet to deliver your education, which opens up a world of flexible learning solutions to help you graduate and find success when your local public school’s traditional options don’t fit your needs for grades 6 - 12.\textsuperscript{119}

\textbf{Oregon.} When asked to define the Oregon Virtual School’s goal, Superintendent Susan Castillo stated “Our vision is to deliver real-world readiness so Oregon students graduate prepared to succeed in today’s global, knowledge-based economy. ORVSD gives teachers the tools they need to get our students ready for college, work and life in the 21st century.”\textsuperscript{120} In addition, Oregon had numerous different publicly funded online programs for elementary and secondary students such as the Oregon Virtual Academy Charter School.\textsuperscript{121}

\textbf{Pennsylvania.} The publicly funded Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School issued the following public policy mission statement about the vision of its organization:

The Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School will be dedicated to providing student-centered service in a professional and compassionate manner utilizing highly trained and committed staff to individualize educational strategies that empower each student to succeed. As the leader of cyber

\textsuperscript{118} Oklahoma Virtual Academy, “Certified Teachers, Superior Teaching Tools.” http://www.k12.com/okva/how-it-works.

\textsuperscript{119} Oklahoma Virtual High School, “About the Program.” http://oklahomavirtualhighschool.com/about.html.


\textsuperscript{121} Oregon Virtual Academy, “Who We Are.” http://www.k12.com/orva/.
education in Pennsylvania, PA Cyber will continue to develop best practices and will be a model of academic excellence.\(^{122}\)

**Rhode Island.** The Virtual Learning Academy in the state of Rhode Island had the following goals:

- Increasing test scores
- Increasing student retention
- Lowering dropout rates
- Increasing graduation rates
- Increasing/supplementing course offerings
- Increasing self-esteem & self-confidence
- Developing communication skills, independent thinking skills & goal setting skills.\(^{123}\)

**Tennessee.** E\(^4\)TN worked with each of the 156 school districts in Tennessee and several district-level schools which increased student access to online education.\(^{124}\) There were fifty-eight courses\(^{125}\) offered to elementary and secondary students during the 2010-2011 academic year. Furthermore, the Virtual Public School Act stated the following goals:

WHEREAS, meeting the educational needs of children in Tennessee's schools is of the greatest importance to the future welfare of the State; and

WHEREAS, closing the achievement gap between high-performing students, including the gap between minority and non-minority students,

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and between economically disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers, is a significant and present challenge; and

WHEREAS, providing a broader range of educational options to parents and utilizing existing resources, along with technology, may help students in Tennessee improve their academic achievement; and

WHEREAS, many school districts currently lack the capacity to provide other public school choices for students whose schools are high priority schools.\textsuperscript{126}

**Texas.** In 2007,\textsuperscript{127} the Texas Legislature established policy for the Texas Education Agency that created both the Texas Virtual School Network and Electronic Course Program.\textsuperscript{128} As a result, elementary and secondary students were given the opportunity to take advantage of the Texas Legislature’s goal of increasing student access to virtual charter schools with the options of the Texas Connections Academy at Houston,\textsuperscript{129} Texas Virtual Academy\textsuperscript{130} at Southwest, \textsuperscript{131} and iQ Academy.\textsuperscript{132}

**Utah.** The Utah Electronic High School’s mission statement was as follows: “Our mission is to educate, remediate, accelerate, and graduate Utah’s diverse learners with caring, qualified teachers using current technology to provide rigorous curricula, timely access to quality online instruction, and prompt professional feedback to student


\textsuperscript{130} Texas Virtual Academy, “Who We Are.” [http://www.k12.com/txva/who-we-are](http://www.k12.com/txva/who-we-are).

\textsuperscript{131} Liberating Learning, “Texas.” [http://sites.google.com/site/liberatelearn/home/texas](http://sites.google.com/site/liberatelearn/home/texas).

A total of forty-six courses were offered to students during the 2010-2011 academic year through the Utah Electronic High School.  

**Vermont.** The Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative issued the following public policy mission statement about the structure and objective of its organization:

Vermont Virtual is a partnership of Vermont schools that offer online courses to students in K-12 institutions across Vermont. This partnership offers a variety of high-quality courses that can expand the learning opportunities for students seeking challenging and engaging curriculum in a non-traditional approach. All students need multiple opportunities to access courses and content with high engagement and interest. Courses in Vermont Virtual include foreign languages, AP courses, numerous academic and elective courses, as well as those that provide support to struggling students. In addition to offering online courses, Vermont Virtual also provides summer school, professional development for the staff and faculty of Vermont’s schools and custom online solutions that allow students more availability, accessibility and flexibility for their learning.  

**Virginia.** The Virtual Virginia online school was publicly funded and issued the following public policy mission statement about its purpose:

As a program of the Virginia Department of Education, Virtual Virginia (VVa) offers online Advanced Placement (AP), world language, core academic, and elective courses to students across the Commonwealth and nation. Virtual Virginia is committed to providing high-quality, rigorous course content with the flexibility to meet schools’ and students’ varied schedules. Our program strives to provide instruction that meets the individual needs of students.

Virtual learning is the new frontier in today’s educational institutions. The technology of the 21st century provides a unique opportunity for educators to reach students who want the experience of online courses.

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135 Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative, “Student Brochure.” [https://docs.google.com/a/vtvlc.org/viewer?a=v&pid=explorer&chrome=true&srcid=0B5_g-rLhQEwhY2YwY2M2ZGY1YWYiNi00MzQyLWE4NDctMjg5NzIzZGM2MmZm&hl=en&authkey=CLe7sbMO](https://docs.google.com/a/vtvlc.org/viewer?a=v&pid=explorer&chrome=true&srcid=0B5_g-rLhQEwhY2YwY2M2ZGY1YWYiNi00MzQyLWE4NDctMjg5NzIzZGM2MmZm&hl=en&authkey=CLe7sbMO).

**Washington.** In 2009, the Digital Learning Department within the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction was created as the state virtual school of Washington. The Digital Learning Department predominantly focused on increasing online access by offering a greater number of courses to elementary and secondary students. The Digital Learning Department stated the following about its goal for increasing access to students. “The DLD provides all school districts in the state with equal access to 600+ online courses available through an easy registration system that saves time and money. This ease of access is further enhanced by ongoing teacher training and course support, both online and via phone consultations.”

**West Virginia.** The West Virginia Department of Education created the West Virginia Virtual School to aid in lowering the state’s dropout rate. The following public policy mission statement was issued in regard to using virtual education to lower the dropout rate:

The WV Department of Education is dedicated to reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates for students in West Virginia. To this end, the WV Virtual School is unveiling onTargetWV, a program that will allow students to recover credits they need for graduation and help them develop skills and work habits that contribute to their continued academic success. The new onTargetWV program offers rigorous credit recovery courses with additional scaffolding to sustain learning. These courses are engaging, interactive, and provide differentiated instruction to supply the extra support students need to be successful. An online instructor grades works, answers questions, and provides individualized instruction as needed.

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137 Digital Learning Dept., “About the DLD.” [http://digitallearning.k12.wa.us/about/](http://digitallearning.k12.wa.us/about/).

138 Ibid.

139 Digital Learning Dept., “About the DLD.” [http://digitallearning.k12.wa.us/about/](http://digitallearning.k12.wa.us/about/).

140 West Virginia Dept. of Educ., “Distance Learning and the West Virginia Virtual School (2450).” [http://wvde.state.wv.us/policies/p2450.html](http://wvde.state.wv.us/policies/p2450.html).

Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Virtual School defined its purpose and mission in the following public policy mission statement:

Wisconsin Virtual School (WVS), Wisconsin's Web Academy, is an online course service provider that partners with school districts throughout the state, to offer online courses to middle and high school students. WVS "uncomplicates" the process of adding online courses to a district’s middle and high school curriculum. WVS takes care of the details, providing the content, platform, Wisconsin-certified online teachers, technical support, training, server, and much more. With WVS, districts can offer online options to their students with minimal cost and time. Districts retain control of key policy decisions and the enrollment. WVS helps districts define their policies for online learning.\(^{142}\)

Collectively, states in the Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model consisted of either a state virtual school or consortium, and had several private school options that were available to elementary and secondary students. This funding model acknowledged that elementary and secondary students must be afforded the option of choosing from multiple publicly-funded virtual schools or private/for-profit and non-profit virtual schools.

In addition to the states discussed in the Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model, the following states also had evidence of virtual school models with public or private school options that allowed for private/publicly-funded virtual school alternatives to any state model: Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, North Dakota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Table 4-3 illustrated every state within the Private/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model and public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s). (Table 4-3)

Alternative Virtual School Models

Delaware and New York. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the states of Delaware and New York did not fall within one of the three primary virtual school funding models. Therefore, the researcher was unable to expand upon the public policy goals of virtual education in the states of Delaware and New York.

Summary

Chapter 4 illustrated a breakdown and analysis of data that were used to answer the forth research question: What were a given state’s virtual school public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s)? Within the Centralized Virtual School Model, Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model, and Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model, the researcher was able to determine that individual states funded virtual education for a variety of different philosophical goals and objectives. The researcher also concluded the use of virtual school funding varied from state to state. There were inconsistencies among philosophical ideologies such as mission statements, goals, and reducing the dropout rate regardless of the funding model an individual state utilized. For example, both California and West Virginia used the Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model. However, California’s University of California College Prep school focused on increasing student access to advanced placement courses, whereas the West Virginia Virtual School focused on reducing the state’s dropout rate with its onTargetWV program.
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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Increase Access</th>
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<th>Higher Quality Education / Increase Student Achievement / 21st Century Global Skills / One on One Instruction</th>
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Table 4-3. Public Policy Mission Statement(s), Goal(s) and/or Aspiration(s) of states within the Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model

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<th>State</th>
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CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION / SUMMARY

This study allowed the researcher to examine the following research questions:

1. Did a given state utilize a virtual school funding model?
2. Did a given state utilize a Centralized Virtual School Model, Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model, or a Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model?
3. When a state virtual school existed, did policy/statute allow for students to enroll in alternatives to the statewide virtual school?
4. What were a given state’s virtual school public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s)?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was twofold. First, the study determined what type of virtual school funding model was being used in a given state. The state’s policies and actions were then divided into three separate categories organized by what virtual school funding model a given state utilized. Second, the collective analysis of all fifty states’ virtual school funding models allowed the researcher to create an overview of how elementary and secondary virtual education was funded in the United States. The researcher was then able to better understand a given state’s virtual school public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s).

Implications of the Study

The major implications of this study was that it illustrated how a given state utilized a specific virtual school funding model, and state’s virtual school public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s). Similar to a one-way analysis of variance, ANOVA, the similarities and differences within the three funding models were compared within the model itself, and then compared across all models in the ensuing explanations.
Centralized Virtual School Model. The Centralized Virtual School Model contained a total of thirteen states with a variety of public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s). The states of Alabama, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, and Wyoming contained evidence of mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s) addressing increasing student access. Michigan, Missouri, Montana, and North Carolina addressed reducing the dropout rate / credit recovery. Matters of higher quality education / increasing student achievement / Twenty-First Century global skills / one on one instruction were addressed by Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, and Montana. The states of Maine and North Carolina contained public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s) about reducing the achievement gap / diverse learners / student diversity. Only Maine, Michigan, Missouri, and North Carolina addressed more than one of the categories.

Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model. The Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model contained a total of nine states with a variety of public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s). The states of Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Ohio contained evidence of mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s) addressing increasing student access. Arkansas and South Carolina addressed reducing the dropout rate / credit recovery. Matters of higher quality education / increasing student achievement / Twenty-First Century global skills / one on one instruction were addressed by Alaska, Georgia, Kansas, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and South Dakota. No states contained public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s) about reducing the achievement gap / diverse learners /
student diversity. Only Maine, New Hampshire and South Carolina addressed more than one of the categories.

**Private/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model.** The Privately/Publicly-Funded Virtual School Model contained a total of twenty-six states with a variety of public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s). The states of Connecticut, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin contained evidence of mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s) addressing increasing student access. Hawaii, Rhode Island, and West Virginia addressed reducing the dropout rate / credit recovery. Matters of higher quality education / increasing student achievement / Twenty-First Century global skills / one on one instruction were addressed by Arizona, Colorado, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Vermont, and Virginia. California, Connecticut, Iowa, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Utah contained public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s) about reducing the achievement gap / diverse learners / student diversity. Only Iowa, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia addressed more than one of the categories.

**Three Virtual School Models Combined.** Combined, forty-eight states fit into one of the three funding models and collectively contained a variety of public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s). The states of Alabama, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New
Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming contained evidence of mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s) addressing increasing student access. Arkansas, Hawaii, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and West Virginia addressed reducing the dropout rate / credit recovery. Matters of higher quality education / increasing student achievement / Twenty-First Century global skills / one on one instruction were addressed by Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, and Virginia. The states of California, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, North Dakota, Rhode Island, and Utah contained public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s) about reducing the achievement gap / diverse learners / student diversity. Only Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia addressed more than one of the categories.

In summary, regardless of which funding model a given state utilized, in the public arena each state was engaged in similar activity. There was as much variance between funding models as there were within each group’s public policy mission statement(s), goal(s) and/or aspiration(s). However, since inconsistent educational methodologies were used among states, the researcher was unable to determine what/if any funding model was the most efficient and/or resourceful. It was also unclear about what
evaluation structures were being used for philosophical ideals such as Rhode Island’s goal of improving student self-esteem through the use of virtual education.

**Topics for Further Research**

A study that would advance online educational research would be one that includes university funding models as opposed to just elementary and secondary schools. Researching issues of equity and adequacy in regard to the funding mechanisms of virtual education in every state should be considered as well. Additionally, a study that measures both the cost-efficiency of virtual schooling and/or student achievement should be considered since little data has been published in the literature.

**Conclusions**

The rapid growth of virtual education presents unique challenges to public education policymakers throughout the United States. Due to widespread concerns related to access and equity in public elementary and secondary education, educators have continued to seek funding, through legislation, for virtual schools. Whether a state legislature utilized a centralized model or allowed each student to choose a public or private virtual school option, the promotion and development of virtual schools in the United States has proven to be a primary issue for public education policymakers.

The cost effectiveness of virtual education compared to traditional, brick-and-mortar schools has been a continual issue for state policymakers and school administrators. With limited data to reference, financial analysis related to the long-term return on investment was difficult. The average startup cost for an elementary and
secondary virtual school was approximately $1.6 million.\(^1\) While initial costs were significant, the potential for long-term cost savings was greater than with a brick-and-mortar school (e.g. a virtual school would not have the same operational costs—maintenance, utilities, security—as traditional schools; virtual schools typically have fewer teachers and administrators). Although the potential for long-term cost savings was prevalent, local school districts faced imminent financial problems due to the rapid growth of virtual education and the immediate financial burden facing schools districts responsible for allocating additional funds to cover per-student overhead costs for students enrolled in virtual schools. Specifically, for those elementary and secondary students who opted for virtual schools in lieu of home-school resources, the financial burden shifted from the family to taxpayers. Further, one could argue that unrestricted school choice has diluted local political control.\(^2\)

In essence, parents and students who were afforded the opportunity to utilize their own rationale to choose between virtual education and a traditional brick-and-mortar school served as a transformative measure to ensure competition and reform throughout public elementary and secondary education. The ability to enroll in a virtual school in lieu of a traditional brick-and-mortar school within a given student’s local school district ensured the continued competition for public elementary and secondary students and allowed virtual schools to become the de facto educational vouchers of the Twenty-First Century. Thus, public educational policymakers can continue to fund and


develop virtual education throughout the United States as a method of increasing student access and choice.
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