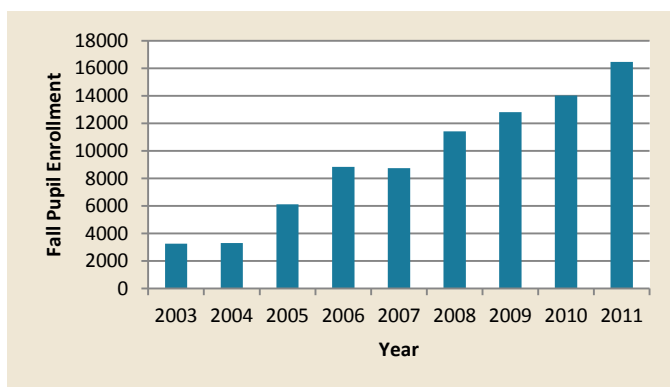


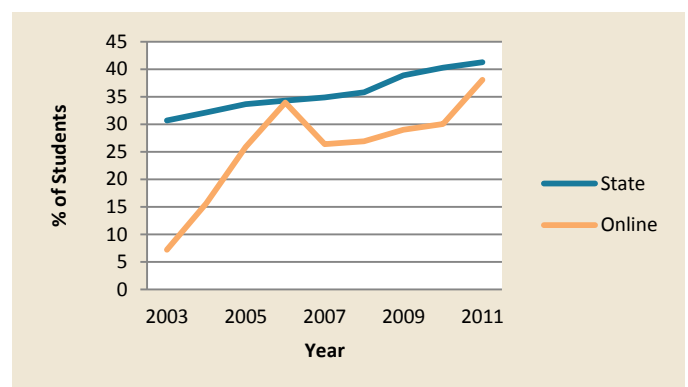
Characteristics and Perspectives of Colorado's Online Students

Over 16,000 Colorado students attend an online public school—a school choice that is valued by many families across our state. However, as the number of students attending online schools has grown and changed over the years, interest and questions about online schools from policymakers, media, and the general public has piqued. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) conducted an internal study of online student characteristics with State collected data, and with the help of the Donnell-Kay Foundation and the Colorado Legacy Foundation, the University of Colorado Denver (UCD) was commissioned to conduct a study to gain insight into the perspective of online students, parents and staff.

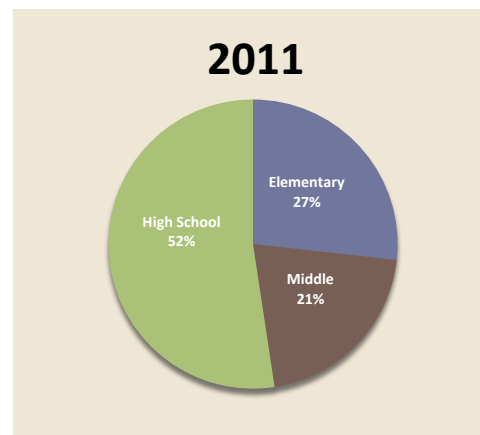
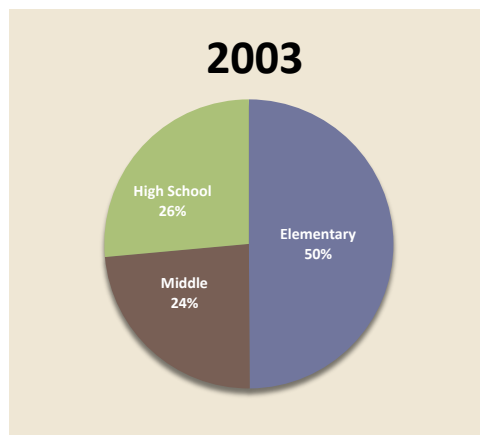
Pupil Enrollment in All Online Schools from 2003-04 through 2011-12



Percentage of Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch in the Fall Pupil Count for Online Schools and the State of Colorado



The population of online students in Colorado has undergone dramatic changes in recent years. In 2003, there were only nine online schools in Colorado, with a total pupil enrollment of 3248; 82% were white, 7% were socioeconomically disadvantaged (qualified for free or reduced price lunch), and 50% were elementary (K-5) students. By 2011, a smaller percentage of online students were white (61%), a much greater percentage were socioeconomically disadvantaged (38%), and more than half (52%) were high school (9-12) students (and only 27% were elementary students).



Learn more:

- To view the full reports or learn more about Online & Blended Learning in Colorado, visit us at: www.cde.state.co.us/onlinelearning
- Or contact Amanda Heiney, Senior Consultant in the Office of Online & Blended Learning, at heiney_a@cde.state.co.us

Characteristics and Perspectives of Colorado's Online Students – Key Findings & Recommendations

Key Findings

- Early reading proficiency is critical. Students who had not achieved proficiency in reading by 3rd grade had a high chance of never attaining proficiency.
 - Online schools less successfully identified struggling readers in grades K-3.
 - A greater percentage of 9th graders new to online schools were entering non-proficient as compared to the state average for all 9th grade students.
- Numerous transfers between schools are related to poor academic performance and a higher probability of students dropping out.
 - Online students were more mobile than their brick & mortar counterparts and had higher dropout rates.
- Many students who chose online schools were dissatisfied with their previous brick & mortar school and transferred out because of school culture and communication challenges.
- The majority of students and parents surveyed believe that online learning is a better fit for them than a brick & mortar school; however, many students continue to perform poorly academically in online, despite greater satisfaction.

Recommendations

- Online schools need to more accurately evaluate and diagnose their youngest students' reading levels.
- Given changing demographics, online schools need to modify the programs and services they offer in order to better meet the needs of the students they are enrolling.
- Excessive movement between schools should be avoided.
 - Push out policies by schools and districts are discouraged.
 - If a transfer is necessary, a long-term educational setting is preferable to short-term solutions.
- Parents and students need to be better educated about the realities of attending an online school.
- Colorado should consider a different funding model for both online and brick & mortar students that better accommodates increased mobility and competency-based pathways.

We would like to thank the following organizations for their contributions and support:

- Buechner Institute for Governance, University of Colorado Denver - www.spa.ucdenver.edu/BIG
- Colorado Legacy Foundation - colegacy.org
- Donnell-Kay Foundation - www.dkfoundation.org