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Single-District Virtual Ed. Seen Growing Fastest

The shift to greater local control means districts will have to take a hard look at how they evaluate virtual education

By [Katie Ash](#)

Single-district online learning programs were the fastest-growing sector of virtual learning in the United States in 2011. Whether it is to provide more options for students, keep more students from seeking virtual learning options outside the school district, or simply to move toward 21st-century teaching and learning, many districts are launching and sustaining their own virtual learning programs.

As districts move in this direction, they are taking a harder look at how they will evaluate their local models of virtual education, which is gaining popularity even though reviews on its effectiveness compared with that of more traditional approaches are still mixed.

"District administrators in close to half of all states know that they are losing students to online schools," says John Watson, the founder of the Evergreen Education Group, a Durango, Colo.-based organization that researches online learning, and an author of the ["Keeping Pace With K-12 Online Learning" report](#), which tracks annual trends in online learning.

As districts without virtual learning options lose students to online programs, they also lose per-pupil enrollment aid, siphoning precious dollars from district budgets.

In addition, Watson says, plenty of successful blended and virtual learning options are now out there, making district administrators more confident about taking the leap to online education.

"It's not a plausible response to say, 'It's not time. It's not proven yet,' " he says. "It's clear that online and blended learning can work, and there are examples of it working."

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