

Leading in an Era of Change: ON THE GROUND

How Districts and Schools Can Make the Most of Course Access

“The vision for online learning – whether in Texas, nationally or internationally – has the potential to open up experiences and options for students with a wide range of needs. But it’s important that programs be held to a high standard.”

- Jean Parmer, Plano, Texas Independent School District eSchool

How Districts Can Use Course Access

Course Access is a state-level policy that provides public school students with expanded course offerings across learning environments from diverse, accountable providers. These programs promise to offer students expanded curricular opportunities and alternatives that meet their unique learning needs. Participating students have the right to enroll in qualifying courses and earn full class credit for courses completed through the program. Though many courses are offered online, others may be delivered through live instruction and blended environments.

The Foundation for Excellence in Education’s Digital Learning Now initiative works closely with states seeking to develop, implement or improve Course Access programs. Since 2013, and in partnership with EducationCounsel, ExcelinEd has facilitated the gathering of leaders from Course Access states to explore policy steps ranging from ensuring quality providers to providing clear communication strategies and formalized actions to ease state collaboration. Lessons from these state discussions were captured in ExcelinEd’s 2014 whitepaper: “Leading in an Era of Change: Making the Most of State Course Access Programs.” The paper defined key policy issues guiding the development of new Course Access programs, highlighted implementation challenges faced by states and made recommendations for the creation of a new multi-state network.

Leading in an Era of Change: On the Ground profiles ten districts and charters in seven states utilizing Course Access or Course Access-like strategies to maximize the use of resources, better serve students and ensure districts are evolving with the needs of the 21st century student. Students take language courses from local universities, earn industry certification for workforce training and stay on course for graduation, even while pursuing time-intensive athletic or artistic activities. Taking place in small and large districts, rural and suburban, these cost-effective strategies harness technology to strengthen districts and offer new opportunities for students.

States highlighted are California, Florida, Louisiana, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Texas. Each profile includes:

- Context on the District (including key data on enrollment, demographic and graduation rates).
- Specific Student Need Served by the Program.
- The Story of the Program and Outcomes for Learners.
- Lessons for Other Districts and Charters.
 - *Offering students a broad and diverse set of courses.*
 - *Ensuring quality in content, instruction and support.*
 - *Stretching limited budgets.*



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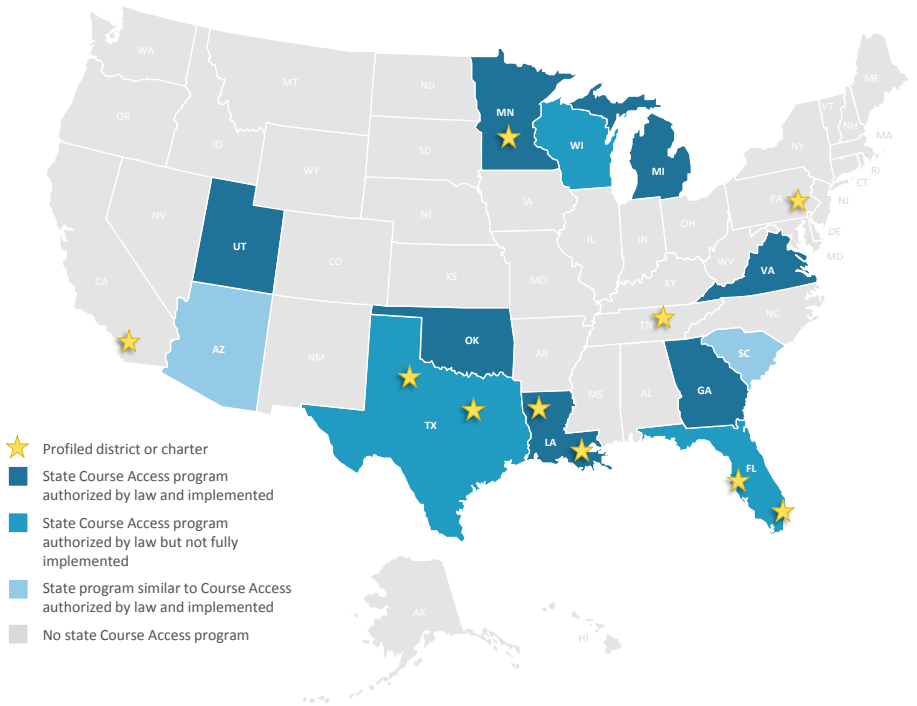


**Stretching
limited budgets.**



“Districts today have to think creatively about budgets, including how to address a growing array of student interests and needs in the most effective and efficient way possible. That requires you to think outside the four walls of your school and to consider other partners in the effort.”

- Patrice Pujol, Ascension Parish Superintendent, Louisiana



How Districts are Leveraging Course Access

Offering Hard-to-Staff Courses: With only 350 residents and 100 students, Guthrie (Texas) found it difficult and cost-prohibitive to offer high-quality courses for all subjects. Course Access is allowing Guthrie to offer courses like Spanish, not just to its students but also to surrounding districts.

Ensuring Meaningful Career and Technical Education and Workforce Training: Ascension Parish (Louisiana) recognized the need for credentialed, skilled workers in an expanding market, particularly for welders and electricians. Partnering with a local industry certification provider, the Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc., and utilizing the state’s Course Access program, Ascension found a cost-effective and efficient way to provide new career and technical education courses to its students.

Expanding Student Support and Scheduling Flexibility: Quakertown (Pennsylvania) is utilizing a blended program with expanded and flexible course options to customize instruction for its students and compete with other virtual options. While not part of a defined Course Access program, Quakertown is also building

its course offerings around the needs of students, and can offer examples to other states on how to leverage technology as well as careful implementation, including scheduling, data analysis and student counseling.

Recommendations for States Core Components of Effective Course Access Programs

- 1 Meaningful and rigorous state review of prospective providers and/or courses.
- 2 Strong monitoring systems.
- 3 Flexible and sustainable funding models.
- 4 Alignment with the state’s broader education systems.
- 5 Deliberate and sustained engagement with districts and schools.
- 6 Effective communication with students and parents.
- 7 Clearly defined student eligibility.

Digital Learning Now is an initiative of the [Foundation for Excellence in Education \(ExcelinEd\)](#) that works to advance state policies that will create a high-quality digital learning environment to better equip all students with the knowledge and skills to succeed in the 21st century. The policy framework stems from the belief that access to high-quality, customized learning experiences should be available to all students, unbounded by geography or artificial policy constraint.

EducationCounsel is a mission-based education consulting firm that combines experience in policy, strategy, law, and advocacy to drive significant improvements in the U.S. education system. We work at the local, state, federal, and national levels to develop and put into motion policy initiatives that close achievement gaps and lead to improved education outcomes from pre-K through college. EducationCounsel is an affiliate of Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough. In collaboration with former U. S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley, EducationCounsel was established by Arthur L. Coleman and Scott R. Palmer.