

Wisconsin eSchool Network

ENTITY TYPE: 501c3 consortium of school districts

DELIVERY MODE: Supplemental online, full-time and blended learning programs

GRADE LEVELS SERVED: 5–12

NUMBER OF COURSE ENROLLMENTS (2017–2018 FY):
41,252, supplemental and blended

INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF: Over 600 teachers employed at the local level

The Wisconsin eSchool Network (WEN) is one of the largest online learning consortia in the country, consisting of 28 partner school districts, including eight of the 11 largest districts in the state, serving over 220 schools. WEN supports partner districts of all sizes and program types. Districts choose to offer supplemental, full-time and/or blended learning options for students based on the needs and resources of the district. WEN had 41,252 online and blended course enrollments in FY 2017–18.

The Wisconsin eSchool Network was formally established as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 2012 after operating for several years as a less-formal confederation of districts. WEN is a membership-based organization with two access points: Invested Partnerships (governing partners) and Affiliate Partnership pathways. A third pathway via Wisconsin Virtual School is known as the Supplemental Pathway and is part of the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative that is explained below.

WEN provides cloud-based infrastructure for all members, including a course registration and management portal, learning management system, online content owned by WEN, licensed content from multiple vendors, infrastructure that allows partners to build local digital content, and professional learning curricula. WEN employs five full-time and several part-time staff that work with a board comprised of Invested Partners and other educators.

Invested Partner membership is designed for members with a comprehensive plan for online and blended learning that includes an emphasis on local autonomy and use of local teachers and staff. The 15 Invested Partners make a significant one-time investment that provides the lowest operating expenses of any pathway and a voting seat on the WEN board of directors. Invested Partners are building scalable digital learning programs to support growing online enrollments, increased use of student devices on campus and greater integration of digital content and instruction in the classroom. One of the most powerful benefits WEN affords Invested Partners is the opportunity for teachers and staff to collaborate with peers facing the same challenges and implementation issues. Invested Partners also contribute to the direction of online learning practice and policy at the state and local level.

Many Invested Partners have developed virtual charter schools that supply the online learning needs of the district as well (in some cases) as enrolling students from across the state, while others have integrated online learning services into the schools in the district. Some focus on building local teacher capacity, while others use WEN for teaching the majority of the online enrollments. Some focus entirely on resident students while others embrace a philosophy of providing access to online learning for students across Wisconsin. Regardless of approach, size or community composition, all share a long-term commitment to grow and implement digital learning programs rooted in local autonomy.

Affiliate Partner membership is appropriate for districts ready to take on more control and ownership of their program as they become members in the WEN consortium. The 13 Affiliate Partner districts have access to WEN's online course catalog, licensed teachers, technology tools, student orientation courses and professional learning while benefitting from lower cost, scalable enrollment fees. The Affiliate membership allows districts to retain a high degree of local control, using a combination of local instructors with online teachers from Network partners as needed.

Most of WEN's Affiliate district members are small to medium-sized school districts, ranging from less than 1,000 students to nearly 7,000 students. A few have virtual charter schools or consortia that serve multiple districts. Although they are diverse in size, geography, community composition, and stage of development of their online learning programs, most Affiliates have or are in the process of developing cohesive and comprehensive online learning plans.

The **Supplemental Pathway** appeals to districts that wish to offer online courses to their students. It offers a high level of access to online courses and support through Wisconsin Virtual School (WVS) without the need for formal membership in WEN and without the need to build online learning capacity locally. It is a pay as you go option to add online courses to existing middle or high school curriculum with no annual fees, contracts or memberships. WVS is the primary provider of supplemental online courses for the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative (WDLC).

WEN and the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative

WEN is a partner in the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative (WDLC), in collaboration with Wisconsin Virtual School and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. As a statewide effort, WDLC shares knowledge and resources with K-12 schools, districts, and agencies that want to start or improve their online and blended learning practice. WDLC offers planning strategies focusing on quality, connections to implementation solutions, and peer-led learning opportunities that empower schools and districts to meet a wide array of learner needs, providing choice, flexibility, and instructional support. Educational leaders—no matter where they are on the online and blended learning spectrum—can access proven tools, resources and strategies, gain better understanding of best practices, and connect with other educators through peer-led professional learning events.

WDLC has three focus areas: planning, implementation, and quality. In each of these areas WEN works with local, state, and national experts to elevate quality in the courses offered, online instruction and program operations. WEN collects and synthesizes strategies, resources, and national expertise from the field into a single resource (<https://www.widlcollab.org/case-studies/>). This work is aimed at elevating quality, best practice, and continuous improvement in the field.

The ability for schools and districts to offer students choice, flexibility, and instructional support, on a sustainable and equitable basis, is a common vision among WEN members. By pooling the collective knowledge and resources of partner districts, WEN addresses practices that will enable leadership to ensure that all Wisconsin learners have access to high-quality learning opportunities, and to strive to leverage online and blended learning for academic and career readiness.

The WDLC model of providing online and blended learning courses through a collaboration of partner organizations guided by school districts is unusual compared to most other digital learning models. This model allows districts to invest in digital learning at different levels, and to build different types of programs—supplemental, full-time and blended—based on the needs of the district.

Professional Learning Leading to Transformational Instructional Models

Wisconsin eSchool Network is working with the nationally recognized Ready to Blend program to promote continued professional learning and access to transformational tools that assist partner's efforts to grow and develop blended and personalized learning approaches. WEN recognized a critical need to take the lead in supporting Wisconsin schools with a solid understanding of blended learning and the various models and implementation strategies. Beginning in 2015 with a partner-wide study of the book "Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools" and culminating the year with the Blended Learning Summit in February 2016, this partnership is expanding upon the momentum already established. Additional workshops and professional learning programs has resulted in approximately 45 certified Ready to Blend educators, and over 450 teachers and administrators trained in blended learning approaches, taking new skills and knowledge back to their schools and districts to improve the quality of online and blended learning locally.