The Georgia Virtual (GaV) program was created by legislation in 2005 to provide supplemental online courses and related services to schools and districts across the state. GaV served 31,066 students with 69,907 course enrollments in SY 2016–17, including credit recovery. GaV also provides more than 100 online courses as open educational resources at no cost to Georgia districts. Like most other state virtual schools, Georgia Virtual (GaV) is not a “school” in the traditional sense. It does not issue credits or grant diplomas, but rather works with the school districts to provide online courses and teachers, and record student grades for transcription and issuance by the school. GaV supplemental courses may be part of a student’s regularly scheduled school day or outside of the school day, taken on the student’s own time outside of the school building.

When initially established by the legislature, in 2005 Georgia Virtual operated as part of the Georgia Department of Education, Office of Technology Services Division. GaVS was moved to its current location in the Office of Teaching and Learning in 2016 for better alignment as a curricular program. In 2012, the Georgia legislature passed SB289 that significantly affected all school districts in Georgia and included the following provisions:

- All students in grades 9–12 may enroll in online courses in GaV without permission of the student's home district, "regardless of whether the school in which the student is enrolled offers the same course." The limit of one GaV course per semester per student was eliminated.
- All districts must provide written information on both part- and full-time online learning options to parents of all students in grades 3–12.
- SB289 also prohibited local school boards from enacting policies to keep students from taking online classes during the school day, and required that publishers of textbooks recommended by the State Board of Education (SBE) provide electronic versions of such textbooks.

**Funding and cost to districts**

GaV funding changed with SB289 (2012). Prior to 2012, GaV was funded from a state appropriation based on a portion of student FTE. Funds were diverted from the student’s home district to GaV, which received the equivalent of the district’s FTE portion for that online course enrollment. The state then used those funds to pay for GaV total operating budget. School districts had the ability to disallow a local student from taking a GaV course under this old funding formula.

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With SB289 GaV now receives a state appropriation specifically for operations (about $3M) and a course fee not to exceed $250 per student per semester course, paid by the school district. GaV invoices districts monthly, and districts pay GaV directly. Georgia students are no longer limited in the number of courses they may take from GaV in a year, however, a district is not required to fund more than six credits per student per year. Students may take GaV courses in excess of six credit hours at the $250 tuition rate if paid for by the parent.

The change in funding models created greater demand for GaV courses. Enrollments grew from 33,041 during the 2013–14 SY to 52,290 in 2014–15.

**Instructional model and course development**

Twenty-four full-time and 206 adjunct teachers are employed by Georgia Virtual, with comparable duties and responsibilities in regards to online instruction. Some full-time teachers participate in building a new courses or act as instructional leads. These teachers receive a reduction in students assigned to the teacher while the additional work is being performed.

Georgia Virtual’s instructors are all highly qualified teachers, specially trained to teach in the online learning environment. Each of its online instructors must successfully complete a virtual training course, addressing the pedagogy of online learning, as well as the policies and procedures specific to Georgia Virtual. Once training is complete the new online teacher is mentored on a daily basis by an experienced online instructor for one-semester. A second semester of support is provided for the teachers with access to the mentor as needed rather than everyday direction. New teachers also have a monthly evaluation during the first year conducted by a Quality Assurance Specialist (QAS). GaV employs five QAS, all of whom are educators certified in evaluating teachers. New teachers begin with less than a full load of students. The number of students is increased over the first year until the teacher reaches full capacity. In addition, Advanced Placement (AP) instructors are required to successfully complete authorized AP training before teaching GaV’s AP courses. This extensive training and support is designed to insure the quality and consistency of online instruction.

Georgia Virtual develops all of its online courses and makes them available to anyone as open educational resources (OER) without assessments and content updating. Georgia districts are allowed capture the course in its entirety and move them to their own server for district use.

The vast majority of the GaV course catalog is available as OER, although a few are eliminated because of licensing or copyright retractions.

Courses are developed by a team, consisting of a GaV Content Development Specialist, a highly-qualified teacher acting as a subject matter expert (SME) and a course reviewer. All Content Development Specialists have a minimum of seven years experience in building online courses. A typical course takes approximately 10 months to develop, review and finalize, usually from August to May. All courses are reviewed to ensure maximum accessibility and functionality.

**Student data and demographics**

Georgia Virtual has experienced consistent growth over the past five years, growing from 52,290 course enrollments in 2014–15 to a total enrollment of 69,907 during the 2016–17 FY. The bulk of the course
enrollments, about 85%, were students in grades 9–12. A limited number of state-funded seats are offered to homeschooled and private students on a first-come, first serve basis, until the funding is exhausted.

Georgia Virtual has about 3,000 students a year take online Advanced Placement courses. GaV students traditionally have a better pass rate (a score of three or higher, according to GaV) on the AP exams than the state and national averages. The table below compares the pass rates of GaV students to those across Georgia and the U.S. from 2014–2017.2

<table>
<thead>
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<th>2017</th>
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<th>2014</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>57.0%</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) designated GaV as its leading partner in implementing a statewide credit recovery program that had about 6,700 course enrollments as of July 2010, but has grown to nearly 40,000 during the 2016–17 FY. GaV supplies an online, teacher-less program where students progress on their own, with the program administered by the participating school districts. Approximately 25 credit recovery course titles are available. Over 21,000 students have earned their diplomas after taking GaV credit recovery courses.

Georgia Virtual has more course enrollments in the core areas of ELA, math, social studies and science (62%) as compared with the national average (52%) of state virtual schools.3 It also has a significantly higher percentage of course enrollments in World Languages than the national average of state virtual schools - 25% at GaV versus 13%. The program offers courses in six World Languages, some through four grade levels and Advanced Placement.

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2  http://www.gavirtualschool.org/About/StatisticsReports.aspx. The data don’t show that GaV students are representative of students statewide or nationwide in terms of academic achievement, and therefore GaV does not suggest that it is responsible for students in its courses performing better than state and national averages. Still, the data suggest that the GaV online AP courses are roughly the same as face-to-face AP courses in terms of student outcomes.

3  The percentage of course enrollments by subject area does not include enrollments in credit recovery courses.
Health and Fitness is a required course in Georgia. GaV has a large enrollment in the course, particularly during the summer.

GaV student enrollment in the 2016-17 SY was 41% male and 59% female, a significant contrast to the state demographic of 51% male and 49% female in grades 6–12. There are also significant differences in the student demographic between GaV in grades 6–12 and the general Georgia student population in the same grades.

Approximately 19% of GaV students are gifted and 13% are served by the special education team.