

EDUCATION WEEK

Digital Education

Tech Topics and Trends in K-12

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Virtual Ed. Budget Battles and Graduations

[According to this AP article](#), there's trouble brewing in Indiana for virtual school advocates. Virtual school supporters scored a victory when Gov. Mitch Daniels, a Republican, included \$7 million in his two-year budget proposal to create a state-led online education program and help fund pre-existing cyber schools.

But democrats in the state's House argue that it's irresponsible to set aside money for schools that don't even exist yet when the brick-and-mortar schools that do exist are facing budget cuts.

The governor's budget proposal includes an annual 2 percent increase for traditional public schools, but those numbers are based heavily on federal stimulus money, which democrats argue should not be included in the budget.

And in other virtual ed. news, from a state that has led the way, in many respects, for online education in the U.S.:

A group of graduates from the Kaplan College Preparatory School, a private virtual school, [recently gathered from across the nation in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., to receive their diplomas](#). The ceremony was the first time that many of the students had met each other face-to-face.

Although it was a small gathering—only 16 of the 65 graduates made it to Ft. Lauderdale—I think having an in-person graduation ceremony speaks to the growing importance of fostering a sense of community in virtual schools. In fact, one of the students in attendance, who left virtual education for a year to join a traditional public school, and then decided he wasn't missing anything and came back

to the Kaplan College Preparatory School, noted that online ed. students have to be *even more socially adept* than students attending brick-and-mortar schools because "you have to think outside of the box here to make friends."

I'm not sure if making friends online vs. in-person requires *more* social skills, but certainly it brings different social elements into play. Either way, it's clear from both these articles that virtual schools are gaining popularity and presence in mainstream education.

EDIT: An earlier version of this blog post mistakenly identified the state in the first AP story as Illinois. It has since been changed to the correct state—Indiana.

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