PROMISING PRACTICES
IN ONLINE LEARNING

Policy and Funding Frameworks for Online Learning

Written by
John Watson and Butch Gemin
Evergreen Consulting Associates

July 2009

iNACOL
International Association for K-12 Online Learning

Policy and Funding Frameworks for Online Learning

In at least 44 states across the country, students are logging in to learn at all times of the day and night—accessing courses they might otherwise be unable to take, interacting with students they might otherwise never know, and working with highly qualified teachers they otherwise could not access. In these and countless other ways, online learning provides new and remarkable educational opportunities and student outcomes.

While the viability and popularity of online learning is gaining widespread acceptance, the policy needed to support its growth is lagging. The continued success and sustained growth of online learning requires state education policy frameworks to be adjusted. The issues are varied and sometimes complex, but as we delve into them, what emerges is quite interesting: by creating frameworks for online learning policy development, exciting possibilities arise for positive policy change that promotes reform and benefits education as a whole.

To lay the groundwork, though, it might be useful to consider why online learning is even worth the trouble. We'll also consider the kind of policy problems that have arisen as online learning has taken hold. What do strong policy and funding frameworks look like, and what specific benefits do they afford? Finally, which online learning policy and funding structures hold promise for all modes of learning?

Online Learning Policy Challenges

Online learning continues to grow rapidly every year, with programs and states reporting annual growth rates of 15% to 50%. Yet many state policies are woefully behind this rapid growth. One typical policy with wide-ranging implications, for instance, is the way in which funding is linked to student attendance. Most states predicate student counts on the idea that the student is in a physical classroom and can be counted in a census-like fashion. In the online world, students are most often not in a physical classroom, and therefore the very language in such census exercises does not fit virtual learning, resulting in a lack of funding for online programs or the need to change accounting practices.

Education codes like this envision physical spaces: teachers at chalkboards in the front of a room; students at desks in schools they reach on yellow school buses; and buildings with lunchrooms,

libraries, and gyms. Indeed, education policy often addresses issues far from the subject of actual learning. Very little policy is tied directly to student achievement, and such policies are behind today's learning realities.

Online learning creates the challenge to update policy to address a new and exciting form of learning. At the same time, it presents the opportunity to upgrade policy to shift the focus to student achievement instead of inefficient proxies, such as seat time, or measures based solely on inputs, such as state content standards.

Why Online Learning is Worth the Effort

Online learning presents exciting promise to students, which many educators now understand and support. Still, some policymakers may still not understand its value, and a quick review of what virtual learning offers our students is appropriate.

Online learning is—

Largely public and democratically accessible: Of the estimated million enrollments in online learning, most are within a public education framework. Online learning is a remarkable opportunity for students to access high quality courseware and first-rate teachers—regardless of location or socio-economic status.

Academically and demographically blind: Gone are the days when it was assumed online learning was only for gifted students. Today, many students who struggle in traditional classrooms find that they fare better online. You'll find successful learners in online ESOL and reading courses and in programs specifically for at-risk students. Why? In a word: flexibility. Online learning allows students to choose when, where, and at what pace they want to learn, so personalization is possible in ways that, before now, few educators or students could imagine.

Engaging: The National Survey of Student Engagement[1] concluded that online teachers and course developers, compared to traditional educational approaches, may be more intentional about engaging students with themselves, with one another, and with the content precisely *because* they are online. Practitioners and developers of online learning tools are capitalizing on Web 2.0 tools and emerging approaches such as games and other interactive technologies to assist in the process of driving students into higher level thinking processes. For example, one game-based online course allows students capture their thought processes as they learn and visually manipulate their snippets of learning throughout multiple units of study, allowing them to make motivating connections, construct deeper and more varied learning paths, and extract significant meaning from the content.

Social: It is a myth that students in online programs are socially handicapped. While many online students take the bulk of their courses through traditional venues, even students who take all classes online are typically involved in sports, clubs, lessons, churches, and community events. In fact, sports competitors or performers, for example, may choose online learning because it allows them to go further in their training or competition than the restrictive calendar and day-to-day schedule of

[1] *The National Survey of Student Engagement*, Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2008

traditional classrooms. Virtual schools have also worked intentionally to include socialization through online conferencing, meet-ups, field trips, clubs, and social gatherings. In addition, the online environment itself also has a way of engaging students who might otherwise be reluctant. Shy students, for instance, often find it easier to participate online, and the peer pressure that so often exists in classrooms is greatly reduced online.

Rigorous: Students who take an online course with the expectation that it will be easier quickly realize their mistake. Well-designed online courses are not condensed or easier versions of regular courses. They cover the same topics, and are aligned to the same state content standards, as all public school courses in the state. They require active participation and operate under supervision of state-certified teachers. They require students to take state assessments and to demonstrate mastery of topics. At the same time, because of the online interactions, games, teleconferences, and other elements, students may more readily process information in this environment.

Highly teacher-facilitated: While technology is clearly a big component of online learning, virtual schools are still centered on teaching and learning, which means teachers are far more important to students than the technology. The technology facilitates communication between teachers and students, delivery of content, assessment, and other key elements of education. It is still critical that the teacher possess the interpersonal skills that allow for a strong teacher-student working relationship. The relationship between student achievement and teacher quality, expectations, and care is well documented. The best online programs are built solidly on these principles, while the technology provides the necessary "invisible" support.

Transformative: Teachers who transition to online instruction often become the biggest evangelists for the medium because of the level of individualization in online learning. For the first time, teachers can truly help each student reach a level of mastery, rather than forcing students to move ahead when they aren't ready, simply because the calendar dictates it. Indeed, the ability of online classes and schools to personalize learning is nothing short of transformative for all of public education.

Dimensions of Online Programs: Understanding the significance for policymaking

In order to fully grasp the impact of poor or non-existent policies, it is important to understand the various dimensions of online learning. Programs vary widely in comprehensiveness, reach, delivery methods, locus of control, and more.

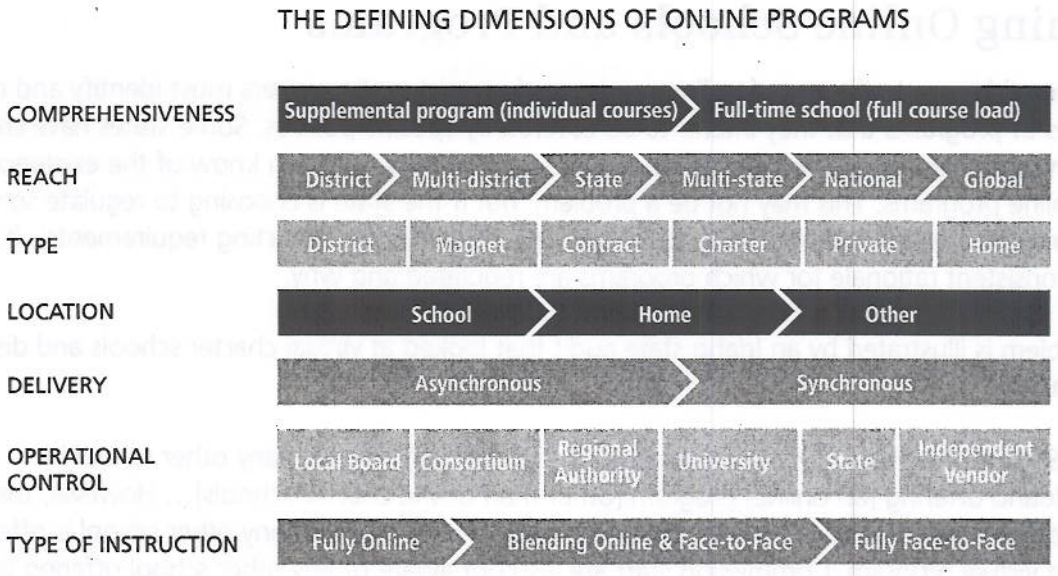


Figure 1: Defining dimensions of online programs. Figure adapted from Gregg Vanourek, *A Primer on Virtual Charter Schools: Mapping the Electronic Frontier,* Issue Brief for National Association of Charter School Authorizers, August 2006

Of the dimensions shown in Figure 1, four are particularly pertinent to policy issues:

- **Comprehensiveness:** Although programs may provide both full-time and supplemental options, most offer primarily one or the other. The way in which a program is funded and regulated rests largely on this variable because in most cases, supplemental programs do not directly generate funding based on the state education funding formula, while students enrolled in full-time online schools usually do.
- **Reach:** Several states draw a distinction between online programs that primarily serve students in their own districts, and programs that serve students across multiple districts, the entire state—or even beyond. Because funding for K-12 education in the United States has historically been structured around local control, education and policy leaders have never had to deal with questions like, "Who pays for the teacher's salary if he or she teaches from another district or even another state?" or "Who gets the state's per-pupil funding allotment—the district, the virtual learning provider, or some combination?" Questions that deal with reach typically center on issues such as teacher certification and reciprocity, variations in graduation requirements, portability of credits, meeting state standards and accreditation requirements.
- **Blended learning:** Schools may deliver instruction online, face-to-face, or in some kind of combination. An increasing number of schools are blending online and face-to-face learning, with implications for policymaking related to the location and financing of physical facilities, attendance, requirements for teachers, etc.
- **Location:** Since the beauty of online learning is directly related to its "any time, any place" flexibility, it is important to rethink policy as relates to attendance at a physical school. The establishment of physical facilities that might serve multiple districts also presents policy challenges related to funding, supervision of instruction, understanding who is ultimately responsible for student grades and progression, graduation requirements, and more.

Defining Online Schools and Programs

Given the wide range of types of online programs that exist, policymakers must identify and define the types of programs that they intend to be covered by specific policies. Some states have created requirements for some online schools but not others, and may not even know of the existence of some online programs. This may not be a problem, but if the state is choosing to regulate some online programs and not others (even if the regulations are simply reporting requirements), it should have a consistent rationale for which programs are regulated and why.

The problem is illustrated by an Idaho state audit that looked at virtual charter schools and district programs:

> Staff at the [Idaho] Department of Education are not aware of any other school in Idaho offering [an online] program [other than online charter schools]... However, the department does not have a process for determining whether any other school is offering a virtual program. Commission staff are also not aware of any other school offering virtual programs, but stated they would only be aware of a virtual program offered at a school they authorized...[2]

The Idaho legislature responded, in part, by creating a legal definition of virtual schools as "... a school that delivers a full-time, sequential program of synchronous and/or asynchronous instruction primarily through the use of technology via the Internet in a distributed environment."[3]

Some states define the key elements of an online program as 1) students and teachers are geographically separated, and 2) instruction takes place using the Internet or other distributed technologies. For example, Wisconsin's Act 222 defines a virtual charter school as: "[A] charter school... in which all or a portion of the instruction is provided through... the Internet, and the pupils enrolled in and instructional staff employed by the school are geographically remote from each other."[4]

The Texas legislation that created the Virtual School Network provides a robust definition of "electronic courses" as courses in which:

1. Instruction and content are delivered primarily over the Internet;
2. A student and teacher are in different locations for a majority of the student's instructional period;
3. Most instructional activities take place in an online environment;
4. The online instructional activities are integral to the academic program;
5. Extensive communication between a student and a teacher and among students is emphasized; and
6. A student is not required to be located on the physical premises of a school district or open-enrollment charter school.[5]

---

[2] http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/ope/publications/reports/r0702.pdf
[3] 2008 Idaho House Bill 423, http://www3.state.id.us/oasis/2008/H0423.html
[4] http://www.legis.state.wi.us/2007/data/acts/07Act222.pdf
[5] http://www.legis.state.tx.us/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=80R&Bill=SB1788

The "Hybrid" Dilemma

The growth of the use of online resources in physical schools requires that policymakers not create policies that cover more schools than intended. Until recently, questions about how to define blended vs. online learning have not been clearly addressed. At what point does a course switch from being blended to online? What percentage of online learning marks the threshold that triggers online learning policy? Recent research and legislation have revealed the need to distinguish between schools that are 1) using the online environment to an extent that they should be subject to online policies, and 2) those schools that may be using the online environment, but not at this threshold level.

Because there is a continuum between programs that are fully Internet-based and operate with students and teachers at a distance and programs that are fully face-to-face, it is especially difficult to define the difference and set appropriate policy. Some state policies, such as in Indiana, define online or virtual schools based on a percentage of instruction delivered online (for example, less than 50% for virtual charter schools in Indiana). Tennessee's online learning law, in contrast, states that virtual schools are those that provide a "significant portion" of instruction online, which leaves open to interpretation what a "significant" amount of instruction means.

The question of how to determine the percentage of content or instruction delivered online remains. If a student is reading paper-based text at a distance from the teacher, does this qualify as "online"? The answer seems to be "no," but if so, this raises questions about situations in which a student reads text on a computer screen. Does the instruction count as online? What if she prints out the text and reads it offline—does that mean the instruction is not considered online? This issue is particularly challenging in lower grade levels, where students typically spend less time working online than their high school counterparts, and instead may be reading print materials, writing in a journal, or calculating math problems in a workbook. If these activities are assigned and graded by an online teacher, do these activities count as time online? The issues and questions are complex, so they've often been left unaddressed and, often, not even understood.

One approach to ensuring that physical classrooms using online resources are not covered by online learning policies is to explicitly exempt blended learning. Florida's 2008 law takes this tack, stating: "A provider of digital or online content or curriculum that is used to supplement the instruction of students who are not enrolled in a virtual instruction program... is not required to meet the requirements of this section." In this case, "this section" refers to the stipulations given to providers that touch on teacher certification, location of offices within the state, accreditation procedures, and other operational issues.

First Principles

With so many issues and variables to consider, policymakers may benefit from establishing a set of first principles to guide debate and decisions. A set of foundational ideas may provide a touchstone for the potentially complex and heated debates that are likely to follow. Such a set of guiding statements might start with the commitment that all policy decisions should be made with the best interests of students in mind, and it may include ideas such as these that were established by the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL), or those of the Trujillo Commission, which was established to assist policymakers in Colorado to respond to the state's audit of online schools. Quality online learning policy should:

- Begin with the premise that public education should include a variety of high quality learning options, including online learning
- Include both full-time and supplemental online opportunities
- Provide equal access to all students
- Facilitate a range of online learning opportunities
- Provide fair and sensible funding that allows online learning to expand with demand while maintaining state-of-the-art quality
- Provide reasonable oversight and reporting requirements to ensure quality
- Allow for thoughtful teacher licensure requirements so that students benefit from the best online instructors
- Advocate for valid research to ensure effective, research-based instructional and curricular practices
- Seek a balance between simultaneously providing oversight and ensuring a responsive ongoing policy refinement process to allow policy development to keep pace with emerging virtual learning developments
- Maintain teachers as the expert leaders and facilitators of learning, giving them responsibility for overseeing and managing student learning, and for ensuring academic progress and accountability
- Encourage and facilitate the involvement of parents, guardians, and mentors to increase accountability and support in the learning process
- Require high quality curricula, aligned with state and applicable district standards
- Address existing policies that do not fit or that hinder online learning progress and accessibility, including removing enrollment caps and artificial limits restricting student access to online courses
- Allow learning to transcend time- and place-related requirements and focus, instead, on successful student achievement
- Look for opportunities to address policy issues that may provide improvement or address gaps across all modes of education delivery[6]

Policymakers may add to the above list, eliminating or changing wording or emphasis. The list is not definitive, but creating a set of principles is a critically important first step.

[6] These statements are adapted from the first principles identified by the Trujillo Commission, whose report is available at http://inacol.org/resources/docs/TrujilloCommissionOnlineEducationFinalReport-2-15-2007.pdf, and from Every Student's Right to Online Learning Opportunity, published by the Advocacy and Issues Committee of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning.

Legislative and Policy Themes

Once the first principles are established, they can be applied to the many issues that policymakers must address. This section divides online learning policy issues into five broad areas: funding, locus of control, operations and oversight, evaluation and reporting, and "other," including "policies to avoid." Most of the policies discussed below are state-level. The state is the key policy level for online learning because there is little national legislation that affects online learning (beyond the ways in which No Child Left Behind impacts all public schools), and the majority of large and influential online programs operate above a district level.

Specific examples are provided for some of the policy issues, highlighting decisions made by some states in each area of policy. These examples are not comprehensive but are meant to be illustrative.

Funding

Funding is the single most important policy issue in online learning. Online schools are full-service public schools with many of the same costs as their brick-and-mortar counterparts, including salaries, benefits, initial training, and ongoing staff development. Online programs do not incur the same level of facilities and transportation costs as traditional districts, but they have significant technological components, with associated costs for hardware, bandwidth, and the like, which are critical to supporting the teaching and learning process. In addition, other costs, such as teacher travel for face-to-face training, telephone technology, and technical support, must be considered. Funding for online schools and, indeed for all learning, should facilitate quality learning while allowing for ongoing investment in research and innovation. A few states have elements of funding models that might be used by other states as a starting point in crafting their own funding models, including Florida, Idaho, Ohio, and Wyoming.

Few studies have compared the cost of online schools to traditional schools; those that have been done suggest that the cost of educating a student in an online environment is about the same as educating the same student in a brick-and-mortar school. Key considerations in funding of online programs include:

Amount of funding

Online schools should be funded within the range of brick-and-mortar school operating costs in each state. The study by school finance consulting group Augenblick, Palaich and Associates concluded, "The operating costs of online programs are about the same as the operating costs of a regular brick-and-mortar school."[7]

For online schools that draw students from across the entire state, some argue that a single online base funding level (not including additional funding for special needs and similar student-specific situations) should be established within the range of brick-and-mortar school operating costs. Some states are considering a similar approach for all public schools, while others counter that this standardized approach doesn't properly account for the costs of educating students from diverse communities.

[7] Costs and Funding of Virtual Schools, Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc. 2006

Kansas policy states, "...for each school year that a school district has a virtual school, the district is entitled to Virtual School State Aid. Virtual School State Aid is calculated by multiplying the number of full-time equivalent pupils enrolled in virtual school times 105.0 percent of the unweighted Base State Aid per Pupil (BSAPP)."*

* http://skyways.lib.ks.us/ksleg/KLRD/2008ConfCommRpts/ccrb669_001_23.pdf

Accounting and Reporting

Accounting and reporting should be freed from seat time and census dates. A common alternative is to fund based on equivalencies (i.e., the online course is deemed to be equivalent to the face-to-face course and is funded at the same level.)

States that fund schools based on one or two census dates should consider using an alternative for online schools, to avoid the possibility of a student switching districts right before or after the count day and creating a situation where the district receiving funding for the student is not the district that does most of the teaching of that student. In fact, the census date approach is a prime example of a policy that bases funding on a variable completely unrelated to student achievement and therefore should be reconsidered for all modes of education—not just for online learning. As it is, funding is provided in relation to something that has no bearing whatsoever on student achievement.

An innovative option is to fund students based on outcomes. States that fund based on successful completion find that having defined benchmarks or milestones for incremental completion (for example, 50% and 100% complete) provides a more rational and predictable approach than "all or nothing."

The Florida Virtual School (FLVS) is an example of outcome-based funding, as the school does not receive funding until students successfully complete each course segment. Julie Young, FLVS CEO, notes,

> "In our early days of development, we were highly influenced by a 1992 SCANS report [Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills]. One quote we've returned to over and again says, 'In our current system, time is the constant and achievement the variable. We have it backwards. Achievement should be the constant and time the variable.' As we continue to evolve, we keep this central focus on achievement as our guidepost for development."

In Michigan, the State Superintendent has provided 14 public school districts and public school academies (out of 838) with "seat time waivers" that allow a certain portion of the student population to take online courses in a "full time" status.*

* http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/PA_212_of_2008_-_cyber_school_report_both_documents_v2_270919_7.pdf

Student Participation Requirements

If a state shifts funding to be based on outcomes, the issue of non-participation or truancy may come up because public schools are expected to know the status of their students. State law may set requirements for communications from students in order to make sure that they are actively participating in the online school.

EXAMPLES FROM THE STATES

Under Wisconsin's 222 (passed in 2008), "if a student fails to respond appropriately to a school assignment or directive from instructional staff within five school days, the virtual school must notify the student's parent or guardian. If a student fails to participate three times in a semester, he or she may be transferred to another school or program."*

* Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, Legislative Brief 08–6 May 2008 VIRTUAL CHARTER SCHOOLS

From Line-Item to Sustainable

State-led supplemental programs, which have traditionally been funded through line-item state appropriations, should be shifted to a sustainable funding source. A study by the Southern Regional Education Board estimated that a state virtual school needs $4 million in funding for start-up and operational costs to serve 5,000 one-semester enrollments.[8] While the state legislature may find it cost-effective to fund start-up and early operating costs through appropriations, ultimately these programs can only meet growing demand if they are integrated into the regular per-pupil funding formula on a fractional or formula basis.[9]

EXAMPLES FROM THE STATES

The 2007 Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee of the Idaho Legislature approved a funding formula that allows the Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA) to grow, predict, and plan for the future. IDLA is funded by a per-enrollment formula and a base appropriation, then adds in course registration fees and an additional base amount for every 5,000 course registrations. IDLA's funding is based on this formula, so it is automatically funded from the dollars appropriated for public schools, but it does not compete for per pupil funding.

Locus of Control

Locus of control entails at least two issues:

1. At what level (district, state, charter, other) is online learning provided?
2. Can students and parents choose both supplemental and full-time online learning options?

Full-time online schools are often charter schools, but in some states such as Washington and Colorado, multi-district programs that are not charters offer a full online course load. Supplemental

[8] Southern Regional Education Board, 2006, Cost Guidelines for State Virtual Schools
[9] See for example the 2001 study by The CNA Corporation, Who Should Fund Virtual Schools, available at http://www.cna.org/documents/VirtualSchools.pdf

programs are often a state virtual school (such as in Michigan, Kentucky, Georgia, Florida, and other states), but in a few states, districts offer supplemental programs. Regardless of the types of entities offering online opportunities, the key considerations are:

1. Are students informed about online courses and schools?
2. Do students have the right to choose an online course or school, regardless of where they live? Alternatively, does the student's home district have the right to tell a student that the online school or course is not available to him or her?

States with the most growth in online learning are those that allow students to cross district lines and enroll in the state virtual school or a full-time online school operated by another district or charter school. This open enrollment allows online schools to achieve economy of scale and, most importantly, provides students the opportunity to access the school option that best meets their needs. Relatively few districts are large enough to sustain a full-time online school on their own at this point.

EXAMPLES FROM THE STATES

The legislatures in Colorado (in 2007) and Wisconsin (in 2008) affirmed their support of online programs, including full-time programs that draw students from across the state, in laws that were passed after 1) a state audit of online programs (in Colorado) and 2) a lawsuit that resulted in a judgment that would have closed online schools in Wisconsin, if the legislature had not intervened by updating legislative language. In Colorado, funding for most students in physical schools varies by district, but all online students are funded at the same level (the state minimum). State education agencies and legislatures in Minnesota, Kansas, Pennsylvania, and Washington, among other states—all of which have substantial numbers of full-time online schools—have policies that support these schools. In Florida, students across the state enjoy a statutory right to choose online courses when these courses best meet the learning need. Florida K-20 Education Code (s.1002.20) states: "Parents of public school students may seek whatever public school choice options that are applicable to their students and are available... [including]... the Florida Virtual School."

Operations and Oversight

While operations of online schools is not a primary policy issue, it can become one if states create operational requirements for online schools, as some have done, that go beyond standard requirements for all public schools, such as the requirement that online courses meet state content standards, and that teachers be licensed. Online school operations should not be subject to state micromanagement that threatens flexibility and innovation, but provisions specific to online learning may be appropriate.

In addition to operational issues, online schools often challenge states' oversight mechanisms. While full-time online schools are usually subject to the same provisions under NCLB as all public schools, the ways in which these provisions are enacted may not easily account for online schools. There are a number of issues related to oversight that need to be addressed. Following is an explanation of some key operational issues.

Professional Development

Teachers often say that teaching online is very different from teaching in a physical classroom, and many online schools (but not many pre-service programs) provide specific professional development to help teachers make the transition. At the most basic level, teachers benefit tremendously from training that provides the necessary technical skills for communicating online, but more importantly they benefit from specific training in online pedagogy. Some states now mandate that online schools offer and/or require professional development in online teaching strategies.

EXAMPLES FROM THE STATES

Wisconsin's 2008 online learning bill requires that as of July 1, 2010, public or charter online teachers must have completed at least 30 hours of professional development specific to online teaching. South Dakota requires that distance learning instructional staff must annually demonstrate proficiency in instruction using the distance learning provider's delivery system. Hawaii's 2008 online learning law calls for developing and establishing "a mentoring and training program for online teachers, collaborating with the University of Hawaii Department of Educational Technology as needed." The law also calls for the establishment of "an online training program to increase the number of highly qualified teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals."

Teaching Across Boundaries

Many policymakers recognize that online learning offers the opportunity to bring highly-qualified teachers to rural areas and other underserved regions within their states; this is one of the drivers behind the proliferation of state virtual schools. However, very few states have made the next logical observation that online teachers should not be restricted to teaching within state lines. While state content standards vary in some subjects, for many topics such as algebra there is simply not much variation by state. States could easily balance the supply of highly qualified teachers by creating reciprocity with other states—recognizing each other's certification of qualified online teachers. The result would be increased access for students who otherwise might not be able to easily take a course in a subject such as physics, chemistry, or a foreign language—online or otherwise. Although teacher reciprocity is found in some form in 37 states,[10] in most cases it requires that teachers take steps to obtain a license in the state in which they wish to teach and therefore does not properly address the needs of online teachers and the students they would serve.

EXAMPLES FROM THE STATES

Oklahoma is one of the few states in which teachers of online courses may be certified in another state, or may be a faculty member at a postsecondary institution. In North Dakota, "all teachers... meet or exceed the qualifications and licensure requirements placed on the teachers by the state in which the course originates."*

* North Dakota House Bill 1491, passed in 2007

[10] Online Learning Policy and Practice Survey: A Survey of the States from Center for Digital Education

Accreditation

Because online learning programs vary so widely, accrediting issues vary as well. For example, most state virtual schools do not fit the definition of actual schools, so the ways in which they can or should be accredited differ. In other cases, full-time online schools theoretically must follow the same accreditation practices as any other public school. As noted earlier, however, audits reveal that states and districts have been guilty of not following their own accreditation procedures when it comes to online learning opportunities.

Over the years, standards that are specific to accrediting online programs have been developed, though their application is not necessarily widespread or consistent. For those schools seeking an accreditation, the Commission on International Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA) provides a formal process for doing so. Their standards address issues such as:

1. Vision and Purpose
2. Governance and Leadership
3. Teaching and Learning
4. Documentation and Using Results
5. Resources and Support Systems
6. Stakeholder Communication and Relationships
7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Clearly, these issues apply to any program of quality and are the same issues any accrediting agency might address. However, the language of the CITA accreditation process makes room for the specific needs of online programs.

Quality standards have been developed for K-12 online courses, teaching and programs. The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) have both developed measurement tools to help administrators assess operational issues ranging from the quality of specific courses, teacher performance, professional development offerings and program quality. Individual states often have their own guidelines as well, such as Virginia where online courses are required to be "equivalent" to a course at a local school, taught by a licensed (or eligible and supervised) teacher, and approved by the school board.

EXAMPLES FROM THE STATES

Kansas uses a state-controlled registration system that requires all online programs to register with the state, utilize a desktop audit, and submit to annual reporting measures in order to claim FTE funding for the students. In addition, Kansas includes site visits, personnel, and program requirements. Kansas has gone to great lengths to create a clear definition of a virtual school and to provide specific guidelines for their governance.

Washington includes governance for online learning within their policies for all "alternative learning experience" (ALE) programs. All ALE programs must be state accredited and, in order to receive FTE funding, must meet annual reporting requirements.

In Florida, the Florida Virtual School (FLVS) set its own standards early on and voluntarily sought, and was awarded, accreditation through CITA and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. FLVS also contracts with an external firm to conduct its own annual evaluations, and the program has submitted to other evaluations, such as a tax watchdog organization that conducted an audit of FLVS in order to assess the value of the program to Florida taxpayers, which concluded the virtual school was a better use of taxpayer dollars, providing academic results and a new model of accountability.

Senate Bill 215 in Colorado introduced new oversight measures, particularly for multi-district programs, which now must be state certified. The newly created Unit of Online Education, which was formed in 2007, created new statutory standards that now provide the foundation for the online accreditation process in the state. In Pennsylvania online learning is conducted primarily through charter schools, which are overseen by the Pennsylvania Department of Education's System of Cyber Charter Review.

Evaluation and Reporting

Typical Measurements and Data Points

Measurement of program effectiveness, like everything else in online learning, varies across the nation, not only in how evaluations are conducted but also in what data are being measured. Generally, evaluation and reporting focus on measuring student achievement as well as program effectiveness—including teaching, curriculum, administration, and support.

Full-time online schools can measure student achievement in a fairly straightforward manner because they are responsible for their students' state assessment scores. Part-time or supplemental programs don't typically administer state-mandated achievement tests; thus, the responsibility lies with the local district not only to administer the test, but also to validate and accept the credit being provided by the virtual program. For this reason, supplemental programs typically measure achievement through course completions, embedded final exams within the course, and built-in internal and/or external feedback mechanisms, such as parent and student surveys.

Possibilities and Promise

While early practitioners of online learning understood fairly quickly the data advantages of the online environment, newcomers may just be catching on to the possibilities such real-time data gathering affords. Because online learning is almost entirely digital, we can now capture remarkably granular bits of information that tell us how and when students are succeeding or struggling in their coursework—right down to single components within a given lesson.

By paying attention to this kind of data, program managers can make quick and very specific intervention decisions. Impressively specific pieces of real-time data can be captured, such as time-, day-, and duration-specific login information, time to complete assignments, scores, online participation, and even a digital record of the students' work, comments to and from the teacher, and captured discussions during online collaborative sessions such as forums or web conferencing. Having immediate access to this kind of information is a potential goldmine for evaluators, who,

without this kind of data, had to make instructional, curricular and programmatic recommendations based on lagging data, such as last year's achievement scores. Achievement scores, while critical and certainly useful for ongoing development and decision making, don't tell the whole story. With online learning, students, teachers, and program administrators are leaving digital footprints on practically every activity they do in association with the program. Administrators, teachers, and developers are delving into the rich availability of this kind of immediate data to harness it for dynamic decision making, while researchers and evaluators can reach into far more specific areas of the teaching and learning process through the window afforded by such compelling data.

For example, because online schools tend to use the same course for numerous teachers, whether developed in-house or purchased from a provider, it is now possible for real apples-to-apples comparisons among teaching staff. While some may see this as intimidating, there are actually very positive outcomes when the data is used proactively. If, for instance, a team of teachers, using the same online biology course, is tracked, it is soon easy to distinguish genuine areas of strength and weakness. The ramifications for peer coaching, teaming, and informed professional development are all positive—and online teachers often find they benefit from the opportunity to receive such remarkably specific input to help them grow in their profession.

Course developers likewise benefit from such specific data gathering. If the data show that all students typically struggle with a given lesson or section of content, developers know with amazing specificity the areas where they need to re-develop, provide additional instructional tools, such as interactives, or work to clarify the directions.

The beauty of using the real-time data afforded by the online learning environment is that it facilitates the kind of rapid evaluation process necessary to a quickly emerging field of teaching and learning. The key for program administrators is to ensure that measurement tools are in place to capture data related to the specific goals of the program. If, for instance, the goal of the program is to increase opportunities for rural students, there must obviously be a way to ensure that the growth of rural student participation is reaching the percentage goals set by leadership.

Besides developing their own internal and/or external evaluation measures, virtual schools across the nation are evaluated by their states or districts in numerous ways. The state audits in Kansas, Colorado, Arizona, and Idaho, and others mentioned earlier, have provided input that continues to inform policy development. More states are developing specific guidelines for state-, district-, and charter-led virtual initiatives. Independent evaluations, such as the TaxWatch study in Florida,[11] have likewise provided useful third-party insights. The trick lies in providing enough guidelines to ensure quality and hold programs accountable to standards, while also providing enough leeway for individual programs to use the dynamic data available to them to make the best decisions for their specific student demographics. The move by some states towards measuring achievement on year-to-year growth models is welcome to many online program administrators who not only have the capability of tracking such data, but also see the value it represents in terms of providing a clearer picture of student achievement.

[11] Florida TaxWatch Center for Educational Performance and Accountability, Final Report: A Comprehensive Assessment of Florida Virtual School, available at http://www.floridataxwatch.org/resources/pdf/110507FinalReportFLVS.pdf

Policies to Avoid

States are laboratories of democracy, taking 50 different approaches to online learning from which we can pick and choose the best approaches. Clearly, if some policies are beneficial for increasing student opportunities and outcomes, others are not. Some ideas that have been tried by one or more states, and have proven to be restrictive or detrimental, include:

- **Requiring on-site or face-to-face instruction, thereby not allowing fully online schools.** There is evidence that online learning works as well or better than face-to-face instruction.[12] As online learning evolves in practice and is accepted as a viable option, there is no reason to limit access or create arbitrary attendance requirements that create barriers and negatively impact students and families.
- **Mandating enrollment cap limits on the number or type of students who can enroll in online schools or online courses.** This approach makes little logical sense—if online learning is beneficial for the first 5,000 students who choose it, why deny it to the next student? Alternatively, some states have created "pilot" programs that allow for a limited number of online schools under limited circumstances. In some states, these programs languish in pilot status for years. Pilot programs may have made sense a decade ago when online schools were in their infancy, but with more than a decade of experience and results to draw upon, and with demand growing annually, pilot status does not make sense and restricts opportunities.
- **Setting funding levels for online students well below funding of other students in the state.** Some states may believe they can save money through their online schools by arbitrarily setting the funding level below the state average. However, reducing funding for online students below the state minimum is unsupported by any cost studies or other evidence. It threatens quality and innovation in content, delivery, human capital and technology and prevents planning for a sustainable online future. It also penalizes students who choose online schools by making it highly likely that their educational experience is substandard. Low funding forces online schools to cut or restrict teachers, academic programs, technology, and student support services.

Next Generation Legislation

With so many existing online learning policy approaches, it is impossible to suggest one-size-fits-all legislation. However, as legislators consider creating or amending education policy, they should focus on adequate funding, providing options to students, and creating policy that is not overly prescriptive. Key input measures, such as teacher credentialing, state standards alignment, and reporting of measures like completion rates and response times, are likely to hold true no matter the technology being used, or the balance of online, offline, or face-to-face instruction. Creating requirements outside of these few inputs, however, often threatens innovation by mandating an approach made obsolete by changes in educational practices. Next generation policymaking may include some of the following elements:

[12] US Department of Education, Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies, retrieved July 8, 2009, http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/tech/evidence-based-practices/finalreport.pdf

1. **Define online schools and programs in a way that clarifies which are covered.**

   Consider the differences between full-time and supplemental programs, and between single-district and multi-district programs.

2. **Provide adequate and sustainable funding that entails the following elements:**

   a. Fund a state-led, supplemental program that will benefit from economies of scale in offering online courses to districts across the state.

   b. Fund full-time schools at the same operational cost level, not including capital costs, as other schools in the state.

   c. Allow students to choose an online school that meets their needs, and allow funding to follow the student.

3. **Provide standards and monitoring expectations for online programs and/or program authorizers.**

   All online programs and schools should be authorized by and answer to an oversight body with adequate knowledge of and experience in online learning to ensure that students are benefitting from a high-quality online experience. This oversight entity might also develop key definitions that would apply across online programs, such as successful course completion, enrollment, attendance, and at-risk, and create and impose penalties for programs that do not meet requirements.

4. **Create reporting requirements for online schools.**

   Many states have little or no data on how many students are taking one or more online courses, how many online programs exist, and how those programs are operating. A few forward-looking states recognize that in order to maintain any oversight role they need to benchmark quality and collect data. A mechanism to track online programs and students is an apparent first-level policy requirement that a surprising number of states have yet to put into place.

   Reporting and requirements work closely together, of course, and include oversight, data collection, and reporting. Each requires a similar set of data and processes that might include:

   - Curriculum and assessment
   - Supervising, evaluating, and training teachers
   - Attendance and activity tracking in a course
   - Communication and teacher response times
   - Student support
   - Awarding credit
   - Funding
   - Participation in state assessments
   - Accessibility and provision of special education services

The state's approach to these policies should seek to find a balance between oversight and leaving room for flexibility and innovation, while remembering that the overarching method of full-time online program oversight should be the same as all other public schools.

Conclusion: The role of online policy development in larger reform efforts

Online learning is clearly here to stay. It has spread rapidly throughout the country—and, indeed, throughout the world—as educators, parents, and policymakers have recognized the many ways in which it can increase educational achievement and improve educational outcomes. Students are increasingly choosing online learning options, for many of the same reasons that they choose to socialize, find information, listen to music, or watch videos online—because Internet-based options are often the best and most convenient for them.

Online learning may also be one of the truly transformative influences on all of education, because many online policy issues cannot be easily addressed without looking at education as a whole. Examples of these types of issues include:

- Funding based on educational attainment instead of seat time
- Student progression based on outcomes instead of social promotion
- Enhanced use of data throughout education
- Move to cross-curricular mastery of benchmarks vs. siloed mastery of standards, course by course
- More effective use of education's essential "human capital"—especially the development and deployment of excellent teachers

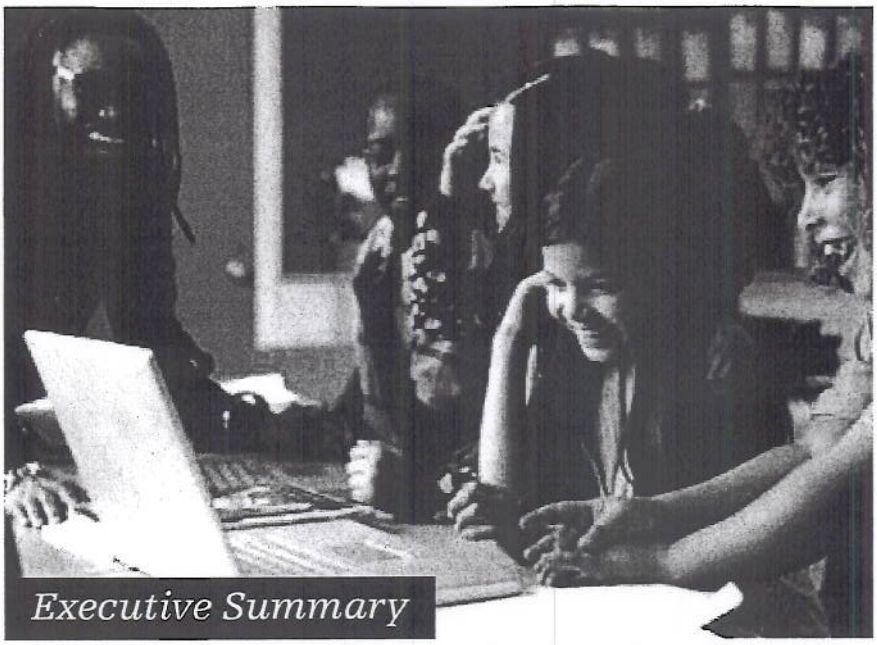
Ideally, the continuing evolution of high-quality but diverse online learning programs, together with development of thoughtful state policies, provides a laboratory to explore issues that benefit students in every learning environment.

The many intricate policy details and questions can be confusing, and certainly challenging to understand and explain. In fact, even when you find something that works in one state, there is no guarantee it will work everywhere. With so much local control and without national education standards, perhaps the best approach is to agree on promising frameworks for creating policy, and then leave it to states and districts to create policy specific to their needs within those frameworks.

There is, however, a simple litmus test for evaluating online learning policy. Good policy answers two key questions affirmatively:

- Does the policy hold promise for increasing student educational **opportunities**?
- Does the policy hold promise for improving student educational **outcomes**?

If the answer to both questions is yes, the policy is likely to be beneficial.



Executive Summary

Cracking the Code:

Synchronizing Policy and Practice for Performance-Based Learning

Written by:

Susan Patrick, International Association for K-12 Online Learning

Chris Sturgis, MetisNet

July 2011

iNACOL would like to thank the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, The Donnell-Kay Foundation, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and the Stupski Foundation for the generous funding and support for the Competency-Based Learning Summit. The Stupski Foundation provided additional support to develop this policy paper for the members of the Partnership for Next Generation Learning. We would like to especially thank Linda Pittenger at CCSSO for her major contributions to this report. Her guidance, clarity and insights were invaluable.

iNACOL International Association for K-12 Online Learning

TOLL-FREE 888.95.NACOL (888.956.2265) DIRECT 703.752.6216
FAX 703.752.6201 EMAIL info@inacol.org WEB www.inacol.org
MAIL 1934 Old Gallows Road, Suite 350 Vienna, VA 22182-4040

Executive Summary

State policymakers are seeking ways to catalyze breakthrough innovations that produce excellence and equity. Performance-based learning is one of the keys to cracking the current structures and practices that are built into the educational code. This paper is designed to expedite state policy development.[1] Building upon the 2011 Competency-Based Learning Summit convened by the International Association for K–12 Online Learning (iNACOL) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the following discussion explores how state policy can loosen the regulatory environment that is handcuffing the administrators and educators who are ready to move toward student-centered, competency-based models of learning.

What Is Performance-Based Learning?

The Council of Chief State School Officers included performance-based learning as one of the six attributes of next generation learning. It is a powerful concept that mutually reinforces personalized learning and anytime, everywhere innovations. However, it is not enough to simply create seat-time waivers. Performance-based learning requires a new set of practices and policies that is riveted on student learning.

A Note on Language

In this paper, we use the terms performance-based and competency-based interchangeably. Federal policy uses the term competency-based learning in Race to the Top and other programs. The Council of Chief State School Officers uses the term performance-based learning. Some leading states and districts refer to proficiency-based or standards-based learning. The hope is that as long as a shared working definition is used to drive policy, the variations in the descriptive term will not be a barrier.

At the Competency-Based Learning Summit, participants fine-tuned a working definition of performance-based learning, described below:

[1] For more information about the Competency-Based Learning Summit, read "It's Not a Matter of Time: Highlights from the 2011 Competency-Based Learning Summit," available at www.inacol.org or www.ccsso.org.

- Students advance upon mastery.
- Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students.
- Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students.
- Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.
- Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge along with the development of important skills and dispositions.

Competency-based efforts are certainly not a simple guarantee of high achievement. Like any service industry, only high-quality implementation will produce meaningful results. To ensure equitable results, all five elements of the definition must be implemented.

Redesigning Policy for Performance-Based Learning

Just as there are multiple pathways for students to learn, there are multiple pathways for states to create room for innovation. States can start with enabling policy, such as seat-time waivers or "credit flex" policies. The most advanced states are working on comprehensive competency-based policy redesign, including:

- Require districts to offer competency-based credits so that students have competency-based options. Offer competency-based alternative schools and credit recovery.
- Provide support mechanisms. Education leaders will need opportunities to work with their colleagues or technical assistance providers to create competencies, train teachers, and establish information management systems.
- Establish quality-control mechanisms. To safeguard equity and to ensure that higher expectations for student learning are not compromised, states will want to design quality-

Next Generation Learning

CCSSO has embraced next generation learning as one of the most important roles for state leadership for comprehensively reshaping the agenda for state education agencies. In partnership with seven states, CCSSO has defined next generation learning as rooted in six critical attributes:

- Personalizing learning
- Comprehensive systems of learning supports
- World-class knowledge and skills
- Performance-based learning
- Anytime, everywhere opportunities
- Authentic student voice

control mechanisms, including rubrics and formative evaluations, and provide supporting tools and resources such as samples of student work at each proficiency level.

- Expand learning options. Competency-based efforts immediately trigger demand by students for expanded learning options in the community, after school, and in online courses.
- Align higher education with K–12 competency-based efforts. Teacher training, college admissions, and streamlining budgets to support accelerated learning are all critical elements to creating a sustainable competency-based approach.

A Policy Framework for Advancing a Performance-Based Education System

States must create space for organic development and expansion of innovations. Moving beyond the compliance-based policy model requires replacing it with a different set of design principles. Below are suggested next generation principles that provide a state policy framework.

- **Drive Policy by Student Learning Outcomes:** Focus on student learning and student learning outcomes. First and foremost, policies should be made to support the needs of students.
- **Guard High Academic Standards:** States will need to be vigilant to ensure that academic expectations do not slip, resulting in lower achievement for groups of students. Focus on equity with high expectations for all students.
- **Expand Student Options:** State policies should expand, not limit, the options that students have to reach learning outcomes.
- **Create Shared Vision:** Policy development cannot be top-down. It will be important to keep communication open, inviting stakeholders to contribute to the vision and the steps to get there.
- **Offer Districts and Schools Flexibility:** Be clear about desired outcomes and then provide incentives for educators to take different pathways to achieve the goal. Remove process rules and regulations in order to allow and encourage innovation.
- **Commit to Continuous Improvement:** Policy will need to evolve as we learn more about the dynamics of next generation learning, requiring ongoing improvement efforts.

In the following discussion, the role of state leadership is explored through four different angles. The policy framework is designed to provide insights into the leadership and organizational capacity required by state education agencies to manage next generation reform strategies.

Synchronizing Policy and Practice

States have five critical roles in creating meaningful innovation space that will further advance policy changes: create innovation space, provide catalytic support and knowledge transfer, protect high standards, invest in communication and community engagement, and offer adaptive leadership.

Integrating Next Generation Learning with Efforts to Improve Current System

State policy leaders will be challenged to bring the very different reform approaches—growth models of accountability from the student-level up, improved teaching, and transforming low-performing schools with a strong vision of next generation learning—together into a comprehensive approach.

Collaborative State Leadership

The emerging policy issues require substantial analysis, creativity, and engagement of multiple stakeholders to develop viable alternatives to our traditional system. Although states can do it alone, by working collaboratively they can expedite the process, reduce the costs of poorly formed policies, and guard against being caught by surprise in unintended consequences. In addition, states that work together can create more cohesiveness in the policy environment, thereby allowing competency-based innovators to expand their ideas more easily.

Emerging State Policy Issues

As states and performance-based innovators move forward, they quickly encounter the underlying assumptions defining the dynamics of the traditional education system. The following discussion lifts up a number of emerging state policy issues. How well and how quickly we tackle these issues will determine how rapidly the benefits of next generation learning are unleashed.

EMERGING ISSUE #1: Redefine the Carnegie Unit into Competencies

The Common Core State Standards is opening new possibilities for competency-based models. States can play a critical role in helping districts and schools develop high-quality competencies and learning objectives.

EMERGING ISSUE #2: Personalized Learning

State policymakers can facilitate conversations to redesign policy around personalized learning, including expanding access to online and blended learning, taking advantage of expanded learning opportunities, modularizing courses, rethinking school and district information systems around personalized learning plans for all students, and establishing guidelines for portability for highly mobile students.

EMERGING ISSUE #3: Student-Centered Accountability and Assessment Models

Most states have designed accountability systems that involve grade-based and time-based testing windows. This poses a serious problem for competency-based learning models in which summative assessments should be triggered based on student mastery to validate their knowledge soon after they have mastered new competencies. Moving forward, states need to redesign accountability for student progress that supports teaching and learning on demand, with modularized assessments to validate proficiency throughout the year.

EMERGING ISSUE #4: Learning Empowered by Technology

Most state data systems are designed around compliance models for No Child Left Behind. The result is that district data systems have been designed in the same silos as compliance policies for reporting, rather than informing instruction. Students in a competency-based learning system should have access to meaningful data to see their progress in learning. In practical terms, at a minimum, this means an integration of student information systems, learning management systems, and analytics in a standards-based architecture supporting personalized learning plans. States will need to facilitate discussions on how to cost-effectively shape the necessary information systems.

EMERGING ISSUE #5: Supporting Educators in the Transition to a Competency-Based System

States will need to invest in efforts that engage the teaching workforce in exploring the possibilities in a competency-based model and participating in the decision to move forward. In addition, transitioning to a competency-based system raises several issues that will require states to revise state policies on standards for teacher expectations, the definition of highly qualified teacher, and job classifications to provide more flexibility for schools.

EMERGING ISSUE #6: Financing a Competency-Based System

Performance-based funding creates incentives for schools to respond and intervene quickly to students if they begin to disengage or become stuck academically. It also creates incentives to provide high-quality curriculum and the best learning opportunities to increase the rate at which students are learning. Some states may ultimately want to create incentives for schools and students within competency-based models to accrue the greater benefits of the innovation.

Conclusion

State leadership is increasing its mission to transform what is possible for education systems. Competency-based learning is essential to cracking the code, unleashing next generation learning, and positioning the United States to out-innovate global competitors. State policies that set high expectations for students and unleash creativity in designing personalized learning will dramatically accelerate student outcomes at rates never before thought possible. It is state leadership that will be in the position to be the conductors of this transformation—synchronizing the innovations and policies into a vibrant education system where all of our children experience the joys of learning.

National Standards for Quality Online Programs

Written by

Liz Pape & Matthew Wicks and the iNACOL Quality Standards for Online Programs Committee

October 2009

iNACOL
International Association for K-12 Online Learning

TOLL-FREE 888.95.NACOL (888.956.2265)
DIRECT 703.752.6216 FAX 703.752.6201
EMAIL info@inacol.org WEB www.inacol.org
MAIL 1934 Old Gallows Road, Suite 350 Vienna, VA 22182-4040

iNACOL Quality Standards for Online Programs Committee

iNACOL would like to thank each member of the iNACOL Quality Standards for Online Programs Committee for their contributions, review, and participation in the development of this document.

Co- Chairs

Liz Pape, Virtual High School
Matthew Wicks, Matthew Wicks & Associates, Inc.

Committee Members

Sandi Atols, Chicago Public Schools
Kim Bonniksen, Insight Schools
John Bourne, Sloan Consortium
David Brown, Western Association of Schools and Colleges
Craig Butz, Connections Academy
Allison Cleveland, K12
Jacque Dewey, Hampton Roads Virtual Learning Center @ WHRO
Jed Friedrichsen, BlendedSchools.net
Vicki Jensen, Florida Virtual School
Karen Johnson, Minnesota Department of Education
Ken Kastle, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools
Ron Legon, Quality Matters, University of Maryland
Ray Lindley, Northwest Association of Accredited Schools
Janet Moore, Sloan Consortium
Julia Parra, New Mexico State University
Susan Patrick, iNACOL
Allison Powell, iNACOL
Connie Radtke, Appleton E-School
Chris Rapp, Idaho Digital Learning Academy
Mickey Revenaugh, Connections Academy
Sue Sullivan, New Jersey Department of Education
Bill Tucker, Education Sector
Janna Vega, Idaho Digital Learning Academy

Table of Contents

National Standards for Quality Online Programs

Introduction

The mission of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, iNACOL, is to ensure all students have access to a world-class education and quality online learning opportunities that prepare them for a lifetime of success.

This document, the International Association for K-12 Online Learning's (iNACOL) *National Standards for Quality Online Programs,* is the third of iNACOL's online education standards, following the *National Standards of Quality for Online Courses* and *National Standards for Quality Online Teaching*. The standards in this document address what is needed for a quality online program, elements of which include quality course design and quality online teaching. However, this set of standards is more than the third of a series – it is intended that these Standards for Quality Online Programs provide the encompassing and over-arching set of standards program leaders need to assure a quality online program.

National Standards for Quality Online Programs is designed to provide states, districts, online programs, and other organizations with a set of quality guidelines for online program leadership, instruction, content, support services, and evaluation. The initiative began with a thorough literature review of existing online program standards, including accreditation standards, a cross-reference of standards, followed by a survey to iNACOL members and experts to ensure the efficacy of the standards adopted.

These guidelines should be implemented and monitored by each district or organization, as they reserve the right to apply the guidelines according to the best interest of the population for which they serve.

These standards start by addressing the foundation of the program: its mission, goals and objectives and its underlying beliefs and philosophy. Leadership is also addressed: the program's governance, the role of the governing body and how the relation between the governing body and organizational/program leadership work together to support the achievement of the mission.

Beyond the foundation of what the program has as its mission, goals and objectives, are the standards that address how the program operates, its teaching and learning standards and support standards. In this document, we have provided an overview of the most critical of the course design and teaching standards. In addition, a program needs to provide the support mechanisms

for student and teacher success in online courses. This document describes the necessary support standards needed for programs designed to supplement schools' course offerings as well as those programs designed for full-time students. For a fuller description of course design and teaching standards, please refer to iNACOL's *National Standards of Quality for Online Courses* and *National Standards for Quality Online Teaching*.

The *National Standards for Quality Online Programs* are identified on the following pages.

Rating Scale

5	Exemplary: a model of best practice as related to this criterion
4	Accomplished: excellent implementation; comparable to other examples
3	Promising: good implementation; however, somewhat lacking in depth or detail
2	Incomplete: partial implementation of this criterion; additional work needed; good start
1	Confusing: not obvious; more work needed; not a good example
N/A	Not Applicable

Institutional Standards

Institutional standards address the organization's vision, mission, philosophy and beliefs. The institutional standards define those elements critical to creating the operational framework of the online program, including the governance, leadership, resources, and organizational commitment to meet the program's vision and mission.

A	**Mission statement — A mission statement of a quality online program clearly conveys its purpose and goals. It serves as the basis for the program's day-to-day operations, as well as a guide for its strategic plans for the future. Communication between and buy-in from stakeholders is a critical component of a mission statement.**	Rating
✓	States the purpose of the organization. Is clear and concise in articulating who the organization is, what it does and whom it serves.	
✓	Indicates that online learning is the focus of the organization.	
✓	Demonstrates a commitment to measurable quality and accountability.	
✓	Reflects involvement of key stakeholders.	
✓	Is made available to the public.	
✓	Is reviewed periodically by program leadership.	

B	Governance — Governance is typically provided by a Board of Directors, an Advisory Board or a School Board. In a quality online program, governance and leadership work hand-in-hand, developing the operational policies for the program and its leadership and staff.	Rating
✓	Members are knowledgeable about K12 online learning and/or receive appropriate training after joining the governing board.	
✓	Supports the organization by securing necessary resources.	
✓	Fulfills the role defined for it in the by-laws of the institution.	
✓	Collaborates with program leadership to implement policies and procedures that are in compliance with state educational statutes and/or regional accrediting agencies.	
✓	The legal status of the online program is clearly defined with no ambiguities in ownership, control, or responsibility.	

C	Leadership - The leadership of a quality online program is accountable to the program's governance body, and is responsible for setting and meeting the operational and strategic goals in support of the program's mission and vision statements.	Rating
✓	Is responsible for meeting the organization's annual goals and communicating these goals to its constituents.	
✓	Maintains a disciplined knowledge of its future with projections of income, expense, enrollment, and trends in its educational and business environment.	
✓	Provides a productive collaborative environment for learning and work, and the leadership necessary to plan both day-to-day operations and the long-term future of the online program.	
✓	Verifies that measures are in place to ensure quality, integrity and validity of information.	

D	Planning — A quality online program makes planning, managed by the leadership and staff of the organization a regular part of the program. There are several types of planning activities, including strategic planning, long-range and operational planning, which defines annual goals. Effective planning is not a one-time activity, but instead should provide opportunities for reflection on how to improve the organization's performance.	Rating
Strategic plan		
✓	Is developed that addresses 3-5 years of actions and has been approved by the program's leadership and governance.	
✓	Is updated on a regular basis (at least every 3-5 years) and includes historical data, baseline information, trend data, and projections, allowing data-driven decision-making.	
✓	Addresses the requirements for resources that effectively and efficiently serve their students and faculty, including curriculum, technology, support, professional development, and fiscal viability.	
Organizational goals		
✓	Are aligned with the strategic plan.	
✓	Are updated annually based on past year's accomplishments.	
✓	Are shared and supported throughout the organization.	

E	Organizational Staffing — A quality online program recognizes appropriate levels of staffing are critical to the success of an online program. Staff should be well trained in order to successfully meet their performance goals, and are provided with appropriate levels of support, resources, feedback and management.	Rating
✓	Sufficient professional, administrative and support staff are provided to carry out the mission and annual organizational goals	
✓	Ongoing training and support are provided to the staff to carry out the mission of the program.	
✓	Clearly defined roles and responsibilities are evident to create a collegial team to assure effective delivery of quality education.	
✓	Evaluations of staff and faculty occur on a regularly scheduled basis.	

F	Organizational Commitment — In a quality online program governance, leadership and staff are responsible for creating an organization that demonstrates a commitment to attaining the program's goals and mission statement. Everyone within the organization understands the mission statement and works to achieve it.	Rating
✓	Activities and accomplishments of the organization are aligned to the mission statement.	
✓	Programs that function under the authority of another educational organization have a demonstrated commitment from the parent organization to support the implementation and ongoing operation of this program.	
✓	Sustainability of the program is articulated through strategic and operational planning and implemented through ongoing operations (e.g. commitment to sustainable funding, maintaining quality staff, and compliance with applicable educational statutes).	
✓	Is accredited by a recognized accrediting body.	

G	Financial and Material Resources — A quality online program has adequate financial and material resources to accomplish the mission of the organization. These resources are appropriately planned for and expended using sound business practices.	Rating
✓	Are available to assure a quality educational experience in alignment with the organization's mission statement.	
✓	Are managed in a responsible manner according to prescribed budget and accounting principles.	
✓	Are allocated in support of mission statement that demonstrates sustainability over time.	

H	Equity and Access — A quality online program's policies and practice support students' ability to access the program. Accommodations are available to meet a variety of student needs.	Rating
✓	Policies clearly state eligibility requirements for the program.	
✓	Policies and practices are in place that provide accommodations for students with disabilities.	
✓	Ensures that students have equitable access to the program consistent with its mission and purposes.	

I	Integrity and Accountability — In a quality online program, leadership is transparent in its management of the program, providing regular and timely information on progress towards attainment of goals, alignment with policies and standards, and achievement of student learning outcomes.	Rating
✓	The online program discloses accurate information relating to its mission, accreditation, courses and programs, services, policies, fees, recruitment processes and incentives, and other factors considered important to prospective and current students and stakeholders.	
✓	The program results in learning appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the course, program, or diploma completion requirements.	

Teaching and Learning Standards

Teaching and learning standards focus on how an online program develops or chooses its curricula; how the program's teachers deliver that curriculum to students; and how students' progress in the curriculum is assessed. The *iNACOL National Standards of Quality for Online Courses* focus on issues of curriculum and assessment at the individual course level, while the *iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Teaching* focus on ensuring individual teacher quality. These standards assume that a quality online program meets those individual course and teacher standards and identifies the most critical aspects of those standards as well as a more comprehensive, "macro-level" set of standards to truly be considered a quality online program.

J	**Curriculum and Course Design — A quality online program will have a well thought-out approach to its curriculum and course design whether it develops its own courses and/or licenses curriculum from other educational providers.**	Rating
✓	Has clearly stated and attainable educational goals	
✓	Is clear and coherent in its organization	
✓	Utilizes quality instructional materials and appropriate technology that enable and enrich student learning	
✓	Demonstrates rigorous course content	
✓	Provides for high-degree of interaction between teacher, learners, parents, and among learners themselves	
✓	Embeds critical thinking, problem solving, analysis, integration, and synthesis abilities in learning activities	
✓	Meets requirements of appropriate state or national standards, including applicable end of course assessments	
✓	Meets requirements of accessibility for individuals with disabilities	
✓	Meets requirements of copyright and fair use	
✓	Is designed to accommodate different learning styles	
✓	Is designed with consideration for time and place limitations of students	

K	Instruction — A quality online program takes a comprehensive and integrated approach to ensuring excellent online teaching for its students. This process begins with promising practices but is equally committed to continuous improvement and adaptation to student learning needs through professional development.	Rating
✓	Is grounded in the program's mission, beliefs, and expectations for student learning	
✓	Is supported by research and best practice	
✓	Is continually refined based on assessment of stakeholders' needs	
✓	Is adaptable to best serve different student learning styles	
✓	Is sensitive to the cultural differences of students	
✓	Includes frequent teacher to student interaction, teacher to parent interaction, and fosters frequent student-to-student interaction	
✓	Is sensitive to time and place limitations of students	
✓	Faculty hold the required state certifications	
✓	Faculty are trained in and demonstrate competency in online instructional methodologies and learning technologies	
✓	Includes a process to monitor that the work and assessments are completed by the students registered for the course	

L	**Assessment of Student Performance — A quality online learning program values student academic performance and takes a comprehensive, integrated approach to measuring student achievement. This includes use of multiple assessment measures and strategies that align closely to both program and learner objectives, with timely, relevant feedback to all stakeholders.**	Rating
✓	Enables students to monitor their own learning progress.	
✓	Enables teachers to adapt their instruction to meet learner needs.	
✓	Uses multiple methods to assess student performance.	
✓	Assesses a variety of types of student performance.	
✓	Uses formative assessments to inform instructional practice.	
✓	Informs ongoing course design and revisions.	
✓	Measures student attainment of the course's educational goals.	
✓	Provides for timely and frequent feedback about student progress.	

Support Standards

Support standards address the organization's academic, administrative, guidance and technical services that are critical to meeting the needs of all participants in the online program.

M	Faculty — A quality online program supports the faculty by providing opportunities for them to develop their professional skills through mentoring, professional development, and technical assistance.	Rating
✓	Provides and encourages participation in induction and mentoring programs.	
✓	Provides regular feedback regarding teacher performance.	
✓	Provides a wide variety of professional development opportunities.	
✓	Provides timely, effective technical support.	

N	Students — A quality online program has student support services to address the various needs of students at different levels within the organization. The levels of support are appropriate and adequate for a student's success.	Rating
✓	Provides an orientation to online learning technologies and successful online student practices.	
✓	Provides academic and administrative services to address their academic and developmental needs.	
✓	Provides support services for individual needs.	
✓	Provides access to learning and assessment content, instruction, technologies and resources.	
✓	Establishes standards for teacher to student communication.	
✓	Provides timely and meaningful assessment feedback.	
✓	Provides timely, effective technical support.	

O	Guidance Services: A quality online program has guidance services to support students and parents to ensure success of the online program. Depending on the program, these services are either directly provided by the program or a service provider, or in the case of supplemental programs, these services may be provided by the local school.	Rating
✓	Ensures academic advising is provided for students to meet requirements of the program and/or school.	
✓	Provides staff training in the unique student needs of online learning.	
✓	Provides tools and/or information to assist students in determining the appropriateness of specific courses for their academic needs.	
✓	Understands the network of services available to support online learning.	

P	Organizational Support — A quality online program has organizational support to oversee the instructional learning environment as it is conveyed through technology. Some organizational support services may be distributed between the program and other entities, depending on the physical location where the students are taking their online courses.	Rating
✓	Provides an online learning environment that is appropriately maintained, secure and is a productive and safe work environment for students and staff	
✓	Provides a work environment consisting of the resources, tools, and organizational policies that enables staff to implement the program's mission, beliefs and objectives.	

Q	Parents/Guardians — In a quality online program, parents and guardians play an integral part in their students' educational life. They work as a team with faculty, administrators, guidance services, and organizational support to ensure a quality educational experience for their students.	Rating
✓	Are provided information about the program, successful online.student practices and supportive learning environments.	
✓	Receive timely responses from faculty and staff.	
✓	Receive critical information about student progress and are encouraged to communicate with faculty and administrators to best support the online learning student.	

Evaluation Standards

A culture of continual program improvement is critical in becoming a quality online program and maintaining that status. Evaluation efforts are utilized to both verify the program is meeting its intended purposes and identify where improvements can be made. The cycle is completed by taking this information and developing concrete plans for program improvement.

R	**Program Evaluation — A quality online program recognizes the value of program evaluation. Program evaluation is both internal and external and informs all processes that effect teaching and learning. Internal evaluations often are more informal in nature and may provide immediate feedback on a targeted area of inquiry. External program evaluations typically look at the entire program from an objective perspective that will bring additional credibility to the results.**	Rating
✓	Conducts ongoing internal evaluations that include regularly collecting and analyzing data based on national, state, and/or program metrics.	
✓	Conducts ongoing internal evaluations that include using clearly articulated measures to evaluate its learners.	
✓	Conducts ongoing internal evaluations that include determining program success by measuring student achievement and satisfaction based on valid and reliable assessment techniques.	
✓	Conducts ongoing internal evaluations that include ensuring students participate in state or national standardized testing, as appropriate and evaluating results against state or national data.	
✓	Conducts ongoing internal evaluations that include consistently evaluating faculty to assure instructional quality, using clear, consistent policies, measures and procedures.	
✓	Conducts ongoing internal evaluations that include reviewing and evaluating courses to ensure quality, consistency with the curriculum, currency, and advancement of the student learning outcomes.	
✓	Conducts periodic external evaluations that include validating internal evaluation process and results.	
✓	Conducts periodic external evaluations that include independently assessing progress towards goals, mission and strategic plan of program.	
✓	Conducts periodic external evaluations that include informing an improvement plan for the online program.	
✓	Communicates evaluation results to program stakeholders.	

S	Program Improvement — A quality online program establishes a culture of continual program improvement. Improvement planning focuses on using program evaluations, research, and promising practices to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness. It fosters continuous improvement across all aspects of the organization and ensures the program is focused on accomplishing its mission and vision.	Rating
✓	Uses strategic, long-range and operational planning and evaluation to continuously improve its educational programs and services.	
✓	Uses data effectively to drive instructional and management decision-making.	
Is based on:		
✓	Advancement of the program's vision and mission.	
✓	Student achievement.	
✓	Internal and external evaluation.	
✓	Current research in the relevant areas.	
✓	Promising practices.	
Includes provisions for:		
✓	Beta testing and peer review.	
✓	Satisfaction surveys by students, parents, teachers and schools as appropriate.	
✓	Evaluation of curriculum and instruction as it relates to student achievement.	
✓	Regular online teacher performance evaluations.	
✓	Reviewing and updating policies and procedures.	
✓	Reviewing appropriateness, effectiveness and quality of teaching and learning technologies.	
✓	Regular online course reviews.	

National Standards of Quality for Online Programs[1]

Online Program Self-Evaluation Form

	5 Exemplary: a model of best practice as related to this criterion **4 Accomplished:** excellent implementation; comparable to other examples **3 Promising:** good implementation; however, somewhat lacking in depth or detail **2 Incomplete:** partial implementation of this criterion; additional work needed; good start **1 Confusing:** not obvious; more work needed; not a good example **N/A Not Applicable:** Some standards may not apply to all types of programs	5 - Exemplary	4 - Accomplished	3 - Promising	2 - Incomplete	1 - Confusing	N/A
A	Mission statement — A mission statement of a quality online program clearly conveys its purpose and goals. It serves as the basis for the program's day-to-day operations, as well as a guide for its strategic plans for the future. Communication between and buy-in from stakeholders is a critical component of a mission statement.						
✓	States the purpose of the organization. Is clear and concise in articulating who the organization is, what it does and whom it serves.	5	4	3	2	1	N/A
✓	Indicates that online learning is the focus of the organization.	5	4	3	2	1	N/A
✓	Demonstrates a commitment to measurable quality and accountability.	5	4	3	2	1	N/A
✓	Reflects involvement of key stakeholders.	5	4	3	2	1	N/A
✓	Is made available to the public.	5	4	3	2	1	N/A
✓	Is reviewed periodically by program leadership.	5	4	3	2	1	N/A
	Comments/Evidence:						

INSTITUTIONAL

1 Graf, David & Caines, Maisie. (2000). WebCT Exemplary Course Project Scoring Rubric. Retrieved June 23, 2009 from: http://www.webct.com/Communities/library/iteminformation?source=browse&objectID=4367802

VERSION 2

National Standards for Quality Online Teaching

October 2011

iNACOL
International Association for K-12 Online Learning

TOLL-FREE 888.95.NACOL (888.956.2265)
DIRECT 703.752.6216 FAX 703.752.6201
EMAIL info@inacol.org WEB www.inacol.org
MAIL 1934 Old Gallows Road, Suite 350 Vienna, VA 22182-4040

Acknowledgements

iNACOL organized a committee of experts with various backgrounds in the field of K-12 online learning to take the lead in refreshing the iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Courses, Version 2. They are representatives from educational organizations that share an interest in online education and believe that it is important that students have access to the highest quality online teachers.

With their experience and the expertise of the original National Standards for Quality Online Teaching, Barbara Treacy from the Education Development Center (EDC) and Sara Baltunis and Connie Swiderski from the Texas Virtual School Network (TxVSN) chaired this project. iNACOL would like to thank them for their leadership, as well as the involvement of these experienced and knowledgeable leaders in the field of K-12 online learning:

Holly Atwell – Connections Academy
Sara Baltunis – Texas Virtual School Network (TxVSN)
Chris Bell – Leading Edge Certification
Tom Blanford – National Education Association
Maria Boyarko – Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT)
Ken Bradford – Louisiana Department of Education
Brian Bridges – California Learning Resource Network (CLRN)
Barbara Champney – Education Collaborative
Cathy Cheely – Consultant
Stephanie Cox – Louisiana Virtual School
Liz Glowa – Consultant
Shani Hartley – Northern Beaches Christian School, Australia (NBCS)
Mark Hawkes – British Columbia Ministry of Education
Bob Hiles – Newport-Mesa Unified School District
Pat Hoge – Connections Academy
Julie Keane – University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Jacqueline Kennedy – Learning Forward
Kristin Kipp – Jefferson County Virtual Academy (Colorado)
Tiffany Kisker – Florida Virtual School
Gwen Wallace Nagel – Iowa Online Learning (ILO)
Rick Ogsten – Carpe Diem
Rena Palloff – Crossroads Consulting Group
Liz Pape – Virtual High School Global Consortium
Matlea Parker – Southern Regional Education Board (SREB)
Susan Patrick – iNACOL
David Pelizzari – K12, Inc.
Cory Plough – Odyssey Charter Schools
Allison Powell – iNACOL
Keith Pratt – Crossroads Consulting Group
Kerry Rice – Boise State University
Teresa Scavulli – K12, Inc.
Kelly Schwirzke – Computer Using Educators
Kay Shattuck – Quality Matters
Connie Swiderski – Texas Virtual School Network (TxVSN)
Barbara Treacy – Education Development Center (EDC)
Matthew Wicks – iNACOL

VERSION 2

National Standards for Quality Online Teaching

First version was originally published in 2008.

Introduction

The mission of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) is to ensure all students have access to a world-class education and quality online learning opportunities that prepare them for a lifetime of success. *National Standards for Quality Online Teaching* is designed to provide states, districts, online programs, and other organizations with a set of quality guidelines for online teaching.

The original initiative in Version 1 of the standards began with a thorough literature review of the existing online teaching quality standards, then conducted a cross-reference of standards, followed by a survey completed by representatives of the iNACOL network to ensure the efficacy of the standards adopted. As a result of the research review, iNACOL chose to fully endorse the work of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) *Standards for Quality Online Teaching and Online Teaching Evaluation for State Virtual Schools* as a comprehensive set of criteria. The standards as identified by SREB were already in use by sixteen SREB states; they proved to be the most comprehensive among those reviewed and included guidelines set forth in the other criteria from the literature review.

iNACOL organized a team of experts consisting of online teachers, professional developers, instructional designers, researchers, course developers, and administrators to review these new standards and the new literature on the topic. They determined that there was a need to refresh Version 1 of the iNACOL standards. The same process was used in developing Version 2 of the standards, in addition to having Version 1 as a starting point in the development of the new version.

Over the past three years, iNACOL has received feedback from organizations using these standards for the development of professional development and evaluation of online teachers. In this new version of the standards, the indicators have been divided between what the online teachers should know and understand and what the online teachers should be able to do for evaluation purposes.

These guidelines should be implemented and monitored by each district or organization, as they reserve the right to apply the guidelines according to the best interest of the population for which they serve.

The National Standards for Quality Online Teaching are identified on the following pages:

Rating Scale

0 Absent—component is missing
1 Unsatisfactory—needs significant improvement
2 Somewhat satisfactory—needs targeted improvements
3 Satisfactory—discretionary improvement needed
4 Very satisfactory—no improvement needed

Standard A

The online teacher knows the primary concepts and structures of effective online instruction and is able to create learning experiences to enable student success.

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding	Teacher Abilities	Rating
The online teacher knows and understands the current best practices and strategies for online teaching and learning and their implementation in online education.	The online teacher is able to apply the current best practices and strategies in online teaching to create rich and meaningful experiences for students.	
The online teacher knows and understands the role of online learning in preparing students for the global community they live in, both now and in the future.	The online teacher is able to build learner capacity for collaboration in face-to-face, blended, and online environments and encourages students to participate as global citizens.	
The online teacher knows and understands the instructional delivery continuum (e.g., fully online to blended to face-to-face).	[This indicator can only be evaluated in the context of instructor(s) having the ability to modify the course.] The online teacher is able to construct flexible, digital, and interactive learning experiences that are useful in a variety of delivery modes.	
The online teacher knows and understands the need for continuing to update academic knowledge, pedagogy, and skills.	The online teacher is able to meet the state's professional teaching standards or has academic credentials in the field in which he or she is teaching.	
The online teacher knows and understands the subject area and age group they are teaching.	The online teacher is able to provide evidence of credentials in the field of study to be taught.	
The online teacher knows and understands the professional responsibility to contribute to the effectiveness, vitality, and self-renewal of the teaching profession, as well as to their online school and community.		

Standard B

The online teacher understands and is able to use a range of technologies, both existing and emerging, that effectively support student learning and engagement in the online environment.

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding	Teacher Abilities	Rating
The online teacher knows and understands the use of an array of grade-appropriate online tools for communication, productivity, collaboration, analysis, presentation, research, and content delivery.	The online teacher is able to select and use a variety of online tools for communication, productivity, collaboration, analysis, presentation, research, and online content delivery as appropriate to the content area and student needs.	
The online teacher knows and understands the use of emerging technologies in a variety of mediums for teaching and learning, based on student needs.	The online teacher is able to effectively use and incorporate subject-specific and developmentally appropriate technologies, tools, and resources.	
The online teacher knows and understands the importance of interaction in an online course and the role of varied communication tools in supporting interaction.	The online teacher is able to use communication technologies in a variety of mediums and contexts for teaching and learning.	
The online teacher knows and understands basic troubleshooting skills and the responsibility to address basic technical issues online students may have.	The online teacher is able to apply troubleshooting skills (e.g., change passwords, download plug-ins, etc.).	
The online teacher knows and understands the need to continuously update their knowledge and skills for using the evolving technology tools that support online learning.	The online teacher is able to identify and explore new tools and test their applicability to their content areas and students.	

Standard C

The online teacher plans, designs, and incorporates strategies to encourage active learning, application, interaction, participation, and collaboration in the online environment.

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding	Teacher Abilities	Rating
The online teacher knows and understands the techniques and applications of online instructional strategies, based on current research and practice (e.g., discussion, student-directed learning, collaborative learning, lecture, project-based learning, forum, small group work).	The online teacher is able to use student-centered instructional strategies that are connected to real-world applications to engage students in learning (e.g., peer-based learning, inquiry-based activities, collaborative learning, discussion groups, self-directed learning, case studies, small group work, and guided design).	
The online teacher knows and understands the process for facilitating, monitoring, and establishing expectations for appropriate interaction among students.	The online teacher is able to facilitate and monitor appropriate interaction among students.	
The online teacher knows and understands the techniques for developing a community among the participants.	The online teacher is able to apply effective facilitation skills by creating a relationship of trust; establish consistent and reliable expectations; and support and encourage independence and creativity that promotes the development of a sense of community among the participants.	
The online teacher knows and understands the process for facilitating and monitoring online instruction groups that are goal-oriented, focused, project-based, and inquiry-oriented to promote learning through group interaction.	The online teacher is able to facilitate and monitor online instruction groups to promote learning through higher-order thinking and group interaction.	
The online teacher knows and understands techniques to adjust communications to diverse perspectives.	The online teacher is able to respond appropriately to the diverse backgrounds and learning needs of the students.	
The online teacher knows and understands differentiated instruction based on students' learning styles.	The online teacher is able to use differentiated strategies in conveying ideas and information, and is able to assist students in assimilating information to gain understanding and knowledge.	

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding	Teacher Abilities	Rating
The online teacher knows and understands techniques to create an environment that will engage, welcome, and reach each individual learner.	The online teacher is able to apply strategies for engagement in online learning environments, e.g., asking questions to stimulate discussion.	
The online teacher knows and understands the participation in an online course from a student-centered approach.	The online teacher is able to apply experiences as an online student and/or group to demonstrate the development and implementation of successful strategies for online teaching environments and to anticipate challenges and problems in the online classroom.	
The online teacher knows and understands the need to establish and maintain ongoing and frequent teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction, teacher-parent interaction, and teacher-mentor interaction.	The online teacher is able to provide a variety of ongoing and frequent teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction, and teacher-parent interaction, and teacher-mentor interaction opportunities.	

Standard D

The online teacher promotes student success through clear expectations, prompt responses, and regular feedback.

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding	Teacher Abilities	Rating
The online teacher knows and understands techniques to maintain strong and regular communication with students, using a variety of tools.	The online teacher is able to use effective communication skills with students.	
The online teacher knows and understands techniques for using appropriate communications in support of student engagement through prompt and regular feedback, and setting and communicating high expectations.	The online teacher is able to provide prompt feedback, communicate high expectations, and respect diverse talents and learning styles.	

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding	Teacher Abilities	Rating
The online teacher knows and understands the need to create and explain objectives, concepts, and learning outcomes in a clearly written, concise format and to explain the course organization to students.	The online teacher is able to provide clear definitions of objectives, concepts, and learning outcomes and the course organization to students.	
The online teacher knows and understands the need to define the terms of class interaction for both teacher and students.	The online teacher is able to establish and provide clear expectations of class interaction for both teacher and students.	
The online teacher knows and understands the need to define the assessment criteria for the course.	The online teacher is able to provide a clear explanation of the assessment criteria for the course to students.	
The online teacher knows and understands the need to provide clear expectations for teacher response time to student queries.	The online teacher is able to provide a clear explanation of the expectations of teacher response time to student queries.	
The online teacher knows and understands the need to establish criteria for appropriate online behavior for both teacher and students.	The online teacher is able to establish and implement criteria for appropriate online behavior for both teacher and students.	
The online teacher knows and understands the need for timely, constructive, personalized feedback to students about assignments and questions.	The online teacher is able to use student data to inform instruction, guide and monitor students' management of their time, monitor learner progress with available tools, and develop an intervention plan for unsuccessful learners.	
The online teacher knows and understands a variety of methods and tools to reach and engage students who are struggling.	The online teacher is able to use a variety of methods and tools to reach and engage students who are struggling.	
The online teacher knows and understands the process for aligning teacher and student expectations for the course, in general.	The online teacher is able to orient students to teacher's instructional methods and goals and invite students to provide feedback on their perceptions of how they are learning in a course.	

Standard E

The online teacher models, guides, and encourages legal, ethical, and safe behavior related to technology use.

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding	Teacher Abilities	Rating
The online teacher knows and understands the responsibilities of digital citizenship and techniques to facilitate student investigations of the legal and ethical issues related to technology and society.	The online teacher is able to establish standards for student behavior that are designed to ensure academic integrity and appropriate use of the Internet and online written communication; teach students that copyright laws are created for a reason.	
The online teacher knows and understands how the use of technology may lead to instances of academic dishonesty.	The online teacher is able to identify the risks and intervene in incidents of academic dishonesty for students.	
The online teacher knows and understands resources and techniques for implementing Acceptable Use Policies (AUP).	The online teacher is able to model and comply with intellectual property policies and fair use standards and reinforce their use with students.	
The online teacher knows and understands techniques for recognizing and addressing the inappropriate use of electronically accessed data or information.	The online teacher is able to provide resources for students related to intellectual property and plagiarism.	
The online teacher knows and understands privacy standards about other students and their posting and performance that are outlined in FERPA or other similar guidelines.	The online teacher is able to incorporate and comply with FERPA or other similar guidelines in AUP and course design and communicate privacy guidelines to students.	

Standard F

The online teacher is cognizant of the diversity of student academic needs and incorporates accommodations into the online environment.

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding	Teacher Abilities	Rating
The online teacher knows and understands legal mandates stipulated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Assistive Technology Act, and Section 508 or other similar guidelines/requirements for accessibility.	The online teacher is able to monitor student progress and apply activities and tools that are relevant to the needs of all students, including those with learning or physical disabilities, in collaboration with appropriate staff or resources.	
The online teacher knows and understands that students have varied talents and skills and make appropriate accommodations designed to include all students.	The online teacher is able to address learning styles, needs for accommodations, and create multiple paths to address diverse learning styles and abilities.	
The online teacher knows and understands appropriate tools and technologies to make accommodations to meet student needs.	The online teacher is able to use appropriate tools and technologies to make accommodations to meet student needs.	
The online teacher knows and understands how adaptive/assistive technologies are used to help people who have disabilities gain access to information that might otherwise be inaccessible.	The online teacher is able to apply adaptive and assistive technologies in the online classroom where appropriate in the instruction to meet student needs.	
The online teacher knows and understands options to expand student thinking, address styles of learning, and provide avenues for enrichment or intervention.	The online teacher is able to identify students who are struggling with various learning obstacles, such as ELL or literacy issues, and apply appropriate strategies to support student thinking, address styles of learning, and provide avenues for enrichment or intervention when needed.	
The online teacher knows and understands the process for connecting with local support personnel to verify student's IEP requirements or 504 accommodations needed for student success.	The online teacher is able to communicate with the appropriate school staff regarding specific accommodations, modifications, or needs as listed in a student's IEP or 504 accommodations, and work in collaboration with others to address student needs.	
The online teacher knows and understands the diversity of student learning needs, languages, and backgrounds.	The online teacher is able to demonstrate awareness of different learning preferences, diversity, and universal design principles.	

Standard G

The online teacher demonstrates competencies in creating and implementing assessments in online learning environments in ways that ensure validity and reliability of the instruments and procedures.

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding	Teacher Abilities	Rating
The online teacher knows and understands adequate and appropriate assessment instruments to measure online learning that reflect sufficient content validity (i.e., that adequately cover the content they are designed to measure), reliability, and consistency over time.	The online teacher is able to create and implement assessments in online learning environments in ways that ensure validity and reliability of the instruments and procedures.	
The online teacher knows and understands the implementation of online assessment measures and materials in ways that ensure instrument validity and reliability.	The online teacher is able to develop and deliver assessments, projects, and assignments that meet standards-based learning goals and assess learning progress by measuring student achievement of learning goals.	
The online teacher knows and understands multiple strategies for ensuring the security of online student assessments, academic integrity, and assessment data.	The online teacher is able to implement a variety of assessments that ensure the security of student assessment data and accurate measures of student ability.	

Standard H

The online teacher develops and delivers assessments, projects, and assignments that meet standards-based learning goals and assesses learning progress by measuring student achievement of the learning goals.

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding	Teacher Abilities	Rating
The online teacher knows and understands the reach of authentic assessments (i.e., the opportunity to demonstrate understanding of acquired knowledge and skills, as opposed to testing isolated skills or retained facts) are part of the evaluation process.	The online teacher is able to apply authentic assessments as part of the evaluation process, assess student knowledge in a forum beyond traditional assessments, and monitor academic integrity with assessments.	
The online teacher knows and understands the process of continuous evaluation of students to include formative and summative assessments and student feedback, including polls and surveys that reflect student learning progress throughout the course.	The online teacher is able to create or select and implement a variety of formative and summative assessments that assess student learning progress and utilize student feedback to improve the online learning experience.	
The online teacher knows and understands the relationships between the assignments, assessments, and standards-based learning goals.	The online teacher is able to create, select, and organize the appropriate assignments and assessments, and align curricular content with associated and standards-based learning goals.	

Standard I

The online teacher demonstrates competency in using data from assessments and other data sources to modify content and to guide student learning.

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding	Teacher Abilities	Rating
The online teacher knows and understands techniques to plan individualized instruction incorporating student data.	The online teacher is able to use student data to plan instruction.	
The online teacher knows and understands how data is used to modify the content, instruction, and assessment to meet student needs.	The online teacher is able to use observational data (e.g., tracking data in electronic courses, Web logs, e-mail) to monitor course progress and effectiveness.	
The online teacher knows and understands how instruction is based on assessment data.	The online teacher is able to customize instruction, based on assessment data, in order to personalize the learning experience per student needs and performance.	
The online teacher knows and understands the importance of self-reflection or assessment of teaching effectiveness.	The online teacher is able to create opportunities for self-reflection or assessment of teaching effectiveness within the online environment (e.g., classroom assessment techniques, teacher evaluations, teacher-peer reviews).	
The online teacher knows and understands varied assessment strategies that address levels of ability through a variety of alternative interventions.	The online teacher is able to address levels of ability through a variety of alternative interventions.	
The online teacher knows and understands the use of effective learning strategies data for an individual student to formulate detail-specific changes in future instruction, based on assessment results and research study (data-driven and research-based).	The online teacher is able to evaluate instructional strategies to determine their accuracy and usefulness for presenting specific ideas and concepts.	
The online teacher knows and understands the process for maintaining records of relevant communications.		

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding	Teacher Abilities	Rating
The online teacher knows and understands effective time management strategies.	The online teacher is able to provide consistent feedback and course materials in a timely manner, and use online tool functionality to improve instructional efficiency.	
The online teacher knows and understands online course management tasks.	The online teacher is able to track student enrollments, communication logs, attendance records, etc.	
The online teacher knows and understands ways for teacher and students to assess student readiness for course content and method of delivery.	The online teacher is able to employ ways to assess student readiness for course content and method of delivery.	
The online teacher knows and understands that student success (e.g., grade, level of participation, mastery of content, completion percentage) is an important measure of teaching and course success.	The online teacher is able to employ ways for students to effectively evaluate and assess their own readiness for course content and method of delivery.	
The online teacher knows and understands the importance of student self-assessment.	The online teacher is able to create opportunities for student self-assessment within courses.	
The online teacher knows and understands the role of student empowerment in online learning.	The online teacher is able to empower students to independently define short- and long-term learning goals and monitor their personal progress.	

Standard J

The online teacher interacts in a professional, effective manner with colleagues, parents, and other members of the community to support students' success.

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding	Teacher Abilities	Rating
The online teacher knows and understands the need for professional activity and collaboration beyond school (e.g., professional learning communities) to update academic skills and knowledge and collaborate with other educators.	The online teacher is able to engage in professional development activities and collaboration beyond school.	
The online teacher knows and understands the need to coordinate learning experiences with with other adults involved in providing support to the student (e.g., parents, local school contacts, mentors) to support student learning.	The online teacher is able to provide ongoing communication with parents or guardians concerning student learning.	

Instructional Design

The following section outlines standards for instructional design skills for the online teacher of record, where applicable. These standards are considered optional, as instructional design does not always fall under online teaching responsibilities.

Standard K

The online teacher arranges media and content to help students and teachers transfer knowledge most effectively in the online environment.

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding	Rating
The online teacher knows and understands critical digital literacies and 21st century skills.	
The online teacher knows and understands appropriate use of technologies to enhance learning.	
Teacher Abilities	
The online teacher is able to modify and add content and assessment, using an online Learning Management System (LMS).	
The online teacher is able to create and modify engaging content and appropriate assessments in an online environment.	
The online teacher is able to incorporate multimedia and visual resources into an online module.	
The online teacher is able to use and incorporate subject-specific and developmentally appropriate software in an online learning module.	
The online teacher is able to review materials and Web resources for their alignment with course objectives and state and local standards and for their appropriateness on a continuing basis.	
The online teacher is able to create assignments, projects, and assessments that are aligned with students' different visual, auditory, and hands-on ways of learning.	
The online teacher is able to arrange media and content to help transfer knowledge most effectively in the online environment.	

The Washington State Board of Education
Governance I Achievement I High School and College Preparation I Math & Science I Effective Workforce

Old Capitol Building, Room 253
P.O. Box 47206
600 Washington St. SE
Olympia, Washington 98504

Speakers for the Annual State Board of Education and Professional Educator Standards Board Meeting

Sue Collins:

With over 35 years in education and technology, Sue Collins possesses extensive experience. Her career began as a classroom teacher, and was followed thereafter with time spent as a district science coordinator, state IT director for the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, developer for education initiatives at both Apple Computer and Compaq, and more. Sue is well-known for her ability to bridge education, technology, and policy.

Ron Mayberry:

As principal of the Internet Academy and the Career Academy at Federal Way, Ron Mayberry has valuable insights into the future of learning opportunities in the digital world. He employs that expertise both in his profession and as President of the WACOL - Washington Coalition of Online Learning, and as a Board Member for WALA - Washington Association of Learning Alternatives.