



What You've Always Wanted to Know about Online and Blended Learning but Were Afraid to Ask
A Special Briefing for Congressional Staff
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Glossary of Terms

Assistive Technology – Assistive technology helps students with disabilities navigate material in a classroom setting. As technology increases and becomes more complex, students are able to use this technology with greater ease. For example, iPads and other tablet computers help students with autism learn patterns of words and sentences by using the touch screen. Assistive technology also helps students with hearing and visual impairments take notes more easily, allowing them to be more engaged in the classroom experience.

Blended Learning – A learning approach where online and traditional brick and mortar learning are integrated (or blended) to optimize the learning experience for students. In blended learning, online courses are used as supplements to enhance traditional classroom learning experiences. In this model, students benefit from not only the knowledge gained from teachers and other students in the traditional model, but also from the countless possibilities online learning presents. Students take both traditional classes and online courses in a designated computer or learning lab. School and district leaders can choose the courses and programs that best serve their specific students.

Brick and Mortar Schools – Expression that refers to a traditional school or a traditional school building. This expression is often used when contrasted with an online school.

Carnegie Unit – Developed in 1906, the Carnegie Unit is a measure of how long a student has studied a subject. The unit links time spent in a brick and mortar classroom with credits for a particular course. Many states attach funding to schools based on the amount of seat-time each student spends in classes.

Credit-Recovery Programs – When a student fails a required course in high school, they must make it up in order to graduate. Credit-recovery programs allow students to make up failed courses. Many of these programs offer online course options to allow students more flexibility.

Distance Education – Any type of educational activity in which the participants are in separate physical spaces.

Online Course – Any course offered via the Internet.

Online Learning – Online learning refers to an approach where all content and student-teacher interaction occurs online. Florida Virtual School (FLVS) was the first school to use this completely virtual approach and serves as an example of an online learning model. FLVS offers increased flexibility, as students work from their own space at their own pace. Students collaborate with teachers early on to establish their schedule and learning style needs. They complete assignments and courses according to this pre-established timeline and have the flexibility to sign up for new courses at any point during the school year. The only time students must adhere to a certain schedule is during the proctoring of state standardized assessments.

Project-Based Learning –Through project-based learning, students experience powerful learning opportunities as they learn through completing a specific project, often with a partner or group, assigned by the teacher. Students learn through an inquiry-based approach that allows them to solve problems that are authentic, curriculum-based, and often integrate multiple subject-areas. This approach has students integrating information from a variety of sources, honing their critical thinking skills. Project-based learning changes how students are given information, and how students and teachers interact. For example, the teacher’s role shifts from the sole provider of knowledge to the facilitator of information. Students learn through a variety of methods and modes—digital sources, internet searches, peer-to-peer communication, group collaboration, presentations, and teacher interaction. Since students are often working in partners or groups, they increase their problem-solving skills as they work together to solve a common problem. Most projects have the following four basic components: extended time frame; collaboration; inquiry, investigation, and research; and polished product or presentation.

STEM – Over the past few years, there has been an increased focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education so that students are exposed to these fields early on in their education. There is increasing emphasis on bringing professionals from STEM fields to the classroom to either teach or present to students, expanding the skill sets of students and, as a result, preparing them for an evolving workforce.

Resources – Updated 4/15/2013

2010 National Technology Plan Executive Summary: *Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology*

The National Technology Plan, published by the U.S. Department of Education, illustrates how the United States is going to expand technology to enhance the learning experience for all students. The four main pillars of the plan are: to expand mobility of technology, making it accessible twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week; to create more social interactions for learning; to increase the availability and quality of digital content available to students; and to shift from a print system to online/digital system with curriculum whenever possible.

Available at: <http://www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/netp2010-execsumm.pdf>

Quality Control in K-12 Digital Learning: Three (Imperfect) Approaches

In this working paper for the Fordham Institute, Fredrick Hess, director of Education Policy Studies and resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, analyzes the policy concerns for online learning. With online learning comes a great deal of possibilities, as geographic and time constraints diminish. However, traditional structures will not work for the online format. In his paper, Hess looks at the pros and cons of methods already in place and ultimately comes to the conclusion that a mix of all three policies must work together to create the most beneficial outcomes.

Available at:

http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2011/2011_CreatingSoundPolicyforDigitalLearning/20110727_QualityControlinK12DigitalLearning_Hess.pdf

A Closer Look at Virtual Learning Models

Julie Young, Florida Virtual School (FLVS) president and CEO, carefully explains the different models of virtual learning, going through the benefits of each model. With new legislation expanding virtual options in Florida, FLVS is opening new campuses utilizing different virtual models.

Available at: <http://thejournal.com/articles/2011/07/26/a-closer-look-at-virtual-learning-models.aspx>

Integrating Technology With Student-Centered Learning

Sponsored by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, Babette Moeller and Tim Reitzes researched the integration of technology in schools and the impact on student-centered learning by compiling information from literature reviews, policy and practice reports, and interviews with a variety of educators at selected schools. The report concluded that technology can provide a powerful teaching and learning tool, but must be integrated with a more comprehensive reform agenda to truly transform education.

Available at: <http://www.nmefdn.org/uploads/Integrating%20Tech%20with%20SCL.pdf>

Smart Brief on EdTech

The free, daily email newsletter offers a news briefing for education stakeholders who are particularly interested in education and technology. Links to each of the articles are provided as well as a brief synopsis. To sign up, visit the website and provide an email address.

Available at: <https://www.smartbrief.com/edtech/index.jsp>

Online and Blended Learning: A Survey of Policy and Practice of K-12 Schools around the World

Published by iNACOL, this report provides a comprehensive overview of how online and blended learning is developing and expanding in different countries and regions around the world. The report includes overarching trends, issues, and challenges, as well as case studies and profiles of specific countries.

Available at: http://www.inacol.org/research/docs/iNACOL_IntnlReport2011.pdf

Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning: An Annual Review of Policy and Practice (2011)

Released by the Evergreen Education Group, this report is the latest in a series of annual reports. It contains updated enrollment statistic, trends, and analysis of K-12 online and blending learning. A majority of the report consists of state policy profiles.

Available at: http://kpk12.com/cms/wp-content/uploads/EEG_KeepingPace2011-lr.pdf

A National Primer on K-12 Online Learning

Sponsored by Aventa Learning, Connections Academy, and Insight Schools, this is the second edition of a report published by iNACOL intended to provide basic and current information for policy makers and practitioners about K-12 online learning. The report discusses general information about online learning, teaching/learning in an online environment, technology as it pertains to online learning, evaluating the effectiveness of online learning, and emerging trends in the online learning world.

Available at: http://www.inacol.org/research/docs/iNCL_NationalPrimerv22010-web.pdf

Online Learning Definitions Project

Developed by iNACOL, this document provides definitions for terms relating to online and blended learning. Creating a common set of definitions is intended to facilitate a common language among states, districts and other organizations working to develop online and blended learning policies and practices.

Available at: http://www.inacol.org/research/docs/iNACOL_DefinitionsProject.pdf

Online Schools

Online Schools provides a national directory of colleges, universities, and technical schools that offer online educational options. Online Schools has created a comprehensive database chock-full of information that prospective students are looking for. We have mined more than 6,000 school catalogs to build a full list of online learning options in the United States, with the data located all in one place for easy access and comparison.

Available at: www.onlineschools.org/guides/