



A Solution-Finding Report

Title: *Virtual Education: Key Factors Related to Success*

Date: July 16, 2013

This solution-finding report provides information requested for resources related to “models or contexts in which virtual education can occur and identify[ing] key factors related to success,” with a special interest in full-time virtual schools at the secondary level.

Solution-finding Reports are intended to provide a quick response to the request for information; they are not intended to be a definitive literature survey or synthesis of the topic.

Ash, K. (2012). Blended learning models generating lessons learned. *Education Week*, 32(9), 4–5.

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/10/24/09el-overview.h32.html>

According to this article, a variety of models for mixing face-to-face education and online instruction are generating lessons learned. It details some common themes and best practices that have emerged among the diverse blended models.

Ash, K. (2012). Flexibility, support build student independence. *Education Week*, 32(9), 10–13.

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/10/24/09el-flex.h32.html>

This article profiles K12 Inc.'s San Francisco Flex Academy, which operates on a blended learning model in which students have some face-to-face time with instructors and some online class time at individual workstations.

Center for Public Education. (2012). *Searching for the reality of virtual schools*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

<http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Organizing-a-school/Searching-for-the-reality-of-virtual-schools-at-a-glance/Searching-for-the-reality-of-virtual-schools-full-report.pdf>

In this report, the Center for Public Education describes various ways digital learning is offered to students, from individual online courses to full-time virtual schools. In addition, it examines current state and district policies that govern its administration, including funding and accountability, and it discusses what is known – and more importantly, what is not known – about the effect of online learning on student outcomes. It concludes with a list of questions for state and local policymakers to ask when considering policies to expand online learning.

Chingos, M. M. (2013). Questioning the quality of virtual schools. *Education Next*, 13(2).

<http://educationnext.org/questioning-the-quality-of-virtual-schools/>

This article claims that the National Education Policy Center report by Miron and Urschel, *Understanding and improving full-time virtual schools*, “is ultimately of little use to policymakers or researchers. The NEPC report uses badly flawed measures of school performance that provide little information about how much students learn as a result of attending K12 schools. Consequently, it is unclear how to interpret the report’s comparisons of school finances without knowing whether K12’s schools are performing well, poorly, or in between.

Clayton M. Christensen, C. M., & Horn, M. B. (2008). How Do We Transform Our Schools? – Use technologies that compete against nothing. *Education Next*, 8(3).

<http://educationnext.org/virtual-schools/>

This article claims, “The way to implement an innovation so that it will transform an organization is to implement it disruptively—not by using it to compete against the existing paradigm and serve existing customers, but to let it compete against ‘non-consumption,’ where the alternative is nothing at all.”

Christensen, C. M., Horn, M. B., & Staker, H. (2013). *Is K–12 blended learning disruptive? – An introduction of the theory of hybrids*. San Mateo, CA: Clayton Christensen Institute.

<http://www.christenseninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Is-K-12-Blended-Learning-Disruptive.pdf>

This paper analyzes blended learning through the lens of disruptive innovation theory to help people anticipate and plan for the likely effects of blended learning on the classrooms of today and schools of tomorrow.

Florida Virtual School. (2013). *Every great journey begins by charting the right course: 2013–2014 Catalog*. Orlando, FL: Author.

<http://www.flvs.net/Students/Documents/Course%20Catalog.pdf>

2011 legislation in Florida authorized the Florida Virtual School Full-Time (FLVS-FT) to operate a full-time virtual school at the state level which opens up the enrollment allowing any Florida student to join. Being enrolled as a student in FLVS-FT means that FLVS-FT is their school of record; they take courses with FLVS-FT, receive grades through FLVS-FT, and graduate with an FLVS-FT diploma. This is the catalog for high school and middle school courses, listing more than 120 online courses, some with apps specifically developed to help students learn on the go with their smartphones.

Glass, G. V., & Welner, K. G. (2011). *Uncertain private ventures in need of public regulation*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center.

<http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/NEPC-VirtSchool-1-PB-Glass-Welner.pdf>

According to this policy brief, little or no research is yet available on the outcomes of full-time virtual schooling, and the rapid growth of virtual schooling raises several immediate, critical questions for legislators regarding matters such as cost, funding, and quality. This policy brief is accompanied by model statutory code language for states to address the issues raised by research and discussed in the main body of this brief.

Horn, M. B., & Staker, H. (2011). *The rise of K–12 blended learning*. San Mateo, CA: Innosight Institute, Inc.

<http://www.innosightinstitute.org/innosight/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/The-Rise-of-K-12-Blended-Learning.pdf>

For this report, the authors surveyed roughly 40 different blended-learning programs, which helped them determine a definition for blended learning, and develop a categorization scheme for six different models that emerged again and again. They say the report will show that there is a great variety of programs—as well as room for significantly more innovation.

Miron, G., & Urschel, J. L. (2012). *Understanding and improving full-time virtual schools: A study of student characteristics, school finance, and school performance in schools operated by K12 Inc*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center.

<http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/nepcrbk12miron.pdf>

This report provides a new perspective on the nation's largest virtual school provider through a systematic review and analysis of student characteristics, school finance, and school performance of K12-operated schools. Using federal and state data, this report provides a description of the students served by K12 and the public revenues received and spent by the company at the school level. Further, the report presents evidence from a range of school performance measures and strives to understand and explain the overall weak performance of these virtual schools (see Chingos).

Moe, T., Cuban, L., & Chubb, J. (2009). Virtual Schools: Will education technology change the role of the teacher and the nature of learning? *Education Next*, 9(1).

<http://educationnext.org/virtual-schools/>

This article asks the question, “Will education technology change the role of the teacher and the nature of learning?”

Molnar, A. (Ed.). (2013). *Virtual schools in the U.S. 2013: Politics, performance, policy, and research evidence*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center.

<http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/nepc-virtual-2013.pdf>

This is the first in a series of annual reports from the National Education Policy Center designed to analyze the performance of full-time, publicly funded K–12 virtual schools; describe key policy issues raised by virtual education; assess the research evidence that bears on K–12 virtual teaching and learning; and provide research-based recommendations to help guide policymaking.

Quillen, I. (2012). E-Learning opens real-world doors. *Education Week*, 32(9), 6–8.

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/10/24/09el-grandrapids.h32.html>

For many schools, mixing online courses with face-to-face learning is primarily a method for serving struggling or advanced students while keeping them inside school walls but, according to this article, virtual courses give Grand Rapids, MI students time for internships and on-site experiences. In 2008, the Grand Rapids Public School District launched the first of five Centers of Innovation, designed to give students a pathway to in-school internships and fellowships that could eventually lead to careers.

Raise Your Hand Texas. (2012). *Virtual schools in Texas: Good for kids or merely good for profit?* Houston, TX: Author.

<http://www.raiseyourhandtexas.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/virtual-schools-white-paper.pdf>

The policy paper analyzes available research and data on full-time virtual schools in Texas, and makes policy recommendations to strengthen governance, accountability and financial transparency for this rapidly growing segment of Texas education.

Roblyer, M. D., & Davis, L. (2008). Predicting success for virtual school students: Putting research-based models into practice. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 11(4).

<http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/winter114/roblyer114.html>

According to this article, virtual schooling has the potential to offer K-12 students increased access to educational opportunities not available locally, but comparatively high dropout rates continue to be a problem, especially for the underserved students most in need of these opportunities. Creating and using prediction models to identify at-risk virtual learners, long a popular topic in distance education, is assuming increasing urgency in virtual schooling. This article emphasizes that prediction models must be developed and used in ways that yield findings to support student success rather than prevent students from enrolling, and offers one such model. After a description of data collection and statistical processes used to derive the model, procedures are outlined for how to implement it in virtual school settings in ways that increase both the accuracy and utility of predictions.

Staker, H., & Horn, M. B. (2012). *Classifying K–12 blended learning*. San Mateo, CA: Innosight Institute, Inc.

<http://www.innosightinstitute.org/innosight/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Classifying-K-12-blended-learning2.pdf>

This blended-learning taxonomy, with definitions, expands upon and refines the authors' previous work (see Horn & Staker, 2011) in helping to create a shared language for the K–12 blended-learning sector.

Watson, J., Murin, A., Vashaw, L., Gemin, B., & Rapp, C. (2012). *Keeping pace with K–12 online learning: An annual review of policy and practice*. Durango, CO: Evergreen Education Group.

<http://kpk12.com/cms/wp-content/uploads/KeepingPace2012.pdf>

This report from the Evergreen Education Group examines the status of K–12 online education across the country. The report provides an overview of the latest policies, practices, and trends affecting online learning programs across all 50 states. It includes a section called “Planning for quality.”