



PLANNING
FOR K-12
ONLINE LEARNING

Fall 2005



INTRODUCTION

General acceptance of the value of online learning is increasing significantly. Yet, many issues continue to surface as high schools scrutinize this rather unique way of learning.

This document will suggest steps to take when planning for online learning experiences and provide associated activities for each step. Several Oakland County school districts contributed resources, tools, and policies to this document that were part of their preparation to offer virtual experiences for their high school students. Hopefully, this collection will be helpful to you in developing or refining your plan.



DEFINITION

Online learning, virtual learning, and e-learning are often used interchangeably. When a reference is made to online learning or e-learning in this document, the focus is on virtual content and instruction that students access through the Internet. Students learn by communicating electronically with an instructor and peers and have the potential to receive credit for completing a course. While the majority of a class is taken online, some face-to-face time between students and mentors or between students and online instructors is certainly desirable.



PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to pinpoint some of the most important resources for online planning and make them easy to access through a minimal amount of Websites. Only a few Websites will be offered for exploration.



PERSPECTIVES

- An interesting look at online learning is offered in the book, *A Classroom of One, How Online Learning is Changing Our Schools and Colleges*. The author, Gene I. Maeroff, suggests that the main goal of e-learning is, quite simply, convenience for the learner.
- But, the National Education Technology Plan goes far beyond the thinking of Maeroff. The Plan offers a framework for transforming education and, significantly, one of seven recommended action steps boldly addresses e-learning and virtual schools at www.nationaledtechplan.org/actionsteps.asp.
- The National Education Technology Plan suggests that states, districts, and schools:
 1. Provide EVERY student access to e-learning.
 2. Enable EVERY teacher to participate in e-learning training.
 3. Encourage use of e-learning options to meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements (Go to the Website above and scroll to the action step entitled Support E-Learning and Virtual Schools. Then, click on the e-learning resources to the right that emphasize the tie-in to NCLB).
 4. Explore creative ways to fund e-learning opportunities.
 5. Develop quality measures and accreditation standards for e-learning.
- In a very practical sense, an article by Oblender and Glass in the October 2004 publication of *Principal Leadership* (High School Ed.) delineates reasons to offer online courses. These reasons include taking advantage of students' comfort with technology to make learning particularly meaningful; providing students with opportunities to be engaged in every aspect of their learning; allowing for learning preferences; and preparing students for higher education experiences and future employment.

Continued on next page...

- Discussions with educators reveal a strong sense that online learning needs to be an integral part of a learning system. Importantly, online learning addresses any deficiencies in a curriculum that may exist, presents a way to deal with scheduling conflicts, and allows for flexible learning that can be particularly helpful for special needs students.
- Many states have acknowledged the importance of online teaching/learning and offer a variety of virtual classes to high school students. Learn more about the Michigan Virtual High School by going to www.mivhs.org.



SUGGESTED PLANNING STEPS

Whatever your reasons are for closely examining if and/or how online learning might fit in your district, the following steps may assist you in your planning process:

1. Carefully select a committee of online stakeholders
2. Define the mission and scope of the committee
3. Acquire relevant research
4. Review key guides to online education
5. Identify faculty attitudes and current involvement in online learning
6. Determine ways to evaluate online course content
7. Gather data from exemplary sites
8. Develop/refine your policy for online learning
9. Determine specific strategies for success
10. Design a marketing plan
11. Plan for a formal evaluation



WEB EXPLORATION

One particular Website contains some excellent materials surrounding virtual learning. Before reviewing the details associated with each suggested planning step, you may want to go to North Central Regional Education Laboratory's (NCREL's) site, www.ncrel.org/tech/elearn, and explore all it has to offer. At the site, you will find a theoretical framework for e-learning, a review and synthesis of current e-learning literature, an array of references, and an E-Learning Knowledge Base where you can search for e-learning items from a valuable collection of resources. Or, if you prefer, you will be sent to appropriate parts of the site, along with other references, as each suggested planning step is expanded below.

STEP 1: Carefully select a committee of online stakeholders

- Consider including a parent, counselor, teacher, high school principal(s), central office administrator, media specialist, union representative, research/evaluation specialist, and a virtual learning consultant.

STEP 2: Define the mission and scope of the committee

- Make sure the direction of online teaching/learning fits well with your district's overall mission and vision for education.

STEP 3: Acquire relevant research on online teaching/learning and distribute to committee

- Access NCREL's E-Learning Knowledge Base to obtain up-to-date reviews and synthesis of current literature on online teaching/learning (Go to www.ncrel.org/tech/elearn and click on the Knowledge Base button). The Knowledge Base is interactive and consists of full-text online resources.
- Brainstorm, as a group, research areas of interest and assign specific areas to individual committee members.

Continued on next page...

- Access NCREL's *The Effects of Distance Education on K-12 Student Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis* at www.ncrel.org/tech/distance/k12distance.pdf. The indication is that there is no significant difference between results of online learning and classroom-based instruction.

STEP 4: Review key guides to online education

- Access National Education Association's (NEA's) *Guide To Online High School Courses* at www.nea.org/technology/onlinecourseguide.html. The Guide has excellent background information and material on why online courses are focused on the high school level and why standards are needed for online learning. Questions are presented that need to be addressed by policymakers, online teachers, managers and administrators of online courses, parents/guardians, and students. Lastly, areas of consideration for quality online course offerings are delineated.
- Review the Michigan Department of Education's *Pupil Accounting Manual* and discuss the implications for your district. Go to http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-6525_6530_6605-22360--,00.html and then to 5O MI Virtual HS & Distance Learning.
- Acquire *Virtual Realities: A School Leader's Guide to Online Education* (10 copies can be borrowed from Educational Technology Services at Oakland Schools).
 1. Assign 2-3 members of the committee to read the publication and summarize for the entire committee.
 2. Pay particular attention to a Course Evaluation Guide, a possible tool for maintaining quality control.

STEP 5: Identify faculty attitudes and current levels of involvement in online learning

- Consult with Dr. Lindson Feun, Consultant - Research, Evaluation & Assessment Programs, at Oakland Schools, for assistance in developing a survey if you do not have this type of person on staff. Statistical analyses of data reports can be generated when surveys are read electronically. Cost is \$.50/ respondent and assistance with interpretation is available at no additional cost. Contact Dr. Feun at 249.209.2340.
- Through survey results, identify online advocates and keep attitudes in mind throughout the planning process.
- You may be able to use parts of an instrument designed by the Educational Technology Services team at Oakland Schools. View it at www.oakland.k12.mi.us/edtech/pdf/TechSurveyFinal.pdf

STEP 6: Determine ways to evaluate online course content

- Review a Course Evaluation Guide in Appendix A of *Virtual Realities: A School Leader's Guide to Online Education*. This instrument has sections on content, instructional design, instructional support, technical organization, usability, management, and assessment. There is also an evaluation summary sheet that quantifies the effectiveness of the course.
- Go back to NEA's *Guide to Online High School Courses* and consider quantifying the quality areas suggested under A User's Guide to Online Courses. The areas include curriculum, instructional design, teacher quality, student roles, assessment, management, support systems, and technological infrastructure.
- Go to www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/pubs/EssentialPrincipals/EssentialPrincipals.asp to view essential principles of quality for Web-based courses for Middle and High Schools.

Continued on next page...

- Go to www.projectsocrates.org/elearning/downloads/eval_online_products.pdf to view a rubric to assist in choosing online materials for students.
- Arrange for some presentations from online course providers and have a team of educators evaluate some of the courses before purchasing seats, using an agreed upon evaluation instrument.

STEP 7: Gather data from exemplary sites

- Develop an instrument for gathering information from exemplary districts in Oakland County and beyond and distribute results to committee. The tool used by the Troy School District is available at www.oakland.k12.mi.us/edtech/Troy.pdf.
- Have committee members attend conferences focused on K-12 online learning. Include an excellent teacher or two in the trip.
- Arrange for the teacher(s) to formally share experiences with other faculty members.
- Select a small team to visit exemplary sites where online learning can be discussed with administrators, teachers, and students.

STEP 8: Develop/refine your policy for online learning

- Review policies from several Oakland County schools at www.oakland.k12.mi.us/edtech/dop.html. If your district has a policy on virtual learning and you would be willing to share it with others, please e-mail the policy to lyn.allen@oakland.k12.mi.us and it will be included in the electronic version of this document.

Continued on next page...

- Choose 2-3 members of your committee to review the following excellent policy resources and summarize for the entire committee:
 1. *Any Time, Any Place, Any Path, Any Pace; Taking the Lead on e-Learning Policy* (10 copies available for loan through Educational Technology Services at Oakland Schools). This 2001 National Association of State Boards of Education document concludes that “e-learning should be universally implemented as soon as possible”. The rich content focuses on the role of leadership, the power of e-learning, re-engineering the system, assuring equity, and delivery of quality instruction.
 2. Dr. David Richard’s executive summary of his 2004 dissertation entitled *Oakland County Virtual Learning Policy Study*. His insightful summary delineates virtual learning policy components, findings from each component, and associated questions to address. Policy areas include funding, on-site mentors, pupil/parent approval process, course approval process, attendance guidelines, homebound/hospitalized students, and mandatory expulsion students. Access this study at www.oakland.k12.mi.us/edtech/pdf/ocstudy.pdf.
 3. National Education Association’s *Guide to Online High School Courses* at www.nea.org/technology/onlinecourseguide.html. Detailed questions for policymakers are given in the areas of planning for and managing online courses, personnel, quality control, student enrollment, and credit.
 4. NCREL’s *Virtual Schools and E-learning in K-12 Environments; Emerging Policy and Practice* at www.ncrel.org/policy/pubs/tech.htm. Click on Policy Issues, Issue 11, April 2002. This extensive edition of Policy Issues focuses on summarizing the critical e-learning issues related to policy, providing an overview of what works, and offering policy recommendations to support those charged with development of e-learning policy.

Continued on next page...

- Consider writing one or two page policy statements for Board of Education approval. Indicate on the policy statement that the superintendent or designee will develop administrative procedures to implement the policy.
- After Board approval of the policy statement, brainstorm, as a group, the procedures essential for successful policy implementation.
- Select a subcommittee to draft the administrative procedures.
- Refine procedures and gain superintendent's approval.

STEP 9: Determine specific strategies for success

- Train mentors on online navigation and their roles. James Wheaton, an online mentor from Novi High School, discusses the importance of mentoring and how it has positively affected student success at www.oakland.k12.mi.us/edtech/pdf/mentoring.pdf.
- Consider a pilot when first offering online courses.
- Involve parents. Give parents access to their child's username and password so they may access the course, check their child's grades, and receive frequent online progress reports.
- Ensure success of students (Questions students should gain answers to before taking an online course are part of the NEA's *Guide to Online High School Courses* and can be found at www.nea.org/technology/onlinecourseguide.html).
- Involve your teachers in teaching online courses.
- Involve department heads in evaluation of courses.
- Consider having students spend some time each week in a lab environment.
- Have a communications system in place.
- Keep the Board of Education informed of your progress.

STEP 10: Design a marketing plan

- Create awareness of online benefits and opportunities internally and externally.
- Focus on students, parents, teacher, counselors, and administration.
- Plan sessions for staff, students, parents, and community to interact with online courses (Consider answering questions delineated in NEA's *Guide to Online High School Courses* at www.nea.org/technology/onlinecourseguide.html).
- Send letters to community, staff, and students announcing online offerings.
- Highlight information and student and teacher experiences with online learning in publications, your district's Website, and any televised activities.
- Provide demonstrations to the Board of Education and utilize actual student work as you keep them updated.
- Request that online provider(s) assist in designing a full marketing plan.
- Include personnel in Communications & Marketing and Virtual Learning at Oakland Schools when marketing strategies are discussed.
- Distribute data on how students feel about the online courses and how well they do academically.

STEP 11: Plan for a formal evaluation

- If you are fortunate to have personnel dedicated to evaluation, involve them in the entire planning process so that a direction for evaluation is set early.
- Consider qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate online students and capture attitudinal data for teachers and parents.

Continued on next page...

- Consult with Dr. Lindson Feun, Consultant - Research, Evaluation & Assessment Programs, at Oakland Schools, for assistance in developing an evaluation if you do not have this type of person on staff. Assistance with formative and summative evaluations to improve program operations and to determine overall effectiveness is available at no cost. Contact Dr. Feun at 248.209.2340.
- Consider using an outside source for evaluation of the planning and implementation processes. The evaluation of online efforts at Oakland Schools was conducted by North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) and was an excellent resource for reflection and refinement of direction. You may access this evaluation at www.oakland.k12.mi.us/edtech/pdf/OVCrpt.pdf.
- Don't wait until your pilot is finished to think about indicators of success and ways to capture what is occurring. Both formative and summative evaluations are extremely useful.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The electronic version of this document can be found at www.oakland.k12.mi.us/edtech/planning.html.

Any questions regarding this document should be directed to Lyn Allen, Virtual Learning Consultant, at Oakland Schools. Contact her at lyn.allen@oakland.k12.mi.us, or 248.209.2210.

A special thanks to the Troy School District, Novi School District, and Rochester School District for their help in refining this planning guide and to all school districts who contributed policies and/or resources.



Learning Services
2111 Pontiac Lake Rd.
Waterford, MI 48328-2736
248.209.2210
www.oakland.k12.mi.us

Oakland Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, ages, sex, marital status, religion or disability. For employment matters, contact the Director of Human Resources at 248.209.2062. For all other matters, contact the Director of Legal Services at 248.209.2345, 2111 Pontiac Lake Road, Waterford, MI 48328-2736. Oakland Schools is a non-smoking environment. Please notify us within 10 days if you require special arrangements. No reimbursement if cancellation is not made 7 business days prior to the workshop. Carpooling is encouraged.