

Fast Facts About Online Learning



Research, Trends and Statistics

K-12 Online Learning and Virtual Schools: Expanding Options

- K-12 online learning is a new field consisting of an estimated \$50 million market, which is growing at an estimated annual pace of 30% annually.ⁱ
- 42 states have significant supplemental online learning programs, or significant full-time programs (in which students take most or all of their courses online), or both. Only eight states do not have either of these options, and several of these states have begun planning for online learning development.ⁱⁱ
- There are 26 state-wide or state-led virtual schools in the United States.ⁱⁱⁱ
- As of January 2007, there were 173 virtual charter schools serving 92,235 students in 18 states.^{iv}
- 57% of public secondary schools in the U.S. provide access to students for online learning.^v
- 72% of school districts with distance education programs planned to expand online offerings in the coming year.^{vi}
- 14.2 million computers were available for classroom use in the nation's schools as of the 2005-2006 school year. That works out to one computer for every four students.^{vii}

The North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) is the leading international K-12 non-profit organization representing the interests of administrators, practitioners, businesses and students involved in online learning in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

NACOL's mission is to increase access to educational opportunities and enhance learning by providing collegial expertise and leadership in K-12 online teaching and learning.

NACOL facilitates collaboration, advocacy and research to expand the availability and enhance the quality of K-12 online learning.

NACOL was founded in September 2003 and has 2,000+ members.

NACOL hosts the annual Virtual School Symposium, the leading K-12 national education conference on virtual schools and online learning – in Phoenix, AZ on October 26-28, 2008.

For more information, www.virtualschoolsymposium.org

Online learning in K-12 schools is growing explosively.

- In 2000, there were 40,000-50,000 enrollments in K-12 online education.^{viii}
- Eduventures estimated 300,000 students participated in virtual learning in the 2002-2003 school year in the United States.^{ix} Alberta Online Consortium in Canada reported 4,766 enrollments in 2002-2003.
- In 2002-2003, NCES reported 328,000 distance education enrollments in K-12 public school districts.^x
- In 2005, the Peak Group estimated online enrollments of 500,000.
- In 2006, the Sloan Consortium reported 700,000 enrollments in K-12 online learning.
- The Peak Group estimates 1 million enrollments in 2007.
- In 2006, Sloan Consortium reported there were 3.2 million postsecondary students in the United States that took at least one online course; this represents a 25% increase over the previous year.
- In April 2006, Michigan became the 1st state to require online learning for high school graduation.
- 80% of K-12 school districts cited "the course was otherwise unavailable" as the number one reason for offering courses at a distance.^{xi}
- Enrollment province-wide in British Columbia climbed from 17,000 students in 2006 to 33,000 students in 2007, according to Canada's Ministry of Education statistics
- When considering online education for either students in rural communities who have "access to only a limited number of course offerings in their public schools" or advanced students interested in taking courses for college credit, the public expresses considerable support. In these two instances, over 60 percent of respondents support public funding for online education.^{xii}



The American Digital Schools 2006 Survey reports online learning is currently used by 4 percent of K-12 students and this number is expected to grow to 15% by 2011.



Research Reports “As Good or Better”: Effective

According to NCREL *Synthesis of New Research on K-12 Online Learning*:^{xiii}

- Online Learning Expands Options: “The first impetus to the growth of K-12 distance education was an interest in expanding educational options and providing equal opportunities for all learners.” (p.7)
- Online Learning Is Rapidly Growing: “Recent surveys show that K-12 online learning is a rapidly growing phenomenon.” (p.4)
- Online Learning Is Effective: “Equal or Better”: “One conclusion seems clear: On average, students seem to perform equally well or better academically in online learning.” (p. 17)
- Online Learning Training Improves Teaching: Teachers who teach online reported positive improvements in face-to-face, too. “Of those who reported teaching face-to-face while teaching online or subsequently, three in four reported a positive impact on their face-to-face teaching.” (p. 25)

Today’s Students

The Pew Internet Project reports “the Internet is an important element in the overall educational experience of many teenagers”:^{xiv}

- 87% of all youth between the ages of 12 and 17 use the Internet (21 million people).
- 86% percent of teens, 88% of online teens, and 80% of all parents believe that the Internet helps teenagers to do better in school.
- 85% of 17 year olds have gone online to get information about a college, university, or other school they were thinking about attending.



**50% of students
are creators of
content on the
Internet.**

Highlights from the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education Issue Brief on Rates of Computer and Internet Use by Children in Nursery School and Students in Kindergarten Through Twelfth Grade:^{xv}

- The use of computer technology begins at young ages; 67 percent of children in nursery school were computer users, as were 80 percent of those in kindergarten.
- By high school, nearly all students (97 percent) used computers, and a majority (80 percent) used the Internet.
- Computer and Internet use was more widespread among school-age children and adolescents than among adults (DeBell and Chapman 2003).
- 100% of schools are connected to the Internet.^{xvi}
- The use of computers and the Internet may improve people’s everyday lives and improve their labor market prospects. Because these technologies have the potential to improve access to information, help to get tasks done better or more quickly, and facilitate communication (see National Research Council 1999), computer and internet use rates may be considered indicators of the standard of living
- Also, the use of computers helps students gain experience with this technology, so use rates may indicate how well prepared the current generation of students is to enter a workforce where the ability to use a computer is expected (U.S. Department of Education 1999).
- 15% of public school instructional rooms have wireless Internet Access (NCES 2007).^{xvii}

High School Reform and Redesign

- Data suggest that in about six years 10 percent of all courses will be computer-based, and by 2019 about 50 percent of courses will be delivered online.^{xviii}
- 90% of the fastest growing jobs in the economy require a college degree.^{xix}
- Over 40% of our nation’s high schools do not offer any AP courses. Many of these schools serve predominantly low-income and minority students.^{xix}
- Virtual schools and online programs provide AP courses.
- While only 44% of U.S. high school students studied a foreign language in 2002, learning a second or third foreign language is compulsory for students in the European Union and elsewhere.^{xix}
- Virtual schools offer foreign language courses online that allow interactive communication and collaboration with students and teachers across state and national boundaries for 21st century learning.



High School Reform and Redesign

- 52% of middle school and 15% of high school mathematics teachers did not have a major or minor in mathematics and 40% of middle school and 11% of high school science teachers did not have a major or minor in science.^{xx}
- Virtual schools and online programs provide a range of courses such as science, math, foreign languages, electives and remedial courses with highly qualified teachers.
- According to the Manhattan Institute, 70% of all students in public high schools graduate, and only 32% of all students leave high school qualified to attend four-year colleges.^{xxi}
- The high school graduation rate in the United States is 70%. High school drop-out rates in urban areas average 50%.^{xxii}
- Only 51% of all black students and 52% of all Hispanic students graduate, and only 20% of all black students and 16% of all Hispanic students leave high school college-ready.
- According to recent research from the Silent Epidemic study, 47% said a major reason for dropping out was that “classes were not interesting” and they were “bored”; 88% of drop outs had passing grades.^{xxiii}
- The National Education Technology Plan recommended that every student have access to e-learning opportunities and every teacher have access to e-learning training.^{xxiv}
- Virtual schools and online learning can help provide equal access to rigorous courses for all students, reducing inequities that exist across the educational system.
- Today 6,000 talented young people will drop out of school.^{xxiv}
- Today only 11 states require credits in a foreign language for students to graduate.^{xxiv}
- Today African American students are 14 percent of those in school, but only 7 percent of those taking Advanced Placement exams.^{xxiv}
- Today two-thirds of high school students will be bored in at least one class.^{xxiv}
- Today 15 million students who need mentors do not have them.^{xxv}
- 69 percent of the public say that they “would be willing to have a child [of theirs] go through high school taking some academic courses over the Internet.”^{xxvi}

Current NACOL Initiatives

**Virtual School Symposium
Annual Conference:
October 26-28, 2008 in
Phoenix, AZ**

**NACOL Monthly Webinars
the Second Wednesday of
Every Month**

**New NACOL “Teacher Talk”
Webinars for Instructors in
Online Programs**

**K-12 Online Learning
Reports and Resources on
www.nacol.org:**

**Virtual Schools and 21st
Century Skills**

**NACOL Primer on K-12
Online Learning**

**NACOL State Needs
Assessments for Online
Courses and Services**

**NACOL National Standards
of Quality for Online
Courses**

**Online Professional
Development**

**NACOL Experts: Advice and
Networking**

More information is available
online at www.nacol.org.

References

- ⁱ *What Can Virtual Learning Do for Your School*, 2003, Eduventures.
- ⁱⁱ *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning 2007*, Evergreen Consulting; Retrieved January 7, 2008 from <http://www.nacol.org/docs/KeepingPace07-color.pdf>
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Technology Counts 2006*, Education Week; Keeping Pace, NACOL (AL, AR, CA, CO, FL, GA, ID, IL, IN, IO, KY, LA, MD, MA, MI, MO, NC, ND, NV, SC, TN, UT, VA, WV, WI).
- ^{iv} Center for Education Reform. (Note: There are 173 virtual charter schools with 92,235 students, up from 147 schools serving 65,354 students in 18 states in 2005-2006; 86 such schools with 31,000 students in 13 states in 2004-05; 60 schools in 13 states in 2002-03).
- ^v *Internet Access in U.S. Public Schools and Classrooms: 1994–2005*, 2007. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. www.nces.gov
- ^{vi} *Distance Education in Elementary and Secondary Public School Districts*, 2005, U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics. www.nces.ed.gov
- ^{vii} Upcoming *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2009*, Table 252 <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/>
- ^{viii} *Virtual Schools*, 2001, Tom Clark/WestEd.
- ^{ix} In 2002-2003, 4,766 students in Alberta, Canada were enrolled in online learning programs; up 1,000 from the previous year's 3,810 students.
- ^x *Distance Education in Elementary and Secondary Public School Districts*, 2005, U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics. www.nces.ed.gov
- ^{xi} *Distance Education in Elementary and Secondary Public School Districts*, 2005, U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics. www.nces.ed.gov
- ^{xii} "The 2008 Education Next-PEPG Survey of Public Opinion," Fall 2008, (vol. 8, no. 4), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/26380034.html>.
- ^{xiii} *NCREL Synthesis of New Research on K-12 Online Learning*, 2005, North Central Regional Education Laboratory/Learning Point Associates. www.ncrel.org/tech/synthesis/
- ^{xiv} *The Internet at School*, 2005, Pew Internet Study. www.pewinternet.org
- ^{xv} *Rates of Computer and Internet Use by Children in Nursery School and Students in Kindergarten Through Twelfth Grade*, 2003, National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_7/1_2/4_4.asp
- ^{xvi} *Internet Access in U.S. Public Schools and Classrooms: 1994–2005*, 2007. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. www.nces.gov
- ^{xvii} *Internet Access in U.S. Public Schools and Classrooms: 1994–2005*, 2007. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. www.nces.gov
- ^{xviii} *How Do We Transform Our Schools?*, Education Next, Christensen, Clayton M. and Michael B. Horn, Summer 2008 (vol. 8, no. 3), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/18575969.html>
- ^{xix} *Expanding the Advanced Placement Incentive Program*, U.S. Department of Education. <http://www.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/competitiveness/expanding-apip.html>
- ^{xx} *Schools and Staffing Survey: 1999-2000*, U.S. Department of Education. www.ed.gov
- ^{xxi} *Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States*, 2003, from the Manhattan Institute. www.manhattan-institute.org
- ^{xxii} *Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States*, 2003, from the Manhattan Institute. www.manhattan-institute.org
- ^{xxiii} *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives on High School Dropouts*, 2006, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. www.gatesfoundation.org
- ^{xxiv} *Toward A New Golden Age In American Education: How the Internet, the Law and Today's Students Are Revolutionizing Expectations: National Education Technology Plan*, 2005, U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Technology.
- ^{xxv} The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development: The Whole Child. www.wholechildeducation.org
- ^{xxvi} "The 2008 Education Next-PEPG Survey of Public Opinion," Fall 2008, (vol. 8, no. 4), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/26380034.html>