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Expanding Educational Opportunities in Kansas through Online Learning

by John R. LaPlante   January 2012

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Executive Summary

Online learning—sometimes called cyber schooling, digital learning or virtual schooling—is changing schools, students, and education across the country. It uses Internet connections, increasingly sophisticated software, video conferencing tools and rewritten curricula that take advantage of these and other emerging technologies. Successful online learning also requires adapting the roles of teachers and students to give students a more active role.

From its origins in university settings where professors taught computer programming, online learning has grown to serve 4 million students nationwide. They span all grade levels and subjects. Most of these students take a few classes online, while some take all of their course-work online. Online students work at morning, noon and night, from home and from school, alone and in groups.

Online schooling is popular among both students and teachers in Kansas. Students find many different benefits from taking classes online; they are able to proceed at their own pace and can take classes that might otherwise be unavailable. Children who have difficulty fitting in to a homogenized classroom setting can also avoid some of the social difficulties of being "different."

Teachers benefit as well. Sophisticated software gives them instant feedback on their students' grasp of the subject and they have more opportunities to work with students on a one-on-one basis. According to one teacher in the Andover eSchool, "I feel closer to these kids than I did when I was in the classroom."

Online learning is still relatively new, so the extent to which online schooling boosts student achievement more than traditional classroom instruction is not firmly settled—at least in the academic literature. But some lawmakers, school officials and students across the state find it a valuable addition to the public schooling system.

Despite these benefits, online learning has barely made a dent in Kansas schools. The greatest barriers are philo-sophical and bureaucratic, not technical. For example, being able to learn when it best suits the schedule of the student is one of the benefits of online learning, yet Kansas requires that students compile paper logs or punch computerized time clocks to record time online before and after certain dates in the fall. Rather than financially reward schools for the number of hours students sit at a desk (a logic that currently extends to brick-and-mortar schools), Kansas ought to follow the lead of states such as Florida, North Carolina and Minnesota by paying the bulk of its support only after a student successfully completes a class.

There is no silver bullet / single-solution to fix the unacceptably low achievement levels in Kansas (only about a third of all students are proficient in Reading according to the U.S. Department of Education) but on-line learning is a vital component of the broad array of reforms needed. Kansas policy makers should remove barriers to the growth of online schooling, especially regulations first meant for the brick-and-mortar school.

Introduction

For the most part, the way that schools structure learning in America hasn't changed much since the early 20th century: Children go to specialized buildings—public schools—five days a week, from August or September until May or June. They leave home and return home at prescribed times of the day. They take classes in math or English in chunks of time allotted by officials in a school or district office. So, for example, when the bell strikes at 11am, a student moves from Algebra to English—even if he's on the verge of making a breakthrough on a particularly difficult concept.

While we strive to educate our children, too often we constrain schools to "process" them in batches, as a teacher must deal with 20 or so students in a classroom at a time, before the next group enters the room. Schooling students in batches masks wide variations within a class.

Students must learn at a group pace, meaning that some will be frustrated because they can't keep up, while others will be frustrated because they're bored.

Technology offers many opportunities to address these and other educational issues by providing an anytime, anywhere, any pace approach that offers benefits to students, parents, teachers, and taxpayers.

As the name suggests, online learning (also referred to as digital learning) has to do with computers and an Inter-net connection. Students use these tools to read about academic subjects, conduct experiments, manipulate data, write reports, take tests, interact with other students, interact with teachers, and work on projects, among other tasks. One leading publication on online schools, *Keeping Pace 2010*, offers the following definitions:

- **Online learning** is instruction via a web-based educational delivery system that includes software to provide a structured learning environment. It enhances and expands educational opportunities, and may be synchronous (communication in which participants

interact in real time such as videoconferencing) or asynchronous (communication that is separated by time such as email or online discussion forums). It may be accessed from multiple settings (in school and/or out of school buildings).

- **Blended learning** combines online learning with other modes of instructional delivery.

Online learning has advanced a great deal since its beginnings in the early 1990s. Some experts estimate that 3 million to 4 million K-12 students have taken at least one online course.[1]

Digital learning comes in many different varieties, including supplemental versus full-time, district or specialized organization, and public charter school or traditional public school. In some programs, students spend a significant amount of time on school grounds, interacting face-to-face with school employees. In others, student interactions with teachers are almost exclusively through the computer and telephone.

The ability to have individualized instruction – what works best for each student vs. 'one-size-fits-all' – is a unique advantage to online learning.

Online learning can occur either part-time or full-time

Most students take only a few of their classes online, in supplemental programs. Others, however, take all of their classes online, in full-time programs or schools.

Students can finish classes any time or may be on a schedule

The technology of online learning can enable students to start and finish a course any time they are able. In other cases, teachers may wish to have all students in a class proceed at the same pace.

Online learning can be "purely" online, or blended with regular face-to-face classes

In the most "plugged in" version of online education, a student works online from home and enters a school building on rare occasions, such as to take a final exam. But many more students use online learning in a "blended" or "hybrid" method that mixes online activity with face-to-face interaction with teachers. In some situations, students take online classes at home during some days of the week and attend face-to-face classroom classes on others. Another variation is for students to work on computers in a school classroom, with a teacher on hand to serve as a coach to small groups of students or on a one-on-one basis.

Online learning isn't limited to a narrow range of subjects

While the first use of computers in educational settings was to help teach math and science, online learning now encompasses many different subjects, including biology, chemistry, economics, English, foreign languages, geography, government, history, physics, psychology, and even physical education. Kindergarten students through high school seniors take part in online learning.

Many different types of schools can offer online classes

Depending on state and local practices, students in the U.S. may participate in online programs or classes from a variety of organizations, including school districts and consortia of districts.

In many states, students take all their classes online through online public charter schools, sometimes called cyber schools, which are independent of local school districts. (Not all public charter schools are online schools.) These schools have a board of directors separate from the local school board, and have a maximum degree of autonomy. In Kansas, public charter schools have some flexibility in their operations but they are, in effect, part of a regular school district.

Finally, some states have set up independent schools that focus on students taking online classes, much as they might set up independent schools that serve the deaf, blind, or academically gifted students. To date, most of these schools have supplemental rather than full-time programs. The most well-known is perhaps the Florida Virtual School, which was founded in 1997 and had 122,000 students enrolled during the 2010-2011 school year.

Kansas does not have a stand-alone, statewide online school for either full-time or part-time students. The issue came to a head at a meeting of the Kansas State Board of Education, held on October 14, 2009. Sally Cauble, a member of the board, asked the members to consider creating a statewide school.[2] The board reactivated the Virtual School Advisory Council, which recommended against the idea. It noted in its report to the board that "cost and capacity were part of the decision."[3]

It may be just as well that Kansas does not have an independent, state-run online learning program. In many cases, a statewide school came about because a few individuals decided to become champions of online learning. By contrast, not having a statewide school has benefits. It is consistent with the tradition of dispersing

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[1] iNACOL estimates that in the 2009-2010 school year, "over 1.5 million K-12 students were engaged in online and blended learning," but it warns, "growth is so rapid publications that include specific statistics and data are at risk of being out-of-date before they are published." Matthew Wicks, writing in "A National Primer on K-12 Learning , Version 2," October 2010. http://bit.ly/iNACOL-1. Michael B. Horn and Heather Staker, "The Rise of Blended Learning," Innosight Institute, January 2011, http://bit.ly/HornBlended1. See also Heather Staker, "The Rise of Blended Learning: Profiles of Emerging Models," Innosight Institute, May 2011, and "Fast Facts About Online Learning," iNACOL.

[2] Materials for the November 10, 2009 meeting of the Kansas State Board of Education, page 10, http://bit.ly/SB10-09.

[3] "Virtual education report," agenda items from the State Board of Education Meeting, April 13-14, 2010, available online at http://bit.ly/SB4-10.

authority over schooling across the state rather than concentrating it in the capital. Dispersed authority helps diffuse conflicts that arise when one small group of people make decisions for the entire state. In addition, Kansas will be able to draw on educational entrepreneurs from among the state's nearly 300 school districts, rather than hope to "get everything right" in a single statewide entity. Online learning is still a relatively new and unused setting in Kansas, so there is some value in having organizations try different approaches.

Online opportunities may be home-grown or purchased from outside vendors

Some schools, districts, or other organizations that sponsor online courses hire an outside vendor to create the curriculum, keep the computer systems running, and do much of the other work involved. Others use their own staff to carry out these tasks.

Online opportunities may be open to all students within a state, or only a few

Though it is technically possible and certainly preferable to make online learning open to anyone, most states and districts have rules that limit who can enroll in an online class. Sometimes students will be able to take an online course only if it is offered by the school district in which they live. Other students may be able to take an online course from a list of schools, or indeed from any school in the state. Arbitrary regulations, not technology, set the boundaries.

The variety that can found within online learning is reflected in the many different names that people use: digital learning, online learning, cyber schools, cyber public charters, virtual schools, and e-schools.

Online learning is the latest example of educators using new technologies to expand opportunities beyond the traditional classroom setting. Earlier technologies include correspondence courses (introduced in 1906), educational radio (1929), and educational TV (1961).[4]

■ A Brief History

Online learning is a sophisticated and advanced descendent of "distance learning." Distance learning used to mean correspondence courses, in which students worked alone and at their own pace, within guidelines. The next new technology was video conferencing, though in many ways it resembled the face-to-face classroom. Computers made their entrance into education in the 1940s, in American universities. They were first used for K-12 students in the 1960s. That's when a program developed by a University of Illinois professor was used to help teach reading at the elementary school level. A few secondary schools—about 1 percent of all public secondary schools—used computers for instructional purposes in the early 60s. Over time, computers were used to teach computer programming (the BASIC language) and the logic of mathematics (LOGO). [5]

But computer technology's big entrance into schools may have come courtesy of Apple Inc., which created its first line of computers in 1976. In the early 1980s, the company donated computers to public schools across California, a move that was in part philanthropic and in part an attempt to attract customers while they were young. It promised Congress a computer in every classroom in the country, in exchange for tax breaks. Congress did not take the offer.[6] In advertisements, the company also promised parents that its computers could help preschoolers learn shapes and help high-school seniors practice for college entrance exams. Since then, computers have been supplemented with ever more powerful software (e.g., which allows teachers to track student performance in real time, rather than just at the fixed intervals of a testing schedule), and the Internet has amplified the educational power of the personal computer in many ways.

Laural Springs, a private K-12 school in California, may lay claim to being the first school to use online classes, having introduced them in 1991. Since then, many individual schools, school districts, and specialized state agencies have developed online classes and programs.

Utah introduced the nation's first statewide, supplemental online public school in 1994; Florida followed in 1996, as did the Virtual High School Global Consortium, which now has 770 member schools in 34 states.[7] Michael K. Barbour, a professor of educational technology at Wayne State University, writes that in the 2000-2001 school year, 40,000 to 50,000 students enrolled in online courses nationwide. This number grew to over 1 million in the 2008-2009 year, with 175,000 students enrolled full-time.[8] More recent estimates put the number of full-time online students at 200,000.[9]

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[4] Michael K. Barbour, "The promise and the reality: exploring virtual schooling in rural juristictions," Education in Rural Australia, January 2011, http://bit.ly/Barbour1.

[5] Andrew Molnar, "Computers in Education: A Brief History." THE Journal, June 1, 1997, available online at http://bit.ly/MolnarHistory, accessed on July 7, 2011.

[6] "An Apple in every classroom?," The Palm Beach Post, May 8, 1982, accessed online at http://bit.ly/PBPapple on July 7, 2011.

[7] Michael K. Barbour, "The promise and the reality: exploring virtual schooling in rural juristictions," Education in Rural Australia, January 2011, http://bit.ly/Barbour1.

[8] Michael K. Barbour, "The promise and the reality: exploring virtual schooling in rural juristictions," Education in Rural Australia, January 2011, http://bit.ly/Barbour1.

[9] "Keeping Pace 2010," Evergreen Education Group, available online at http://kpk12.com/.

The Move Toward Digital Education

■ Schools and students use digital learning for many different reasons

According to a survey conducted by Stateline.org, "A combination of higher proficiency standards and tighter budgets" is driving the move toward digital education.[10]

Another reason might be that students, schools, and teachers are finding many different ways to use online learning. Some use it for credit recovery while others use it to earn college credit through taking Advancement Placement courses.[11] A school might use it to offer students a "highly qualified" teacher at a distance if none can be found locally. It can also be useful if the enrollment of a school is too small to support a teacher in a specialized class, such as a foreign language.

Others in the field of education cite the ability to offer a more customized experience. Denise Guy, assistant superintendent of the Abilene (Kansas) Public Schools, said that in the Abilene Virtual School, "Students are able to experience a rich learning environment to fit their individual needs therefore helping them to be successful."[12]

Digital learning advantages and opportunities

- Offer students credit recovery programs, which boosts graduation rates.
- Offer students a teacher when one is otherwise not available.
- Offer advanced placement or other classes that may not be available.

Reasons why a student may take up digital learning opportunities

- Work around scheduling conflicts with other classes or family commitments.
- Take a class that is not available in the school, often, advanced classes.
- Work at his or her own pace.
- Get a second chance through remediation; did not succeed in traditional setting.
- Avoid bullying or distractions.
- Homebound due to a medical condition.

■ Programs and enrollment have room to grow in Kansas

Online schooling has been in Kansas for over a decade, though its growth has been slow. The Basehor-Linwood district opened the Basehor-Linwood Virtual School, the first online school in the state, for the 1998-1999 school year, with 63 students.[13] Other districts, such as Galena, Elkhart, and Wichita, followed a few years later. The breakout year may have been 2005-2006, when 11 new schools or programs opened, including the Turning Point Learning Center (Emporia) and two schools overseen by the Lawrence district.[14] By the 2010-2011 year, Kansas public schools hosted 46 different schools or programs, and the current school year features 49.[15]

The number of students who use online opportunities has gone up over time, though today it still remains well under one percent of all students.

First, it's useful to bring up a short reminder that there are two different ways of counting student enrollment. They are "head count" and "full-time equivalent" students, or FTE. Say that two siblings each participate in an online school for half of their class load. They would show up on the head count list as two students, but on the FTE report as only one.

When the Legislative Division of Post Audit published its report on online learning in April, 2007, it calculated FTE enrollment, and concluding that enrollment in online programs grew from 63 students in 1998-1999 to 2,056.2 in the 2006-2007 year. That is, student enrollment in online programs (expressed on an FTE basis) grew from 0.01 percent of the students in 1998 to 0.46 percent – less than one-half of one percent of all students – in 2007.

Numbers for subsequent years have been harder to find. The 2009 edition of *Keeping Pace* says "KSDE reports 5,399 students using online programs in 2008-09," while the 2010 edition says, "KSDE reports approximately 4,000 students using online programs in 2009-10," KSDE refers to the Kansas Department of Education. In an unpublished e-mail, a representative of KSDE says in 2010-2011, "We had approximately 4,000 plus students enrolled in a virtual opportunity."[16] That was a head-

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[10] http://stateline.org/live/details/story?contentId=555696.

[11] A "credit recovery" class or program allows a student who has failed a course to get a second chance. It has become an important tool for raising graduation rates.

[12] Correspondence with author, September 23, 2011.

[13] "K-12 Education: Reviewing Issues Related to Virtual Schools," Kansas Legislative Division of Post Audit, April 2007, Appendix B (p. 36), http://1.usa.gov/LPA-vs1, accessed August 30, 2011.

[14] "K-12 Education: Reviewing Issues Related to Virtual Schools," Kansas Legislative Division of Post Audit, April 2007, Appendix B (p. 36), http://1.usa.gov/LPA-vs1, accessed August 30, 2011.

[15] "Virtual School/Program List 2010-2011," Kansas State Department of Education," http://bit.ly/VS-List, accessed July 21, 2011. "Virtual school programs 2011-2012," Kansas State Department of Education website, http://bit.ly/KSDE-VS-home, accessed September 12, 2011. These overstate the number of programs by counting K-8 and 9-12 separately.

[16] All published editions of Keeping Pace are available on the following website: http://kpk12.com/. The number for the 2010-2011 school year came from a correspondence between the author and KSDE.

count, which translates into an FTE of somewhere between 3,160 and 3,800 students, compared to a statewide FTE of more than 454,000.[17]

A tentative conclusion on enrollment might be this: The percentage of students taking advantage of online learning opportunities has doubled since 2007, but still represents less than one percent of all students. In other words, there is plenty of room to grow, especially if, as some experts predict, 50 percent of all high school classes in the country will be delivered online in 2019.[18]

The schools and programs that do exist offer classes for a variety of purposes, with a number of curriculums, and presented in a variety of ways. (See Appendix "A" and Appendix "B" of this report for more).

The online programs in Kansas tend to emphasize the low end of the academic achievement scale. More schools and programs (28) offer credit recovery opportunities than advanced classes (21). Roughly 35 percent of the programs or schools encompass the full range of grades (K-12) or nearly so (grades 3-12), while 20 percent are for grades 9-12 only, and 10 percent are grades K-8 only. The balance represents a mixture of grade levels. Oddly enough, many online programs lack a substantial website presence for informational or marketing purposes. Programs with a website are listed in Appendix C.

Table 1: Virtual Programs or Schools in Kansas[19]		
Year	Schools/ Programs	FTE Headcount
1998-1999	1	63.0
1999-2000	1	219.5
2000-2001	2	380.0
2001-2002	7	676.4
2002-2003	8	790.9
2003-2004	11	885.5
2004-2005	11	920.8
2005-2006	22	1,487.7
2006-2007	28	2,056.2
2007-2008	34	NA
2008-2009	39	5,399
2009-2010	41	4,000
2010-2011	46	4,000

■ Students, parents and teachers speak

We can see the many different values people place on online learning by looking at a report from KSDE, which was assisted by the Virtual School Advisory Council. An advisory council asked students, parents, teachers and administrators involved in virtual schooling a series of questions about their experiences. The results offer some insight into attitudes toward online education, including questions, concerns and positive reactions.[20]

While it's important to recognize that online schooling presents challenges, it's also important to not use these as an excuse for avoiding change. Some challenges are common to education, regardless of the delivery method. As one teacher said, "Most of the virtual teaching challenges are the same as those faced by teachers in our school buildings." In addition, the presence of challenges does not mean "it can't be done." Added another, "You can drag a kid to a building or to a website, but you can't force the student to learn." As one teacher said, "Every challenge I have faced in working virtually has found a solution. Sometimes it is a matter of trial and error to find the best way. But most everything can be solved."

■ Students, parents and teachers find challenges, but also satisfaction

A survey conducted by the Kansas Department of Education found that participants have a high degree of satisfaction with online programs.

Classes are challenging, students get the support they need

Overall, respondents had high opinions of their virtual schooling experiences, either as a student, parent or teacher. At least three of every four respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that their own virtual school offered academically challenging classes. They believed that students received sufficient academic assistance, as well as opportunities to engage in project-based learning. There was also a widely held belief among respondents that their participation was so far a success and they would like to continue. Those respondents who did not "agree" or "strongly agree" on these questions were much more likely to be neutral than to disagree or strongly disagree.

[17] During the 2010-2011 school year, the typical school district's FTE was 95 percent of its headcount. The same was true of enrollment for the state as a whole.

[18] Clayton M. Christensen makes this claim in *Disrupting Class*, McGraw-Hill, 2008.

[19] Obtaining an accurate count of students involved in online learning is a difficult task. According to a representative of KSDE, "We had approximately 4, 000 plus students enrolled in a virtual opportunity" during the 2010-2011 school year. Email correspondence to author, September 19, 2011. This number is a headcount and not on a full-time equivalent (FTE) basis. This is the same number given for 2009-2010 by "Keeping Pace 2010," iNACOL. WIBW-13, relying on KSDE, said "there are about 4,440 students." http://bit.ly/WIBW-v. Numbers for 1998 through 2006 come from K-12 Education: Reviewing Issues Related to Virtual Schools," Kansas Legislative Division of Post Audit, April 2007, p. 5, http://1.usa.gov/LPA-vs1, accessed August 30, 2011. Other numbers come from various list of approved programs at the KSDE website.

[20] Julie Ford, "Presentation on Virtual School Study," included in meeting materials given to the Kansas State Board of Education for their April 2010 meeting on. Available online at http://bit.ly/VS-Advisory.

Table 2: Attitudes towards virtual schooling among participants Percentage of respondents answering "agree" or "strongly agree"								
			Grades					
			9-12		K-8	4-8	K-3	K-12
Question	"P" = Parent responses "S" = Student responses "T" = Teacher responses	Average	P	S	P	S	S	T
Students gets sufficient academic assistance		90	79	78	95	95	94	98
Classes are sufficiently challenging		88	87	75	95	83	93	92
Student is / students are successful		87	79	80	95	94	–	–
Student and teachers have sufficient contact		86	73	81	94	88	93	–
I / we want to continue		85	86	73	94	83	77	94
Students have opportunities for project-based learning		78	78	70	89	87	71	72
There is enough social interaction and collaboration among students		68	69	57	83	74	58	65
Fine arts opportunities are adequately presented to students		65	54	44	79	70	75	66
Students have opportunities to take AP classes		60	64	61	–	–	–	55
Students have opportunities for dual credit		57	57	58	–	–	–	55
Sports opportunities are adequately presented to students		40	39	24	43	35	61	36
Source: Kansas State Department of Education								

Opportunities for advanced work are limited

On the other hand, virtual schooling still left a few things to be desired. One third of high school parents and students did not think virtual schooling gave students enough opportunities to take Advanced Placement courses. Nearly one half of all teachers agreed. Four in ten teachers, parents and students thought that Kansas' virtual schooling was not offering students enough opportunities for dual-credit courses, whereby college students earn college credit as well. Both of these points reflect the fact that virtual schooling is often adopted first as a way to offer credit recovery courses.

Sports, arts and social interaction fall short

The respondents were less favorable towards virtual schooling in three areas where you might expect: sports, the arts and social interaction. Three out of four high school students did not agree with the statement that virtual schooling offered sufficient opportunities for sporting activities. Teachers, high school parents and high school students were much less likely to agree that virtual schooling offered sufficient opportunities to engage in the fine arts. On the question of whether virtual schooling offers students enough opportunities for social interaction and collaboration, online interaction is good but perhaps not enough. Even here, though, over half of the respondents in each category agreed or strongly agreed that social opportunities were sufficient. Interestingly, the strongest support for the social environment of online learning came from middle-school students, who inhabit an especially troublesome stage of development.

■ Virtual learning and student performance

The research on the success of online learning points to many successes. For example, the Global Virtual High School consortium reports that while the national pass rate for AP classes (usually taught face-to-face) is 60 percent, the pass rate for students who take AP classes online through the consortium is 64 percent.[21] When Florida Tax Watch looked at the AP classes offered by the Florida Virtual School, it concluded that FLVS students scored higher on the math and reading portions of the state assessments than other students. It also found that they scored higher on AP tests than other students in the state.[22]

In 2009, the U. S. Department of Education commissioned a review of previously-performed studies about online learning. The authors, who looked at over 1,000 studies on online learning, concluded that, "[O]n average, students in online learning conditions performed better than those receiving face-to-face instruction." They cautioned, however, that the conclusions are tentative. First, most of the research to date looks at college and trade-school programs, not K-12 programs. Second, the academic benefits they were able to discern are real, but small. Third, the benefits that do exist are likely due to many factors, not simply because the learning experience is served up on the Internet. The authors cautioned that the report does not demonstrate that "online learning is superior as a medium." Rather, the advantages that researchers have found are more likely due to increased time on task, opportunities for collaboration, and attempts to redesign courses to put them online.[23]

[21] "Results: An evaluation of virtual high school," Virtual High School, no date, http://bit.ly/VHS-AP.

[22] "A comprehensive assessment of Florid Virtual School," Florida Tax Watch, 2007, http://bit.ly/FTWonFLVS.

[23] Barbara Means et. al, Evaluation of Evidence-based Practices in Online Learning, 2009, US. Department of Education, http://bit.ly/BarbMeans.

Some people question whether spending on online programs is justified by the research. "Policy-makers [have] reasoned that if online instruction is no worse than traditional instruction in terms of student outcomes, then online education initiatives could be justified on the basis of cost efficiency or need to provide access to learners in settings where face-to-face instruction is not feasible."[24]

Here in Kansas, educators, families, and students have found online learning can be valuable. A recent story in the *East Wichita News*, for example, discussed online programs in the Andover and Wichita districts.[25]

Kim Hett, a teacher at the Andover online school, said when students and teachers work in an online environment simultaneously, she is able to gauge student response in real time. "I feel closer to these kids than I did when I was in the classroom," she said. Dr. Robin Surland, an official with USD 259 Wichita, summed up another value of online learning by saying, "People expect options and flexibility today. Consumers want choice; they want to shop around." Marijo Isbell, the mother of an eighth-grade student taking part in the Andover online school, said, "We just love it!" Erica Dudley, a graduate of the Basehor-Linwood Virtual School said, "I hate to imagine what my life would have been like if my parents had not made the decision to call [the school]."[26]

Even so, not everyone believes in the value of online learning. An article in the *New York Times* that emphasizes the use of online learning for credit recovery gives a more negative portrayal that may resonate with some people.[27] It starts with an anecdote of a high school student, who had already failed an English class, doing an Internet search for a question in his online class. After doing a simple search, he copied the text, did some editing for misspelled words, and sent it to his teacher. The article further raises doubts about online learning by noting that in the virtual school program used by schools in Memphis, Tenn., teachers spend one-fourth the time with online students as they do with face-to-face students.

It also says critics assert "… there is no sound research showing that online courses at the K-12 level are comparable to face-to-face learning." But it's hard to know how effective online learning is when used for credit recovery because "… little is known about the effectiveness of most recovery programs or even how widely they're used."[28] In other words, many students using virtual schooling have already "failed" at school, which then means that examining a program dominated by credit-recovery students may naturally tend to show less impressive results.

When the Kansas Division of Legislative Post Audit examined the 28 programs in existence in 2007, it concluded, "virtual students scored lower on 2005-06 State assessment tests than traditional students." But it also noted that "the data are limited." About 30 percent of the possible test scores for virtual programs were not included due to a computer problem at Basehor-Linwood program, which was the second largest in the state. In addition, only 700 virtual school assessments were compared with 466,000 assessments from across the state. Finally, one out of five students in a virtual program had previously dropped out of school. So while the LPA findings were not encouraging for virtual schooling, it's questionable whether they were sufficiently strong to be valid. The analysts suggested as much, saying "We don't know if [the lower performance results are] a function of the quality of education being provided through virtual schools, the types of students enrolling in those schools, or some other factors."

Regardless of the methodological problems facing researchers, the question of quality will become even more important as providers of digital learning roll out new offerings.

Some of the biggest beneficiaries of digital learning may be rural residents. Suburban and urban schools can draw on a large market of prospective teachers, but drawing teachers to sparsely populated areas, which often pay less and have fewer cultural amenities, can be difficult. Digital learning can help fill that void.

For example, West Virginia Gov. Bob Wise relates the experience of a rural school that was able to hire "one of the best Spanish instructors in the country" by using digital technology to employ a teacher based in Texas.[29] Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman, in his State of the State address, said, "In rural Nebraska, it can be difficult to hire foreign language, math and science teachers. A virtual high school would allow rural schools and rural communities the opportunity to survive."[30]

■ Blended or hybrid learning

The thought that students will use computers to learn may conjure up images of isolated individuals sitting in front of a computer for hours on end, day after day,

[24] Barbara Means et. al, Evaluation of Evidence-based Practices in Online Learning, 2009, US. Department of Education, http://bit.ly/BarbMeans.

[25] Cathy Feemster, "eSchools flourish in Andover, Wichita," *East Wichita News*, September, 2011.

[26] "BLVS testimonials," Basehor Linwood Virtual School website, http://bit.ly/BLVS-Erica.

[27] Trip Gabriel, "More pupils are learning online, fueling debate on quality," New York Times, April 5, 2011, http://nyti.ms/NYT-1.

[28] Sarah Butrymowicz, "Students short on educational credits turn to 'recovery' programs, Hechinger Report, August 2, 2010, http://bit.ly/SarahB-CR.

[29] "Virtual education boom hits the states," http://stateline.org/live/details/story?contentId=555696.

[30] Gov. Dave Heineman, "Nebraska State of the State Address 2011," http://www.stateline.org/live/details/speech?contentId=540498.

desperately in need of both sunshine and social interaction. But that isn't so. For one thing, even students who take all of their classes online at home have online interaction such as chats, discussion boards, e-mail, video conferencing, web conferencing, and simulations. While not face-to-face, it is interaction; it's also the type of interaction with which most students are quite comfortable. In addition, even "purely" online programs offer proms, field trips, face-to-face conferences and discussions, and other ways for the members of a school to interact. In the state of Kansas, all online programs by law must offer opportunities for face-to-face interaction, such as orientation sessions, end-of-year parties, field trips, and so forth.
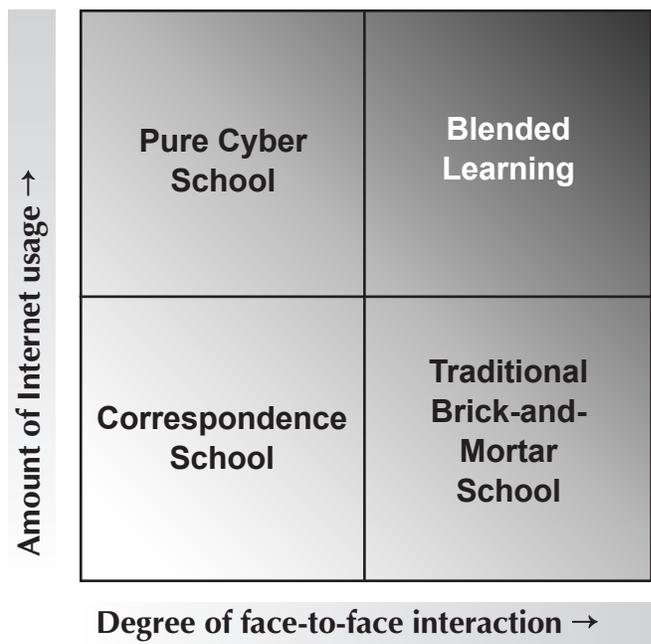
In addition, students involved in online learning are, more often than not, likely to spend at least some if not most of their school life inside a school building. This is called "blended" learning, which is the fastest-growing segment of online learning. "Blended learning is any time a student learns at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home and at least in part through online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or space."[31]

A "blended" learning situation means that there is a significant element of both online and face-to-face interaction. The blending may occur within a specific course. It may also occur within a student's program when some classes are face-to-face and others are primarily online. A school can also be considered blended if it offers online and face-to-face classes or primarily blended classes. *Keeping Pace 2010* argues that the most important element of blended learning is that it **transforms** the way a school provides instruction.

A blended program can provide teachers "a rich data stream about a student's learning that can be used by teachers – both online and offline – to provide truly differentiated instruction."[32] It can also change education in the following ways:

- Expand the school day, as students interact with the content, the instructor, and teach other.

- Personalize instruction by letting students work at their own pace or letting a teacher work with a small group of students as the need arises.

- Transform the role of the teacher from a lecturer to a guide.

A student's education might be characterized as falling somewhere on one of two different scales: Making use of the Internet or not at all; and supervised on a face-to-face basis, or not at all. The chart above illustrates the possibilities.[33]

Degree of face-to-face interaction →

(Vertical axis: Amount of Internet usage ↑)

Quadrants: Pure Cyber School | Blended Learning | Correspondence School | Traditional Brick-and-Mortar School

In a blended-learning situation, students mix and match elements of the online and face-to-face world. Students may report to a school building on a given day of the week or for a given number of days of the week. They may spend most of their time on campus working in virtual learning labs, at their own pace or supplemented by a learning assistant or teacher.

The Innosight Institute, a leading advocate of online learning, says there are currently six flavors of blended learning:[34]

1. **Face-to-face driver:** Most instruction is face-to-face, with the teacher using online tools on an ad-hoc basis. High Tech High School of San Diego, California, is an example of such a school. It emphasizes group activities, but uses online programs to assist with math and foreign languages.

2. **Rotation:** Students rotate between face-to-face instruction in a classroom with time online, which is usually overseen by the classroom teacher. The Carpe Diem school in Yuma, Arizona is one example. Students rotate between computers and face-to-face classrooms several times a day. Computers offer a basic introduction to the material, with teachers and paraprofessionals serving as learning coaches during the face-to-face time.

3. **Flex:** A teacher and students work in the same room, but the teacher serves as a one-on-one or one-to-small-group tutor to students who need help with their online work. The report highlighted the Learning Schools of USD 259 Wichita as one example of a

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[31] Michael B. Horn and Heather Staker, "The Rise of Blended Learning," Innosight Institute, January 2011, http://bit.ly/HornBlended1.

[32] Keeping Pace 2010, p.41.

[33] This graph is adapted from Heather Staker, "The Rise of K-12 Blended Learning: Profiles of Emerging Models," Innosight Institute, May 2011.

[34] Michael B. Horn and Heather Staker, "The Rise of Blended Learning," Innosight Institute, January 2011, http://bit.ly/HornBlended1.

Flex school. Students can visit a learning center, which includes face-to-face support from teachers. It grew out of previous efforts to serve academically failing students. The school is credited with helping raise the district's graduation rates. The program operates at a cost that is 34 percent of the district's per-pupil spending. The report, which draws on information from 2010, notes that the district will close its drop-out recovery centers in a bid to boost its graduation numbers.

4. **Online lab:** Students work in a lab, with paraprofessionals in the room to provide technical though not academic support, teachers being available online. The Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools uses online learning to deliver some classes.

5. **Self-blend:** Students take most of their classes in a traditional classroom, but supplement their work with one or two classes taken online with an online teacher. Florida Virtual School is perhaps the best example of such a school. FLVS, an independent public school, serves students throughout the state. They take a few classes online, but otherwise report to their traditional school.

6. **Online driver:** Almost all of the interaction between students and teachers occurs online, though the school may offer drop-in centers and extracurricular activities. The eCADEMY of Albuquerque, New Mexico, is an example of such a school. It focuses on students who are failing academically. Students meet teachers face-to-face at the beginning of the school year. Students who do not carry a "C" average must do their work on campus, and others may drop in as they wish.

■ Objections, questions, and myths

People raise many questions about digital learning. Some of them have to do with the student's experience, while others are more operational.

Students won't be sufficiently motivated to succeed in an online program.

Motivation is certainly important for both online and in-classroom learning. Virtual school programs surveyed for this report say something to the effect that they require more student discipline and more work than the typical classroom, if students are to succeed. Of course, it's important to remember that online learning is a voluntary choice, not an automatic substitute for traditional learning. It may not be right for every student, just as traditional methods may not be right for every student.

By enabling students to work alone, online schools will encourage racial and economic segregation.

There is no definitive answer in the research to this question, but a case can certainly be made that traditional public schools encourage racial and economic segregation by basing enrollment on where children live, which is often in racially or economically homogenous neighborhoods.

It's difficult, if not impossible, to teach chemistry and other science classes.

Online programs can use virtual labs, so experimentation is not out of the question. In addition, a traditional lab can be used within a hybrid online program. Finally, it's important to not overstate the benefits of a traditional lab. As the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL)[35] points out, setting up and breaking down lab supplies and equipment can be time consuming in a traditional environment, and not all teachers effectively use the lab time they have.

Students in online programs will miss out on important non-educational services that a school can provide.

Andrea Prejean, associate director of education policy and practice at the NEA, says, "We think that students really benefit from having a classroom experience. Public school is that social net that catches a lot of things. My third grade teacher is the person who found out I needed glasses."[36] But many online programs do in fact have face-to-face encounters between students and school staff.

Online learning will divert public money to for-profit businesses. Mark Crawford, superintendent of USD 210 Hugoton, which operates a virtual school, illustrated this concern when he said, "I don't like the amount of out-of-state companies that are for-profit coming in and forming partnerships with districts …."[37] According to a *New York Times* report, "Teachers' unions and others say much of the push for online courses, like vouchers and charter schools, is intended to channel taxpayers' money into the private sector." (It's interesting that such critics ignore the fact *all* of the money going into public schools first comes *out* of the private sector). A union official in Idaho said, "The big corporations want to make money off the backs of our children."[38] Of the other hand, the same has been said of unions.

The legitimacy of online learning has been tarnished by conflict-of-interest accusations. In Idaho, the superintendent of public instruction, facing a re-election campaign, received a substantial portion of his dollars from

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[35] Matthew Wicks, "A National Primer on K-12 Learning , Version 2," October 2010, p. 27. http://bit.ly/iNACOL-1.

[36] "Virtual education boom hits the states," Stateline.org. http://stateline.org/live/details/story?contentId=555696.

[37] Jan Biles, "Virtual schools increase in Kansas," July 24, 2011, Topeka Capital-Journal, http://bit.ly/TCJ-v.

[38] As quoted by Trip Gabriel, "More pupils are learning online, fueling debate on quality," *New York Times*, April 5, 2011, http://nyti.ms/NYT-1.

for-profit education companies.[39] Other people wonder whether schools that emphasize computer use will fail in delivering students a full education, and instead become "a kind of corporate training center – largely at taxpayer expense."[40] But again, the same concerns exist with traditional learning. It's not uncommon for contractors and architects to make donations to school board candidates and school bond campaigns, and then receive large contracts to build new school facilities.

We must recognize that public education is a multi-billion dollar industry whose size rivals that of the Pentagon, which means lots of people use education as a means of seeking financial rewards. And it should be pointed out that seeking financial gain is not a bad thing. The key is to spend the money efficiently, transparently and on programs that actually work.

It should also be noted that for-profit education companies would profit only by serving the needs of students and districts. If they no longer add value to a student's experience, the company would suffer economically.

Some teachers are not equipped to teach in online programs.

Teachers do need to be trained in the art of teaching online. Teaching in an online context requires some different skills, such knowing how to "read" students without being able to observe body language. In addition, the teacher within a digital program is more of a coach and a guide than a lecturer, and some teachers need help to make that transition. Finally, most online teachers use content created by someone else, which may require an adjustment. Schools of education can help make online learning work by incorporating online learning into their own practices, and helping prospective teachers learn how to teach online. It is also in the interest of school administrators to make sure their teachers are trained.

iNACOL recommends that teachers learn the following skills before teaching online:[41]

- Communicating primarily through the typed word.
- Recognizing students' learning styles online.
- Adapting online course content to students with disabilities.
- Managing time in a world in which students may want 24/7 access.
- Using multi-media tools for presenting content online.

Since online learning requires a computer and Internet connection, it discriminates against the poor.

While online programs require a computer and an Internet connection, they can be accessible, even to the poor. Schools that offer online programs typically loan computers to students at low or no cost, and may offer families a stipend with which they can pay for Internet service.

Online learning costs more than traditional classroom learning.

It may be too soon to draw absolute conclusions, but most states do spend less on virtual programs than face-to-face settings. Extra spending required on computers and technology can be offset in a number of ways. In its profile of online learning in Kansas, the *East Wichita News* mentioned that by using online technology, Andover is able to use only four classrooms to educate 300 students. In that same article, the Wichita district said its online program "… serves 500 from a fraction of the space at the Joyce Focht Instructional Support Center," which means "no big school buildings to build; small utility bills; fewer teachers; less building upkeep; no busing."

Some districts in western Kansas, meanwhile, have turned to online learning as a way to save money. According to a profile by the *Topeka Capital-Journal*, "Some western Kansas schools are adjusting to the region's shifting population and cuts in state school funding by offering virtual classes."[42]

■ Regulatory environment

As lawmakers and educators consider the use of online learning, they must grapple with this question: Which regulations from "school as we've known it" should we apply to online schools? Two leading organizations that deal with online learning offer some suggestions.

The Innosight Institute, a Massachusetts-based consulting firm, argues that online learning can and should be used to remake the delivery of education. As a result, it calls for giving online providers more latitude than some people may find comfortable.

Among other things, Innosight recommends:

- Removing caps on the number of public charter schools, which have some regulatory freedoms that can make the best use of online learning.
- Removing caps on the number of students who may enroll in online classes.
- Removing caps on the number of students who may enroll in blended-learning classes.
- Removing legally imposed student-teacher ratios.
- Removing geographic barriers to enrollment, so students can take online classes across district (or even state) lines.

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[39] "Virtual education boom hits the states," Stateline.org. http://stateline.org/live/details/story?contentId=555696.

[40] Todd Oppenheimer, "The computer delusion," Atlantic Monthly, July 1997, http://bit.ly/OppenheimerTech.

[41] Matthew Wicks, "A National Primer on K-12 Learning, Version 2," October 2010, p. 26. http://bit.ly/iNACOL-1.

[42] Jan Biles, "Virtual schools increase in Kansas," July 24, 2011, *Topeka Capital-Journal*, http://bit.ly/TCJ-v.

- Funding online learning down to the class level, so that it follows the student to the school or program, on a fractional basis.

- Letting cost-effective online programs that meet performance targets convert some of their funding into deposits into educational savings accounts for their students.

- Intervening in (or even shutting down) programs or schools that fail to help students progress.

- Letting assessments occur any time a student is ready, not on a state or district-mandated schedule.

- Giving operators of virtual schooling options maximum flexibility in personnel policies including pay scales, certification, work rules, and the like.

■ Ten Principles for Learning

Digital Learning Now! is a effort spearheaded by former Democratic governor, Bob Wise of West Virginia, and former Republican governor, Jeb Bush of Florida. It offers "10 elements of high-quality digital learning**."** Here is a summary of those principles:[43]

1. All students are digital learners. This includes students who currently do not attend public schools.

2. All students should have access to high-quality digital courses. The state should not have a cap on the number of students who take online courses, nor limit student to taking classes from specific providers in specific geographic areas.

3. Students should be able to personalize their educational experience, through approved providers. That is, a student should be able to take online classes full or part time, from one school or several schools, on a traditional school calendar or not.

4. Student progress is based on demonstrations of competency, not seat time. Promote students when they are ready; not when the calendar turns.

5. Digital courses should be aligned with state standards. Electronic texts should align with state standards, just like textbooks, but not face stricter requirements. Do not apply the textbook review process to digital texts; instead, judge schools on results.

6. Teachers should be well prepared to teach digitally. States should maximize the use of alternative-certification routes, encourage or require education schools to prepare teachers for online teaching, and make it easier for teachers to work across state lines if they are already certified.

7. Students should have access to multiple providers of educational services. Let public schools, not-for-profit organizations and businesses all compete for the right to offer online classes to public school students. Create an open and transparent approval process to make it happen. (This recommendation is at odds with the Kansas tradition of strong local control, as well as of KSDE's relatively weak capacity as a regulator.)

8. Ensure that both students and teachers are evaluated, using performance as a guide. Evaluate schools based on value-added performance data for students; use student performance as one factor in evaluating teachers.

9. Change the funding formula. Pay providers of online courses in installments, based on the progress that its students make in classes. "Paying for success will yield success. Right now, the majority of education funding rewards attendance."

10. The state should provide funding and accountability oversight to ensure that students learn with digital tools, whether in classrooms or not. Fund, if necessary, broadband access for students as well as Internet-capable devices. Use cooperative purchasing to secure lower prices. Fund, if necessary, data systems that the state and local schools can use to track student performance over time.

Point 9 merits further consideration. The alternative to today's regulations is not "no accountability," but an accountability based on results – for example, no payment for a class until the student successfully completes it. The Florida Virtual School operates on this principle. This principle is in stark contrast with the way that most schools in Florida – or anywhere else – are funded. As *Education Week* put it, "In most Florida schools, state educational funding follows a student regardless of whether he or she passes or fails a course." It notes that at the Florida Virtual School however, "the money comes through only when the student completes a course with a passing grade."[44] Minnesota has a variation on this practice when a student lives in one district takes an online course offered by another. The district of residence gets 12 percent of the "general education revenue" for a single course. (General education revenue is roughly equivalent to Kansas's base student aid per pupil allowance). The online provider gets the balance of general education revenue – 88 percent – but only after the student successfully completes the course.[45]

Performance-based funding does require oversight, so the school does not "dumb down" a class to promote course completion. So regulatory oversight will not and should not disappear. But it can and should be simplified and focused on outcomes rather than process.

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[43] Foundation for Excellence in Education, "Digital Learning Now!," December 1, 2010. http://bit.ly/DigitalNow.

[44] Ian Quillen, "Fla. Virtual School Ties Course Completions to Funding," Education Week, January 12, 2011.

[45] "K-12 Online Learning," Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor, September 2011, p. 12.

■ Laws and policies governing online learning in Kansas

In some ways, Kansas has been a model among states in its laws and policies governing online learning. An official with one leading company that works nationwide to help schools operate online programs cited Kansas as one example of a state that has gotten things right.[46] In addition, *Keeping Pace*, an annual publication that tracks policy developments in the states, has had words of praise for Kansas over the years.

The 2004 edition of the report cited Virtual Greenbush as a "well-established" program, and noted that the state had recently established regulations that "significantly increased state oversight." In 2005, the publication said that Kansas and three other states "stand out as having been well thought out." For the longest time, it was also one of only a handful of states with specific requirements regarding professional development for educators who teach online. In 2006, it complimented the state as having a thorough means of keeping track of the number of on-line programs and students, calling it "perhaps the most well-developed and well-documented system." It also said that the state's policies for reviewing each individual program were "rare," but added that they did not appear to stifle the growth of opportunities to learn online.

The 2007 and 2008 editions of *Keeping Pace* noted that having sound policies was one thing, but following through on them was another. It based this observation on official reports in several states, including the report by the Kansas Legislative Division of Post Audit (LPA).[47] Keeping Pace concluded that official reports would mark "the beginning of greater scrutiny of online programs."

The problem with online learning in Kansas, to para-phrase the LPA report, was that Kansas had many good policies but they were not being enforced. The 2009 edi-tion of *Keeping Pace* praised the state for strengthening its oversight in light of the LPA audit.

But it is not good enough for Kansas to rest on its laurels. Instead, it should always adjust its regulations and laws as the use of online learning evolves and we gain more experience with what works and what does not.

As the National Education Association (NEA) says, "Shoehorning [regulatory] criteria that don't naturally fit into the online world will only stymie progress and lower the quality of instruction provided." It adds that "New criteria and requirements, geared specifically to the online arena, at times may supplement, or supplant, those rooted to a face-to-face environment."[48]

Ironically, teacher certification, a subject about which the NEA has much to say, is one area that should be revisited.

Teacher certification

One quality that distinguishes public schools from private schools is the requirement that public school teachers be certified by the state. Teacher unions, in particular, have reason to be interested in certification requirements. After all, they are the "gateway" through which would-be teachers must enter. They can also help define "what a teacher is and does."

As seen by the performance of schools today, certification is no guarantee of high academic performance. It is also no guarantee of student achievement in virtual schools.

One problem is that traditional certification requirements are often outdated. The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), an organization that offers guidance to state and school leaders in 16 states, has observed that certification rules in place "may not be appropriate for instructors who teach in classrooms without borders." Since online teachers need "unique instructional, communication, and technical skills," it observed in a report, "state teacher certification requirements are thwarting the hiring of quality online teachers."[49]

As a result, the SREB report suggests that states "develop and implement a program that allows for alternative paths to teaching online in the state."

But should certification be required at all? Terry Stoops, former high school teacher and Ph.D. in education from the University of Virginia, says no. "A large body of research shows that advanced degrees, years of experi-ence, completion of education courses, teacher test scores, and certification status do not improve teacher effectiveness."[50] Certification rules, he says, are a "barrier to the widespread adoption of virtual schooling." He recommends that states eliminate certification rules for online teachers, or at least simplify them. Simplifica-tion can include alternative certification paths for these teachers. He cites the SREB Standards for Quality Online Teaching and iNACOL's National Standards for Quality Online Teaching" as "good starting points."

The National Education Association, though, says that on-line teachers, like their brick-and-mortar counterparts, must be certified. It says that certification is necessary to promote teacher quality: "online teacher should maintain licenses, credentials and other documentation that arm teachers with necessary evidence of their qualifications."[51]

On the other hand, the NEA calls for states and schools to recognize certifications across state lines. It says that

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[46] E-mail correspondence with the author.

[47] "Reviewing Issues Related to Virtual Schools," Kansas Legislative Division of Post Audit, April 2007, available at http://1.usa.gov/LPA-1.

[48] "Guide to Teaching Online Courses," National Education Association, available online at http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/onlineteachguide.pdf.

[49] William R. Thomas, "Online Teachers: What Can SREB States Do to Ensure Competence and Quality?" Southern Regional Education Board, December 2008, http://bit.ly/SREB-cert.

[50] Terry Stoops, "Virtually Irrelevant," John Locke Foundation, July 6, 2011, accessed July 19, 2011: http://bit.ly/StoopsVS.

[51] NEA, Guide to Teaching Online.

state lawmakers should "ensure that state licensure requirements accommodate online courses that may be taught by licensed out-of-state educators." It adds that "failure to be licensed in a specific state should not block their authority to teach online in that state," since doing so may "unduly constrain student and teacher educational opportunities." This is in keeping with the SREB recommendation that states "provide an efficient way for out-of-state teachers to obtain online teaching approval."

The Kansas NEA (KNEA), however, suggests that it is cautious about allowing out-of-state teachers who are not certified in Kansas: "While it is one thing to accept credits from other schools when students transfer, it is quite another to defer the actual education of those students to individuals and institutions not subject to the same scrutiny as local employees."

Why the difference between the NEA and the KNEA? One possible explanation is that the two organizations face different incentives. It's harder for the KNEA to recruit as a member someone who lives outside the state. On the other hand, the NEA is much more likely to find a new member, regardless of a teacher's residence.

Kansas should simplify or even eliminate teacher certification requirements

Currently, the same teacher certification rules are applied to virtual schools. Many states are recognizing that their rules requiring teacher certification need to be overhauled, even in the brick-and-mortar world. As a result, programs such as Teach for America and The New Teacher Project are providing alternative paths to teacher certification to teachers who are working in high-need areas. Teach for America works in over 30 states, and The New Teacher Project works in 17 states. By contrast, Kansas has made few moves to introduce alternative certification paths. Reviewers for the state's application for Race to the Top funding noted that the state offers no alternative paths that are independent of the state's colleges and universities. Other states however, have enacted laws and supports to promote school districts and independent organizations as entities that can train and certify new teachers.

A more dramatic alternative is to eliminate the need for teacher certification in virtual schools altogether (or for that matter, all schools). Certification requirements are barriers that inhibit people who might be good teachers. These individuals include college professors or mid-career professionals who can teach math and science.

This is not to say that "just anyone" would be allowed to teach. Leaders of digital schools and programs would have an interest in hiring competent teachers and providing them with any necessary support. In addition, there is no reason, technologically speaking, why a

teacher in Massachusetts could not teach a class in Kansas through an online school. But without a Kansas teaching certificate, that person would be barred, and reciprocity arrangements, though possible, represent another hindrance.

Eliminate the "seat time" requirement

Online learning enables students to progress at their own pace. Yet, Kansas law imposes a seat-time requirement. The National Education Association (NEA) recommends that "instructional time should not be read literally to mandate specific time spent in a physical building, 'seat time,' if educators are working in a virtual environment."

Yet Kansas law does take "seat time" into account, even if that "seat" is not necessarily within a school building.

Here's how one virtual school program describes the requirements in Kansas:

> "To receive free tuition, Kansas residents are required to complete two 6-hour online sessions. First 6-hour online session must be completed between Aug. 16 and Sept. 19. Second 6-hour online session must be completed between Sept. 20th and Oct. 4th. Both 6-hour online sessions must be completed in a 24 hour calendar day."[52]

Other virtual school programs and schools in Kansas make similar announcements in their brochures and on their websites. The Basehor-Linwood Virtual School says that parents must follow a standard school calendar:

> "Establish a time schedule for completing at least 6 hours of schoolwork each day, five days a week. 1st-12th grade students must document 1,116 of academic learning hours from August through May as mandated by the Kansas State Department of Education. Kindergarten students are required to complete 558 hours during the academic year."[53]

The school also requires "daily progress toward the completion of all course requirements." Among other things, this regulation is incompatible with a student who might work best by alternating subjects from day to day.

More ominously, current Kansas policy subjects online students who deviate from the usual schedule to charges of truancy—even if they are learning. For example, iQ Academy Kansas considers any student who does not sign on for three consecutive days to be truant. This requirement emphasizes process over mastery.

A program operated by USD424 Mullinville, 21st Century Learning Academy, offers an example of an even more regimented approach to learning. It requires students to work 20 hours per week, and at least 15 hours per week when face-to-face schools in the district are open. To say the least, these rigid regulations take a lot of the flexibility out of online learning. Fortunately for parents seeking a

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52 Caney Valley Virtual School Facebook post of June 23, 2010, http://on.fb.me/CaneyV.

53 Basehor-Lindood Virtual School, "BLVS Requirements," http://bit.ly/BLVS4.

variation from the standard academic calendar, other virtual programs, such as the Leavenworth Virtual School, offer other options such as year-round schooling.

Requirements such as these represent a "square peg in a round hole" approach to funding and learning. Changing that approach can open up online learning opportunities to more students. The policy manual of the North Carolina State Board of Instruction, for example, mentions several different definitions of credit for high-school purposes. One involves a seat-time requirement of "150 clock hours of instruction in a traditional schedule." But a different definition, for students in an "e-learning course," has no such requirement. Instead, it calls for courses to meet "competency goals and objectives."[54]

As Stateline.org observed, the change, implemented in 2008, meant that students may now "earn credit for completing a course regardless of how much time they spent in the classroom."[55]

Kansas should simplify reporting requirements for time worked

A student handbook from the Leavenworth Virtual School says, "To fulfill Kansas Statutes for attendance and accountability, it is necessary for parents as the home teachers to submit attendance data for each day on which academic objectives are addressed."[56] While such a requirement may appear to be a commonsense guide to make sure that students work, it measures process (hours) rather than outcome (learning). In addition, it is an administrative burden on families who participate in online learning.

Kansas should require districts to assist families in purchasing the necessary Internet connection

While many (perhaps all) online programs will loan students a computer for a modest fee (roughly $100 per year), few provide subsidies for the broadband Internet connection that greatly expands the attractiveness and utility of an online program.

Kansas should make dual-enrollment possibilities easy

Students who wish to pursue learning through more than one district face administrative red tape. According to the Basehor-Linwood Virtual School, for example:

"Dual enrollment partnerships must be pursued by the parents/guardians, and this type of arrangement must be accepted and agreed upon by the administrators at the student's local school district before the BLVS will consider such an arrangement. After a family has

discussed this type of arrangement with their local school district, an administrator from the student's local school district would need to contact BLVS, and discuss the possibility of a dual enrollment status for the student. Dual enrollment opportunities are not available for students receiving special education services from their local school district."[57]

Requirements such as this place burdens on students and families, and limit the possibilities of online learning.

Kansas should eliminate requirement that out-of-district programs notify local districts

Online programs that seek new students may advertise to potential students in new geographic areas. Currently, Kansas imposes certain restrictions on such notices. One is that online schools that are not operated by the local school district must mention on their notices that they are not affiliated with the district. Given that online learning is still a new practice, this is a slight and reasonable burden. It can also be justified on "truth in advertising" grounds.

But there is another burden that should be removed: the requirement that the local district approve the advertising of any public school program offered by another district.[58] This rule that applies to "written materials" (perhaps even the Internet) imposes a paperwork burden on programs that see to expand their geographic reach to serve more students.

KSHSAA should revise its policies to be more welcoming to students who take classes online

While learning can occur even when students are not in close geographic proximity, other activities, such as sports, require face-to-face interaction. In that case, it makes sense for young people interested in competitive sports to seek opportunities in local districts, even if they don't attend school in that district.

And yet Kansas State High School Athletics Association discriminates against students of online schools. It says, for example, that students who live within the boundaries of USD 259 Wichita must take at least one class from USD259—even if a virtual school in Lawrence can meet all of their educational needs. The association cites a belief that the "student and the school share an interest in the student being a part of the daily climate and culture of the school."[59] Yet in partaking in a district-sponsored activity, the online student would share in the "culture of the school."

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[54] "Policy Manual," North Carolina State Board of Education. See "Policy defining 'course for credit.'" http://bit.ly/NC-seat.

[55] "Virtual education boom hits the states," Stateline.org. http://stateline.org/live/details/story?contentId=555696.

[56] Student handbook from Leavenworth Virtual School, http://bit.ly/LeavenworthVirtual. See the "academic activity log" at the Virtual School/Program Information page of KSDE: http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=455.

[57] Basehor-Lindwood Virtual School, "BLVS Requirements," http://bit.ly/BLVS4.

[58] See, for example, "Virtual Advertising," KSDE website, http://bit.ly/KS-adverts, accessed September 24, 2011, which says, "Prior to publicly distributing any written materials to advertise or promote a virtual program/school, such written materials must be provided to the school district or districts located within the geographic area where the materials will be distributed."

[59] "Policy On Eligibility For Students Attending KSDE Accredited Virtual Schools," KSHSAA, accessed September 24, 2011. http://bit.ly/KHS-Vs.

Conclusion

Kansas had one of the first public online schools in the nation and has been using online learning for over a decade with some good results. Unfortunately, that very promising beginning has been sidetracked by policy barriers and today only about one percent of Kansas students participate in online learning.

There is no 'silver bullet fix' that will resolve all of the challenges confronting public education. But there are solutions, and Kansas should follow the lead of many other states that are implementing a broad array of reforms to raise unacceptably low achievement levels. Even the national teachers' union and Kansas' own virtual schools agree that making online learning more accessible offers great opportunities for Kansas students.

Yet despite this broad base of support and a desperate need to raise achievement levels, Kansas Department of Education policies regarding online learning remain stubbornly rooted in the input-based measurements of a brick-and-mortar environment that limit its potential.

The barriers to having a thriving online learning community in Kansas aren't money or technology, but simply attitude. Kansas education officials could make this valuable learning opportunity available to many more students by implementing a variety of policy changes, including:

- Change teacher certification rules to attract more qualified teachers.
- Eliminate 'seat time' requirements and other input-based reporting requirements; measure progress and pay districts based on successful completion of material.
- Measure student progress and district payments based on outputs, not inputs; performance should be measured by successful completion of material, not 'time in seat'.
- Provide needs-based funding for use of a computer and Internet access.
- Allow dual-enrollment without district approval requirements.
- Eliminate restrictions and requirements placed on online programs that advertise outside their district.
- Allow students to participate in their home district extracurricular activities without having to take a 'brick-and-mortar' class from the district.

Some of these changes may be controversial within the Kansas education industry but Kansans should not allow controversy among the adults in the system to restrict access to improved learning opportunities. Everyone agrees that 'it's all about the kids;' implementing policies that make it so is a different matter.

Appendix A: Types of online providers in Kansas

Virtual schools / programs in Kansas 2011-12

Source: Kansas State Dept. of Education

Online programs, by type of class offered
Credit recovery 28
General education 46
Advanced classes 21

Grade levels
K-12, 1-12, or 3-12 18
9-12 only 10
6-12 or 7-12 10
K-8 5
Nongraded (exclusively) 5
Nongraded (and graded) 15

Sponsor
Education service center 8
School district 42

Public web presence
Available 34
Not available or minimal 13

Appendix B: Virtual schools and programs in Kansas

The following is a list of virtual schools or programs recognized by the Kansas State Department of Education.

Virtual schools and programs in Kansas for the 2011-2012 school year Source: Kansas State Department of Education			
USD	**District name**	**Center/program name**	**Grade levels**
112	Central Plains	Lakeside Learning Center	K-12, non-graded
200	Greely Co	Greely County Virtual	9-12
210	Hugoton Public Schools	Hugoton Learning Academy	7-12
216	Deerfield	Deerfield	6-12
218	Elkhart	Kansas Connections Academy	K-12, non-graded
229	Blue Valley	Blue Valley Schools	9-12
230	Spring Hill	Insight School of Kansas at Hilltop Education Center	9-12
233	Olathe	eAcademy	9-12
253	Emporia	Turning Point Learning Center	K-8
257	Iola	Crossroads Learning Center	Non-graded
258	Humboldt	Humboldt Virtual Education Program	6-12
259	Wichita	Learning^2 eSchool of Wichita	K-12
260	Derby	Derby Public VIrtual	K-12
262	Valley Center	The Learning Center at Valley Center	3-12
266	Maize	Maize Virtual / Virtual High	K-12
299	Sylvan Unified	Sylvan Unified Virtual	3-12
312	Haven	Pleasant View Academy Grade School / High School	K-12
315	Colby Public Schools	Colby Virtual Program	1-12
336	Holton	Fresh Start Learning Center	9-12
373	Newton	Heartland Virtual Academy	K-8
383	Manhattan	iQ Academy	7-12
385	Andover	Andover eCademy	K-12
397	Centre	Center K-12	K-12
400	Smoky Valley	Smoky Valley Virtual Charter School	K-12
405	Lyons	USD 405 Virtual School	K-12, non-graded
422	Greensburg	Kiowa County	NA
430	South Brown County	Horton HELP	Non-graded
435	Abilene	Abilene Virtual School	7-12
436	Caney Valley	Caney Valley Virtual	K-12, non-graded
438	Skyline	Sawyer Virtual Academy	6-12, non-graded
444	Little River	Academy You	7-12
447	Cherryvale	Cherryvale Diploma Center	K-12
453	Leavenworth	Leavenworth Virtual School	K-8
458	Basehor-Linwood	Basehor-Linwood Virtual School Program	K-12
464	Tonganoxie	Tonganoxie	9-12
489	Hays	Learning Center of Ellis County Virtual Program	9-12, non-graded
496	Haston–Pawnee Heights	Pawnee Heights Virtual	1-12, non-graded
497	Lawrence	Lawrence Charter Virtual School / Lawrence Virtual High School / Diploma Completion Program	K-12, non-graded
505	Chetopa-St. Paul	Chetopa Virtual Learning Center	Non-graded
609	SEKESC/Greenbush	Virtual Greenbush	6-12
622	ESSDACK	ESSDACK Learning Centers	9-12, non-graded
626	SWPRSC	Community Learning Centers	9-12, non-graded
628	SCKESC	Diploma Completion Program	9-12, non-graded
628	SCKESC	@Homeroom Virtual Classroom	3-12
629	Smoky Hill ESC	Smoky Hill Learning Center	K-12, nongraded
SC	Service Center Group	Kansas Learns Online	3-12

Appendix C: Websites of online providers in Kansas

While online learning makes use of the Internet, not all virtual school programs or schools in Kansas have an effective website—or even a rudimentary one—that lets prospective students learn more about their options. Here's a list of virtual programs that do have a website that can easily found with a Google search. Programs marked with an asterisk (*) have minimal information, such as a few forms or a very brief explanation. Other sites have more detailed information.

	Virtual programs and schools websites		
	As of September 15, 2011		
USD	**District name**	**Center/program name**	**Website**
112	Central Plains	Lakeside Learning Center *	http://bit.ly/USD112
210	Hugoton Public Schools	Hugoton Learning Academy	http://www.hugotonlearningacademy.com
218	Elkhart	Kansas Connections Academy	http://bit.ly/USD218
230	Spring Hill	Insight School of Kansas at Hilltop Education Center	http://bit.ly/USD230
233	Olathe	eAcademy	http://bit.ly/USD233
253	Emporia	Turning Point Learning Center	http://bit.ly/USD253
259	Wichita	Learning2 eSchool of Wichita	http://bit.ly/USD259
262	Valley Center	The Learning Center	http://bit.ly/USD262
266	Maize	Maize Online	http://bit.ly/USD266
299	Sylvan Unified K-12	Sylvan Unified Virtual *	http://bit.ly/qGCxwU
312	Haven	Pleasant View Academy	http://bit.ly/USD312
336	Holton	Fresh Start Learning Center	http://bit.ly/USD336
383	Manhattan	iQ Academy	http://bit.ly/USD383
385	Andover	Andover eCademy	http://www.andoverecademy.org
397	Centre	Center K-12	http://www.kansasonlinelearning.org
400	Smoky Valley	Smoky Valley Virtual Charter School	http://bit.ly/USD400
435	Abilene	Abilene Virtual School *	http://bit.ly/USD435
436	Caney Valley	Caney Valley Virtual School	http://www.caney.com/USD_436.htm
438	Skyline	Sawyer Virtual Academy	http://bit.ly/USD438
444	Little River	Academy You	http://www.academyyou.com
447	Cherryvale	Cherryvale Diploma Center	http://bit.ly/USD447
453	Leavenworth	Leavenworth Virtual School	http://www.leavenworthvs.org
458	Basehor-Linwood	Basehor-Linwood Virtual School Program	http://bit.ly/USD458
489	Hays	Learning Center of Ellis County Virtual Program	http://www.hayslc.com
496	Haston–Pawnee Heights	Pawnee Heights Virtual	http://bit.ly/USD496
497	Lawrence	Lawrence Virtual School	http://www.k12.com/lvs
497	Lawrence	Lawrence Diploma Completion Program	http://bit.ly/USD497dc
609	SEKESC/Greenbush	Virtual Greenbush	bit.ly/rmDheD
622	ESSDACK	ESSDACK Learning Centers	http://bit.ly/ESSDACK
626	SWPRSC	Community Learning Centers	http://bit.ly/SPRSC
628	SCKESC	Diploma Completion Program	http://bit.ly/SCKESC
628	SCKESC	@Homeroom Virtual Classroom	http://bit.ly/SCKathome
629	Smoky Hill ESC	Smoky Hill Learning Center	http://bit.ly/SmokyH
SC	Service Center Group	Kansas Learns Online	http://kansaslearnsonline.com

Appendix D: Virtual schools and programs in Kansas

The following is a list of virtual schools or programs recognized by the Kansas State Department of Education.

■ *These programs make an effort to attract students from throughout the state or from a wide region of the state. Students who enroll on a full-time basis earn a diploma from the specific district that sponsors the program.*

Academy You actively welcomes students from outside Kansas and even the United States. (Students from outside Kansas are not eligible for financial support from Kansas taxpayers, and must pay tuition.) It is a service of USD 444 Little River, and uses the Kansas Career Fields and Clusters Model.

21st Century Learning Academy Charter School is a service of USD 422 Kiowa County Schools (Mullinville). It has three options: adult high-school diploma program; high school credit recovery; K-12 for students under 17. It advertises itself as being open to students across the state. Students may take one class, or a full program. Students may take high school classes both online and face-to-face at the academy.

Andover eAcademy is a K-12 school open to students throughout Kansas, and has recently held informational open houses in the Garden City, Kansas City, Salina, and Wichita metro areas. Students who live within the boundaries of the district and attend at least one face-to-face class at a school in the district are eligible to participate in the district's sports and band programs. As of May, 2011, the school anticipated that enrollment would more than double, to 400, for the 2011-2012 school year. The academy uses a curriculum from Lincoln Interactive. It is operated by USD 385 Andover.

Basehor-Linwood Virtual School is the oldest virtual school program in the state. With 40 teachers, it is one of the largest, and is run by USD 458 Basehor-Linwood.

Caney Valley Virtual School says it is for "adults seeking a high school diploma, home schooled students, student looking for accelerated graduation, students seeking credit recovery, etc." The website of USD 436 notes that the virtual school is for "non-traditional students." The district also has a public charter school for students in grades 7-12. Students in the public charter school, which has a focus on entrepreneurship, take some of their courses through the virtual school. The virtual school advertises itself as being for (among other students), students who are "looking for accelerated graduation."

Cherryvale Diploma Center, of USD 447 Cherryvale, offers year-round learning opportunities to students, both of traditional schooling age and adults, throughout Kansas. It offers onsite services to students as well, with extended hours. It uses OdessyWare, a national vendor and offers classes for students in grades 7-12. The center requires parents of enrolled students to register a home-school with KSDE. Students under age 17 must work at least 3 hour per day and 15 hours per week, under penalty of truancy. It explicitly forbids students in the virtual school program from participating in "High School sponsored activities such as school dances, banquets, Prom, etc."

Hugoton Learning Academy Public Charter School is now actively advertising its services to other districts that need help in meeting the educational needs of their students. It is offered by USD 210 Hugoton Public Schools.

Insight School at Spring Hill is a partnership between USD 230 Spring Hill and Insight Schools, a national company. It is a high school. Students who live in the Spring Hill district may attend the Insight School on a part-time basis. Students who live outside the district must attend on a full-time basis. Unlike some programs, it recommends a broadband connection but says that a dial-up connection will work. Students earn a diploma from USD 230.

iQ Academy Kansas is a project of USD 383 Manhattan-Ogden, offering classes to students in middle school and high school. The academy uses KC Distance Learning as a contractor. It recruits throughout the state, holding open houses in the Kansas City, Topeka, and Wichita metro areas, among other locations.

Kansas Connections Academy is offered by USD 218 Elkhart and Connections Academy, a national company that operates online schools or programs in 17 states. KCA is open to students in grades K-12. KCA first enrolled students in the 2010-2011 school year. Prior to that, it was known as the Elkhart Cyber School.

Kansas Online Learning is offered by USD 397 Centre. This full-time program for students K-12 has an emphasis on STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) and uses a curriculum from Lincoln Interactive. It is also open to adults who do not have a diploma.

Lawrence Virtual School/Lawrence Virtual High School is a cooperative effort of USD 497 Lawrence and the national company K12. It offers monthly online social hours for students, plus other online activities. It has been a K-8 program but will offer the full K-12 range of grades starting with the 2012-2013 school year.

Learning Center of Ellis County serves students in grades 9-12. It is a service of USD 489 Hays. Students may get help from a face-to-face learning center or work at home. The Learning Center provides standardized courses through a computer-based curriculum allowing anyone who has dropped out of high school the opportunity to earn a high school diploma. The learning center also offers ESL classes on a face-to-face basis. It does not appear to offer Advanced Placement classes.

Learning eSchool of Wichita is an online, full-time program of USD 259 Wichita that comes with optional face-to-face activities. Students may also visit a learning center during the day for tutoring and face-to-face meetings with teachers. It loans out office productivity software, which some districts do not offer to students. It offers honors and AP classes. Though students have some flexibility in when they work, they must complete each class within 9 weeks.

Leavenworth Virtual School is a K-12 online program that is open to students throughout the state. It is operated by USD 453 Leavenworth.

Maize Online, is the service registered on the KSDE list of online programs, but it appears that the district is using "Maize Virtual Preparatory School." This K-8 school, which seeks students throughout Kansas, uses the Calvert curriculum. It promises an education that is "parent-driven, not computer-driven." The school bills itself as having "blended" program, though "blended" appears to mean that not all work is done on the computer (true of many if not most online programs). It has a useful website and a Facebook page.

Pawnee Heights Virtual Learning Center is a diploma-completion program. In addition to online instruction, it also offers traveling teachers and correspondence classes. Starting enrollment is fairly easy, and can be done on-line. USD 496 Pawnee Heights is responsible for the center.

Sawyer Academy Virtual School is sponsored by USD 438 Skyline Schools. It is also a charter school. This school, which is for grades 6-12, use a curriculum from e2020. It uses a web-based model and teacher-led video delivery. It uses the same calendar as the USD 438 brick-and-mortar schools. Students may enroll on a part-time basis, as long as one of those classes are in a core sub-ject (defined as math, language arts, science, or history).

Turning Point Learning Center is a public charter school. It has had an online, full-time, statewide school since 2005, and is open to students in grades K-8. It also has a face-to-face program, using project-based learning, for students in grades 5-8. The center is part of USD 253 Emporia.

■ *The following programs or schools are limited in geographic scope, either explicitly by policy or implicitly by their focus to specific school districts.*

eAcademy Olathe is an offering of USD 233 Olathe. It more closely resembles a traditional school setting than many online programs: It is limited to students who live in the district, and the curriculum is developed from within the district. Summer school (for a fee) was avail-able during the summer of 2011. One unusual aspect of

the program is that the design of its website resembles many websites from the late 1990s or early 2000s.

Fresh Start Learning Center focuses on helping people complete their diplomas. Students can earn a diploma from one of the following districts: 336 Holton, 335 Jackson Heights, 337 Royal Valley, 430 South Brown County, 338 Valley Falls, 441 Wetmore, 377 Atchison County, 380 Vermillion, and 322 Onaga.

The Learning Center, an offering of USD 262 Valley Center Schools, has a minimal web presence that does not suggest an appeal to students outside the district. It "provides students with computer based instruction designed to complete Valley Center High School gradua-tion requirements. Students enroll in individualized courses and are able to complete these courses at an independent pace."

Pleasantview Academy is a public charter school (grades K-12) of USD 312 Haven schools that offers two different curriculums (OdessyWare and K12) for students. It is, by default, a full-time program, though some students may get permission to enroll on a part-time basis.

Smoky Valley Virtual Charter School, a service of USD 400 Smoky Valley, focuses on high-school completion. Enrollment is limited to 40 students.

■ *While most online opportunities come through school districts, they are also offered by education services centers (ESCs). These organizations, unlike local districts, lack taxing power and serve districts within specific regions in the state. They provide professional development training for teachers, help districts purchase goods in bulk, offer other help, and may also offer a variety of community services.*

In addition, ESCs offer diploma completion programs, which are for people who have dropped out. They also offer "credit recovery" classes for students who have failed classes and are at risk of dropping out or not graduating with their class. Students can do their work on a flexible schedule. In most cases, ESCs let people complete their diplomas entirely online, or in conjunc-tion with learning centers, where they can get face-to-face help. These locations, known as community learning centers, operate with extended hours to meet the schedules of working adults. Students receive credit and diplomas from their resident district, not from the service center.

Five education service centers in Kansas were registered with KSDE during the 2010-2011 school year.[60]

Virtual Greenbush (Greenbush Online Learning program) is operated by USD 609 Southeast Kansas Education Service Center. In addition to offering classes for credit recovery, it offers classes for talented and gifted students, and AP classes.

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[60] "Virtual School/Program Information," Kansas State Department of Education, http://bit.ly/KSDE-VP.

USD 622 ESSDACK Learning Centers (Educational Services and Staff Development Association of Central Kansas) has 14 physical locations. The first one was established in 1996. The centers offer community education as well as dropout prevention and credit recovery. The diploma program has been online since 2005.

USD 626 Southwest Plains Regional Service Center (SWPRSC) offers diploma-completion services through nine community learning centers. Participants may take their courses online at their own homes, or online at face-to-face centers. Diploma-completion students work at their own pace and take as long, or as little, as they need.

USD 628 South Central Kansas Education Service Center (SCKESC, or "Clearwater") offers two different programs involving online instruction. One focuses on diploma completion for adults or students of high-school age who need credit recovery classes. Participants can complete their work online or receive face-to-face guidance. A second program, @Home, appeals to families who wish to educate their children at home, using a 30-hour-a-week schedule provided by the center. It is a full-time program using the OdessyWare curriculum. Students register with their resident school district.

USD 629 Smoky Hill Education Service Center, offers three learning centers (Salina, Smith Center, Concordia). They are focused on high-school completion for students whose class has already graduated.

Kansas Learns Online is, in turn, a cooperative effort of the five educational service centers listed above, plus one service center in northeast Kansas, Keystone Learning Services, in Ozawkie, and the Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center (NKESC), based in Oakley.

Appendix E: Kansas Laws on Virtual Schools

The following represents a portion of the laws governing online schools in Kansas. It was compiled on July 25, 2011, and taken from the Kansas Statutes, Chapter 72 (Education), Article 37 (Technology and virtual schools) and Article 64 (School District Finance and Quality Performance). The text is formatted as it is on the state website, except for bold shaded text, which is used to call out key information.

■ *Here are the key provisions:*

72-3712 defines a virtual school.

72-3714 says that school districts shall provide training to teachers working in virtual schools.

72-3715 gives districts 105 percent of the base state aid (BSAPP) for each full-time equivalent (FTE) student. The BSAPP is a fraction of the money the state gives to districts, and an even smaller amount of the amount that districts spend on a student. A district may also get an extra 25 percent for each "nonproficient at-risk" student.

72-3716 says that some districts may receive an extra 8 percent per student for each student taking at least one AP class.

72-3710. Same; joint and cooperative provision authorized; sharing of information required, when. The boards of education of any two or more school districts are hereby authorized to enter into a school district inter-local agreement in accordance with the provisions of K.S.A. 72-8230, and amendments thereto, for the purpose of jointly and cooperatively providing technology education programs in such school districts. Any school district having a technology education program in operation or having a plan to develop, implement or enhance such program shall, upon request, share information on the research, development and operation of such programs with other school districts.

72-3711. Virtual school act; citation. K.S.A. 2010 Supp. 72-3711 through 72-3716, and amendments thereto, shall be known and may be cited as the virtual school act.

72-3712. Same; definitions. As used in the virtual school act:

(a) "Virtual school" means any school or educational program that: (1) Is offered for credit; (2) uses distance-learning technologies which predominately use internet-based methods to deliver instruction; (3) involves instruction that occurs asynchronously with the teacher and pupil in separate locations; (4) requires the pupil to make academic progress toward the next grade level and matriculation from kindergarten through high school graduation; (5) requires the pupil to demonstrate competence in subject matter for each class or subject in which the pupil is enrolled as part of the virtual school; and (6) requires age-appropriate pupils to complete state assessment tests.

(b) "School district" means any school district which offers a virtual school.

(c) Except as provided by the virtual school act, words and phrases shall have the meanings ascribed thereto in the school district finance and quality performance act.

72-3713. Same; supervision by state board; rules and regulations. Virtual schools shall be under the general supervision of the state board. The state board may adopt any rules and regulations relating to virtual schools which the state board deems necessary to administer and enforce the virtual school act.

72-3714. Same; teacher training programs. (a) In order to provide for the proper delivery of instruction through distance-learning technologies, school districts shall provide adequate training to teachers who teach in virtual schools. Each year, school districts shall submit a report relating to training programs provided by the district to teachers who teach in virtual schools. Such reports shall be submitted in the manner and form required by the state board.

72-3715. Same; determining full-time equivalent enrollment; state aid; virtual school fund. (a) In order to be included in the full-time equivalent enrollment of a virtual school, a pupil shall be in attendance at the virtual school on (1) a single school day on or before September 19 of each school year and (2) on a single school day on or after September 20, but before October 4 of each school year.

(b) A school district which offers a virtual school shall determine the full-time equivalent enrollment of each pupil enrolled in the virtual school on September 20 of each school year as follows:

(1) Determine the number of hours the pupil was in attendance on a single school day on or before September 19 of each school year;

(2) determine the number of hours the pupil was in attendance on a single school day on or after September 20, but before October 4 of each school year;

(3) add the numbers obtained under paragraphs (1) and (2);

(4) divide the sum obtained under paragraph (3) by 12. The quotient is the full-time equivalent enrollment of the pupil.

(c) The school days on which a district determines the full-time equivalent enrollment of a pupil under paragraphs (1) and (2) of subsection (b) shall be the school days on which the pupil has the highest number of hours of attendance at the virtual school. No more than six hours of attendance may be counted in a single school day. Attendance may be shown by a pupil's on-line activity or entries in the pupil's virtual school journal or log of activities.

(d) (1) Subject to the availability of appropriations for virtual school state aid and within the limits of any such appropriations, each school year a school district which offers a virtual school shall be entitled to virtual school state aid.

(2) The state board of education shall determine the amount of virtual school state aid a school district is entitled to receive as follows:

(A) **Multiply the full-time equivalent enrollment of the virtual school by an amount equal to 105% of the amount of base state aid per pupil;**

(B) **multiply the full-time equivalent enrollment of non-proficient at-risk pupils enrolled in an approved at-risk**

program offered by the virtual school, if any, **by** an amount equal to **25% of the amount of base state aid per pupil**;

(C) add any amount determined under K.S.A. 2010 Supp. 72-3716, and amendments thereto; and

(D) add the amounts obtained under paragraphs (A) through (C). The sum is the amount of the virtual school state aid to which the school district is entitled.

(3) There is hereby established in every school district a fund which shall be called the virtual school fund, which fund shall consist of all moneys deposited therein or transferred thereto according to law. Moneys received as virtual school state aid shall be deposited in the general fund of the school district and transferred to the virtual school fund of the district. The expenses of a district directly attributable to virtual schools offered by a school district shall be paid from the virtual school fund. The cost of an advance placement course provided to a pupil described in subsection (d)(2)(D) shall be paid by the virtual school.

Any balance remaining in the virtual school fund at the end of the budget year shall be carried forward into the virtual school fund for succeeding budget years. Such fund shall not be subject to the provisions of K.S.A. 79-2925 through 79-2937, and amendments thereto.

In preparing the budget of such school district, the amounts credited to and the amount on hand in the virtual school fund, and the amount expended therefrom shall be included in the annual budget for the information of the residents of the school district. Interest earned on the investment of moneys in any such fund shall be credited to that fund.

(e) For the purposes of this section, a pupil enrolled in a virtual school who is not a resident of the state of Kansas shall not be counted in the full-time equivalent enrollment of the virtual school.

72-3716. Same; advanced placement courses; additional state aid, when. (a) As used in this sections:

(1) "Pupil" means a pupil who is a resident of and enrolled, on a full-time basis, in a school district.

(2) "School district" means a school district which does not offer advanced placement courses and which is either more than 200 square miles in area or has an enrollment of at least 260 pupils and does not offer advance placement courses.

(b) If a pupil is enrolled in at least one advanced placement course provided by a virtual school, the school district offering the virtual school shall be paid an amount equal to 8% of the amount of base state aid per pupil for such pupil as additional virtual school state aid. Such state aid shall be paid in each semester in which a pupil is enrolled in at least one advanced placement course provided by a virtual school.

■ In addition, 72-6407 says that if only some of a student's courses are virtual, the district needs to measure student enrollment in 1/10 increments of an FTE. This is similar to how a district needs to report part-time students.

Here is an excerpt:

> **A pupil enrolled in a district and attending a non-virtual school and also attending a virtual school shall be counted as that proportion of one pupil (to the nearest 1/10) that the pupil's attendance at the non-virtual school bears to full-time attendance.**

Except as provided by this section for preschool-aged exceptional children and virtual school pupils, a pupil enrolled in a district and attending special education and related services, provided for by the district shall be counted as one pupil. A pupil enrolled in a district and attending special education and related services provided for by the district and also attending a virtual school shall be counted as that proportion of one pupil (to the nearest 1/10) that the pupil's attendance at the non-virtual school bears to full-time attendance.

Appendix F: Enrollment in online programs in selected states

How large a percentage of Kansas's students take online classes compared to other states? It is hard to find comprehensive data for each state, especially for states that depend on districts rather than a statewide agency to offer online learning opportunities. Nonetheless, data from other states illustrates that online learning in Kansas has room to grow. (Enrollment in online classes in Kansas almost certainly does not exceed 1 percent of all students, and is probably three-quarters of one percent.)

ARIZONA

During the 2009-2010 school year, the Arizona Virtual Academy enrolled 6,369 students, while the Primavera Online High School enrolled 11,223 students.[61] In both cases, most of those students were enrolled on a full-time basis. Together, this represents 1.6 percent of the 1,082,154 students enrolled in all public schools.[62]

FLORIDA

Roughly 122,000 students took classes from the Florida Virtual School during the 2010-2011 school year, representing 5.5 percent of all public school students in the state. Until this school year, the Florida Virtual School was available to students only on a part-time basis.

MINNESOTA

Roughly 20,000 students took at least one online course during the 2010-2011 school year: 8,000 of those took classes from their own district, and 12,000 took at least one class from other providers. The total number of 20,000 represents 2.5 percent of the state's public school enrollment.[63]

NORTH CAROLINA

In the 2010-2011 school year, 32,349 public school students took at least one class through the North Carolina Virtual Public School. That is 2.2 percent of the students in the state.

OKLAHOMA

During the 2010-2011 school year, 2,593 students took all of their classes online in a virtual school sitting, and 1,863 students took online classes while sitting in a brick and mortar school.[64] A total of 4,456 students, then, have taken one or more classes in an online setting. Total enrollment was 676,789, making online enrollment a low 0.70 percent.

WISCONSIN

In the 2010-2011 school, "just under 4,000 students" were enrolled in virtual schools, putting this kind of enrollment at 0.5 percent of all public school students. The growth of online learning may have been stunted by a hard cap on the number of enrollments, which was recently lifted.[65] This number does not include students who may take an online class or classes in their school district.

[61] iNACOL, "Keeping Pace 2010," p. 31.

[62] Numbers for all-student enrollment in each state were taken from "MDR's Enrollment Comparison Report, 2010-2011," http://bit.ly/SD-enroll.

[63] "K-12 Online Learning," Office of Legislative Auditor, September 2011, http://bit.ly/VS-Minn.

[64] "OK virtual school enrollment at 2,593," Daily Oklahoman, January 3, 2011, http://bit.ly/VS-OK.

[65] Erin Richard, "27 virtual schools set to open, a jump over 15 in 2010-'11," Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, September 5, 2011, http://bit.ly/VS-Wisc.