

Recommendations from the New York Summit on Online and Blended Learning

Hosted by NYSED, iNACOL, and Intel

Prepared by the New York Comprehensive Center

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Virtual Learning Initiative

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On December 8, 2010 the New York State Education Department (NYSED), the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL), and Intel hosted a summit on online and blended learning for stakeholders throughout New York State. The goal of the summit was to identify potential next steps in creating a structural network for expanding online learning opportunities for students throughout the state.

Specifically, the goals of the summit were to:

- Understand the blended and online learning landscape in New York
- Identify the operational models for expanding online learning
- Create opportunities for aligning efforts and collaboration
- Explore policy changes needed to eliminate constraints
- Develop a shared understanding of moving forward in online learning in the state
- Ensure every student has access to high quality online courses in New York

The New York Comprehensive Center, in our role as a technical assistance provider to New York State, was charged with synthesizing the recommendations made throughout the summit's sessions.

I. Technology Platforms

The technology and tools used in online or blended learning typically run through a coordinated system for student, teacher, administrator, and family access. According to the TPAC for Online and Blended Learning (Wicks, 2010) these platforms include:

- Enterprise architecture
- Learning management system/virtual learning environment
- 1:1 computing
- Broadband internet infrastructure
- New SIS models for standards-based and competency-based approaches.

Policy and Advocacy Recommendations

State Level

- Sustain only by supporting programs that “work”. NYSED cannot afford to keep ineffective programs running.
- Expand pilot projects using on-to-one computing with netbooks.
- Disseminate New York State learning digital technology work plan and align this to the national technology work plan released last month.
- Obtain and disseminate statewide practices regarding Internet safety within schools creating a culture of policy-building and appropriate use of the Internet.
- NYS does not have the capacity to host online environments, but have available for dissemination the framework, guidance, and models to create a delivery system of online learning.
- Provide incentives to schools developing online programs.

- Create a statewide online course license to take the burden off districts paying for courses. State contracts and state licenses can decrease prices and encourage sustainability.
 - Allow districts and BOCES to buy from state contracts.
 - Examine perpetual licenses for courses, PD broadband, etc. (see Alabama).

District, LEA, BOCES Level

- Must determine relationship with student use of the Internet including rules, regulations, and restrictions in order to promote rather than not demote student self-directed learning.
- Determine who has the rights to created courses.

Management/School/Administration Recommendations

State Level

- Provide funding to give schools a digitalized environment twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. Fund the development of a system, including the equipment and infrastructure necessary to do this.
- Expand access to broadband. Existing rural utility grants have not gone to places where they are most necessary.

District, LEA, BOCES Level

- Use textbook funding to aid online initiatives
- Share resources statewide as replication and redundancy are inhibiting effectiveness.
- Determine the definition and components of a blended model for uniformity and replication of effective practices statewide.
- Schedule common conferences between sharing districts.
- Create a consortium to support infrastructure, support services, and allow for custom development of online programs.
- Establish collaboration through a virtual library created by school library systems.

II. People (professional development, pedagogy, teachers, administrators)

The people who drive online and blended learning are vital to its success. It is important to consider the pedagogy and professional development plans for the teachers and administrators of online and blended programs and the families who will be supporting these initiatives. According to the TPAC for Online and Blended Learning (Wicks, 2010) this includes:

- New skills needed for teachers who teach online
- New skills needed for administrators to manage online programs
- New Response to Intervention (RTI) models for online and blended learning solutions.

Policy and Advocacy Recommendations

State Level

- Each district has idiosyncratic needs, much like students, especially in rural areas. These schools would like more policy direction but do not want to be forced to shift because all districts look different.
- Provide funding and guidance on how to maintain costs per student.
- Provide specific requirements for online courses and teachers, including online teacher certification requirements, class size, and professional development.
- Examine state reciprocity (certification reciprocity) allowing teachers with other state certifications to offer or teach New York courses.

District, LEA, BOCES Level

- Courses must have requirements to meet accessibility guidelines including instruction to teachers on how to handle certain instances such as visually-impaired or hearing-impaired students.
- Establish protocols for the use of online courses beyond the semester and year academic calendars.

Management/School/Administration Recommendations

State Level

- Provide research on what effective online programs look like including information on research-based leadership and comprehensive systems of support from program planning to the implementation stage.
- State should coordinate district visitations: people want to see what is out there and what is working; they also often want to see similar districts in order to have confidence in the change they are pursuing.
- Establish regional committees and host monthly/bi-monthly calls for a forum to monitor progress and extend conversations.

District, LEA, BOCES Level

- Document existing working practices and share with administrators. This can be used to create a professional development collaboration model between schools, and could be hosted online.
- Build the capacity of teachers including the necessary experience and training on how to use online tools and implement them into the classroom.
- Accountability must be implemented through a transparent model allowing administrators to see everything that is going on with all parties.
- Make teachers aware that there are free resources available to support them.
- Provide professional development relating to online learning for mentors and master teachers to guide new faculty.
- Post information and policy manuals.

III. Assessments

The assessments administered for online and blended learning require different characteristics to support academic integrity and rigor. Student interaction and complete these programs is markedly different from a brick-and-mortar program and should be accommodated when building appropriate assessments. According to the TPAC for Online and Blended Learning (Wicks, 2010) this includes the development of alternate assessments, such as:

- Online/adaptive
- Personalization engines
- Performance-based.

Policy and Advocacy Recommendations

State Level

- Provide requirements, clarification, or guidance on seat time requirements for online learners. Quantify what this looks like for districts.
- Enhance or add to current assessment rubrics available, such as those created by iNACOL, and create state regulated rubrics for assessing online programs, teachers, and students.
- Address the issue of legality in regards to student information, especially data that is transferred or stored online.
- Research appropriate and valid performance metrics that could be used for online courses.
- Provide policy clarification on students with disabilities and ELLs.

District, LEA, BOCES Level

- Provide guidance on how effective online programs are addressing academic integrity in online environments.
- Determine district liability for student failure.

Management/School/Administration Recommendations

State Level

- Disseminate a set of standards and rubrics that are accepted by New York State to make sure programs meet the highest standards, such as those created by the New York Institute of Technology.
- Establish expectations and required components for student graduation from online courses, as currently principals have the authority to grant credits.

District, LEA, BOCES Level

- Schools should look at guidance documents, such as the rubrics created by iNACOL to guide assessments on courses, teachers, and students.
- Disseminate a compilation of best practices for online teaching through research within districts and exchange between districts.
- Create assessments in which students must demonstrate their knowledge of 21st century skills.

- Administer assessments prior to online courses to accurately gauge a student's previous knowledge base.

IV. Content

The quality of the curriculum is paramount to its successful implementation in online and blended programs to further student learning. There are many reasons that students choose to access courses in an online and blended model. According to the TPAC for Online and Blended Learning (Wicks, 2010) it is paramount to consider these factors in selection of online and blended learning solution:

- Quality of online courses
- Dual enrollment
- Utilization for credit recovery
- Alignment to the Common Core curriculum.

Policy and Advocacy Recommendations

State Level

- Create policy surrounding how students are learning in online courses. Specifically, a flexible policy for every implementation type; almost like having a specific IEP for every student.
- New York State is currently establishing a virtual learning network. However, curricular models need to be created to link effective courses for alignment and to build the connection of networks.

District, LEA, BOCES Level

- If individualized policy recommendations are created, determine who will be reviewing each student to ensure that New York State standards are met.

Management/School/Administration Recommendations

State Level

- Create a centralized location for quality content to be shared across districts and schools.

District, LEA, BOCES Level

- Determine how content needs to be customized in order to meet individual student's needs, while still maintaining continuity of instruction.
- Regulate how courses are aligned to NYS standards, as not all vendors currently align.

Final Thoughts from the National Perspective

The *Project Tomorrow* survey in 2009, found that of the 55 million students in the United States, 47% want access to online learning options while only 4% had access to these options. *A Snapshot of K-12 Online and Blended Learning Programs in New York* (iNACOL, 2010), indicates that New York State is in a unique position to learn from the

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programs which are currently being offered throughout the state by BOCES, Regional Information Centers (RICs), school districts, and other programs. New York State can learn about the type of students these programs serve, types of courses and services they offer, and the support they provide for teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders.

From these findings, however, it is clear that NYSED will be called upon to provide guidance relating to seat time, adaptive assessments, and teacher preparation, along with student access to programs and the technology tools needed for participation. An additional key area of focus for NYSED relates to accommodations for students with disabilities and English Learners.

Providing policy and program guidance in all of these areas can increase graduation rates across New York State to assist in the preparation of college- and career-ready students. *The Silent Epidemic* (Bridgeland, DiIulio, Jr., & Morison, 2006) highlights the reasons that students reported they dropped out of high school. There is no single reason why students drop out of high school. Respondents reported a variety of reasons including a lack of connection to the school environment; a perception that school is boring; feeling unmotivated; academic challenges; and the weight of real-world events. But indications are strong that these barriers to graduation are not insurmountable. Using data collected from a national sample of principals, *Class Connections: High School Reform and the Role of Online Learning* (Picciano & Seaman, 2010) examined the role of online and blended instruction in addressing these concerns and issues facing the American high school. From the findings, it is obvious that there are certain initiatives involving online learning that directly address school reform issues such as improving graduation rates, credit recovery, building connections for students to their future college careers, differentiating instruction, and operating costs.

Due to the 2009 *Project Tomorrow* findings that over 88% of administrators say that the effective implementation of instructional technology is core to their mission, and 84% believe that technology use does indeed enhance student achievement, it would appear that New York State is well primed to develop a platform for guidance and program solutions to assist districts with implementation of online and blended learning solutions.

References

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