



NATIONAL LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE'S TOOLKIT 2005 EVALUATING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Evaluation of Online Learning Policy Statement

While many states do not currently have statewide programs for online learning, state legislatures and boards of education are charging state educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) with the creation of policies, programs or courses in this area. For LEAs, online learning opportunities can provide courses to students that are not available locally, and can provide alternative methods for all students to access high quality curriculum taught by highly qualified teachers. Furthermore, online learning has the potential to support schools in their efforts to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements.

The evaluation of online programs and courses helps ensure that programs achieve and maintain a high quality and reach intended goals. To this end, there is a growing body of literature that addresses the essential components of online learning programs and courses. However, a universal set of quality guidelines is needed so that program and course developers (educators and vendors) can create products that will support success for every student who takes an online course or enrolls in an online program. The NLI 2004 Curriculum Development Work Group began to address this need.

The success of online programs and courses hinges on the understanding that one must evaluate the implementation process *before* the impact of the program and the intended outcomes can be evaluated. **This requires ongoing, purposeful, planned program evaluation, which must occur before assessment of the impact on students can be determined.** Furthermore, any evaluation instruments should be based on the Standards for Program Evaluation,¹ particularly those standards related to feasibility and utility.

¹ The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994). The Program Evaluation Standards. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. <http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/jc/>

In the interest of developing a set of standards that measures the quality of online programs and courses, and to aid the assessment of such programs, we have developed a “Buyer’s Guide” to serve as a first-step in this process of evaluating online programs and courses. The goal of the Buyer’s Guide is to provide assistance in the development and selection of successful online programs and courses. Developing this Buyer’s Guide, as well as other evaluation mechanisms, is critical to the success of online programs and courses. If online courses and programs do not fit the needs of students or schools, then the concept of online learning is at risk of being tried once and abandoned without its potential being realized. We hope that the Buyer’s Guide will help state and district leaders in the ongoing process of improving online courses and programs.

Evaluation of Online Learning: A Buyer’s Guide to Evaluate Online Programs and Courses

This Buyer’s Guide is aimed at providing an easy first-step tool to help SEAs and LEAs sort out quality courses and programs—whether homegrown or commercially developed. Unfortunately, in the absence of a Buyer’s Guide to help assess online courses and programs, states and districts are often forced to make uninformed decisions, or decisions that are based on a product’s marketing or cost rather than on its quality. There is a growing body of literature on the effectiveness of online courses and programs, but it needs to be distilled into a form that state directors, school officials, and district leaders can use. An evaluation tool, such as a Buyer’s Guide, should have two components: evaluation of online learning programs (at the state or district level); and an evaluation of online courses as shown through assessments of student performance.

SETDA’s Profiling Educational Technology Integration (PETI) criteria and framework can be used to analyze the quality of online learning courses and programs.² Each number below (i.e. *SI-1*) corresponds to a PETI Guiding Question.

² For more information on SETDA’s PETI framework, please see <http://www.setda-peti.org/Framework.html>

Implementation Evaluation

Student Learning	
<i>SI-1</i>	<i>Is student academic achievement improving where online learning is being used effectively?</i>
<i>SI-2</i>	<i>Are students demonstrating proficiency in technological and information literacy (e.g. performance reviews, assessment of student products, observations)?</i>

Impact Evaluation

Course Delivery	
<i>C1-5</i>	<i>How are the best and most effective practices with online learning identified and shared?</i>
<i>C2-1</i>	<i>Are teachers suitably proficient and familiar with technology to strategically incorporate effective uses of online learning?</i>
<i>C2-2</i>	<i>Are teachers skilled in designing standards-based curriculum that maximizes the unique features that online-experiences have for learning?</i>
<i>C2-4</i>	<i>Do teachers have strategies for evaluating online student learning?</i>
Infrastructure and Support	
<i>C3-3</i>	<i>Does the infrastructure have the capacity to support online learning?</i>
<i>C3-7</i>	<i>Does the school/district provide human, technical, and financial resources to provide adequate and timely technical and network support?</i>
<i>C4-1</i>	<i>Has the school/district ensured that the local socio-economic status is not a barrier to student online learning outside of the school environment and school hours?</i>
<i>C4-4</i>	<i>Is the school/district ensuring that special needs populations have sufficient and appropriate access to online learning opportunities?</i>
<i>C5-7</i>	<i>Does the school/district provide comprehensive professional growth opportunities for administrators to help them understand how to build the capacity for online learning?</i>
<i>C5-8</i>	<i>Does the school/district provide comprehensive professional growth opportunities for teachers to build their own capacity for supporting and using online learning?</i>
<i>C5-9</i>	<i>Does the school/district provide comprehensive, prioritized funding for the full cost of online learning as a regular part of its budget?</i>