Virtual Schools and e-Learning: Planning for Success

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Virtual Schools & e-Learning

• Virtual School (VS) Context
• Growth Factors (and controversy)
• Why Offer/Benefits and Limits
• How can a VS program be offered
• Key VS components
• Lessons Learned/Success factors
• Road Map
Virtual School Context

• The terms "virtual high school" or "virtual school" are generally applied to any educational organization that offers K-12 courses through Internet- or Web-based methods (Clark, 2001).
Virtual School Context

- K-12 “e-Learning” refers not only to virtual school courses, but to distance learning by other electronic methods, and the use of technology to support teaching and learning in schools.
Virtual School Context

- K-12 virtual schools cresting after the maturation of online higher education
- How to avoid repeating the costly failures
  - before the fall (Wilson keynote)
- Our idea: ask successful virtual schools what they have done to plan for success
Virtual Context

- The virtual school movement is the 'next wave' in technology-based K-12 education (TA Consulting/WestEd, 2001)
- 32 states sponsoring e-learning initiatives, including online testing, virtual schools, online prof. development (EdWeek, 2002)
Perennial question: What’s the scope of K-12 online learning? How many K-12 students are taking online courses?

• Few surveys on the subject
• Much speculation
Context: How Many Students?

- **WestEd survey, 2001**
- **Estimated 40-50,000 unique students**

Individuals enrolled K-12 virtual schools

Source: Virtual School Survey, 9/2001, TA Consulting/WestEd
Context: How Many Students?

- Peak Group survey (2002)
  - Estimated 180,000 student enrollments in 2002-2003
- Surveyed larger provider sample (N=88)
  - Possible some independent study students were counted by responders
- But probably missed students in small virtual school programs
Context: How Many Students?

- Course enrollments vs. unique students

Example: Florida Virtual School (FLVS)

- Average student takes 1.5 courses
- 03-04: 12,000 FLVS enrollments by about 8,000 unique students
Context: How Many Students?

- A better answer to “how many students?”
- (Yes & No) NCES Survey, Spring 2004
  - Sample of public schools nationwide
  - Will count student enrollments by district in distance learning courses
  - Not broken out by online, satellite, etc.
  - Will miss those not enrolled via publics
Context: Not just HS

- Not just high school – many virtual schools enrolling middle and/or elementary students

### Grade level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>HS (33)</th>
<th>JH/MS (17)</th>
<th>ES (9)</th>
<th>Ungraded (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Virtual School Survey, 9/2001, TA Consulting/WestEd
Context: What are barriers

Most common barriers to overcome

- Technology
- Funding
- Other

Source: Virtual School Survey, 9/2001, TA Consulting/WestEd
Growth Factors

• Finding funding is a barrier … but multiple funding sources have spurred support growth of virtual schools

• Federal, state, foundation grants and programs

⇒ State aid OK’d for virtual courses

⇒ Issue: when grant’s over, then what?

⇒ VHS®: there is life after the grant
Growth Factors

• School technology infrastructure can now support online learning
  ➔ e-Rate: $5.8 billion by ’01
  ➔ 99% of schools have Net access
  ➔ 87% of instructional rooms online
  ➔ 55% high speed (T1/DS1) access
  ➔ Students to Internet computers: 5.4 to 1

(Source: NCES 2001-071, 2002-018)
Growth Factors

• Today’s K-12 students “native” to the virtual learning space (Prensky keynote)

➤ Internet-savvy students see skills as superior to teachers (Levin, Arefeh, 2002)

➤ Growth in e-learning will be fueled by the current generation … predicts $50 billion e-learning market by 2010 (Ben Hamlin, eMarketer, 2003)
Growth Factors

• Virtual learning is a tool for providing **new curricular access**, especially to increase educational equity

• Many virtual schools: expanded access in mission statements (WestEd, 2001)

• **Example**: Feds/states support online Advanced Placement© access for low income/high-need HS students

• Purpose - improve college placement
Benefits and Limits

- Improved access to rich/varied curricula
- Courses not always high quality, or uneven

- Improved outcomes – further ed, jobs (Ex.: AP in college; 21st century skills)
- High initial dropout - long term NA
- Difficult to link, track outcomes
Benefits and Limits

- Access “anytime, anywhere”
- Must access via personal computer on Net – not via PDAs, phone (Prensky)
- Gaps in home Net access, digital divide
- Increased access for high-need students
- Lower participation and success rates
Benefits and Limits

- Encourage collaboration, teamwork
- Feelings of isolation, role confusion
- Develop self-discipline, time mgt. skills
- Self pacing problems
- Workload shock
Benefits and Limits

- **Strengthen writing, critical thinking skills**
- **Reading for comprehension, extensive online keyboarding in “proper” English** – many students unprepared
- **Gain tech troubleshooting skills**
- **Variable technical support, levels of student skill to address tech issues**
Benefits and Limits

- Provides a “second chance” or alternative educational path for students needing one
- Computer assisted instruction for remedial purposes in 80s/90s … taken it online may not be improvement
- Promotes educational choice for home schoolers and students who attend underperforming schools
- Concerns about effects of choice on public school funding and attendance, and about virtual charter school quality
Controversy

- Virtual schools – controversy and myth
- Annual PDK polls consistently showed only 30% of U. S. adults favored high school students taking online courses instead of attending regular school (Rose & Gallup, 2000; 2002)
- Many Americans may have impression a virtual school ONLY means a virtual charter school used in educational choice, to replace the public school
- Actually, most virtual school enrollments are probably by students attending a regular school who take a course or two online to enhance their curriculum
- The 2004 ED survey may help show the range of beneficial virtual school uses by public schools
How can VS Program be Offered

- Create “from scratch”
- Use providers
- Use a mix …
- Or join a collaborative
How can VS Program be Offered

- Most common: a local education agency starts a virtual school program
- Many 100s of districts doing so
- Offer anywhere from 1 course to a full curriculum, internal/external developed
- Most serve students residing in district, but many have external strategies too
- Example: CCS Web Academy
Local education agency

Student Desktop

Demonstration Course

- Syllabus
- Instructor
- Assignments
- Announcements
- Performance Chart
- Attendance Chart
How can VS Program be Offered

- Most local virtual school programs use external resources
  - Courses, content, learning management systems and academic technical support
  - Resources provided by large virtual schools and course/e-Learning solutions providers
  - Some participate in a collaborative to create their own larger virtual school
How can VS Program be Offered

- Who provides virtual learning resources?
  - State-level virtual schools
    - Example: Florida Virtual School
  - University-based virtual schools
    - Example: University of Missouri-Columbia High School
University of Missouri-Columbia High School

The freedom to learn from anywhere.

MU High School

- From the Desk of Kristi Smalley
  It's Almost Crunch Time
  Take a Course Home for the Summer

The University of Missouri-Columbia High School (MU High School) is a part of the University of Missouri Center for Distance and Independent Study, and is accredited by the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement.

The mission of the University of Missouri-Columbia High School is to provide courses, through a variety of delivery methods, that will complement traditional high school curricula, and provide an accredited diploma program for independent learners of all
### How can VS Program be Offered

Tuition charged: 1-semester, out of district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All VS</td>
<td>$78</td>
<td>$385</td>
<td>$264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U independent study VS</td>
<td>$78</td>
<td>$299</td>
<td>$164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide VS</td>
<td>$300</td>
<td>$385</td>
<td>$333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District VS</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>$350</td>
<td>$285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Virtual School Survey, 9/2001, TA Consulting/WestEd
How can VS Program be Offered

• Who provides virtual learning resources?

⇒ E-Learning solutions/course providers
⇒ Example: K-12, Inc.

⇒ Private schools
⇒ Example: Sagemont Virtual School
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We have complete grade programs as well as individual courses in Language Arts, Math, Science, History, Art, and Music. We provide planning & progress tools as well as engaging materials.
The Sagemont Virtual School (SVS) offers a unique blended online and brick and mortar educational opportunity for high school students throughout the globe.

Sagemont Virtual School is a private operator of a virtual high school that offers students a college preparatory curriculum that meets and exceeds the standards of most states. SVS helps each student maximize his/her learning potential through an individualized learning program that combines the best in virtual education with very real connections among students, teachers, facilitators and family.

Built upon the success of Sagemont’s brick and mortar Lower and Upper Schools in Weston, Florida, SVS combines Internet-based courses taught by Sagemont teachers with an array of services for students and their families: college counseling, career internships, virtual and real field trips and virtual clubs. Students have available to them all of the added activities that a traditional high school has to offer, and will be able to formulate their own mix of online classes and on campus activities to suit individual needs.

SVS provides students with the flexibility to either continue for one or more courses or complete their high school education on a schedule of their choice at anytime of day at anytime of the year. Students can access their courses online, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Unlike correspondence school and home-schooling options, SVS is a complete high school. Students are taught by full-time teachers certified by the state departments of education in their content areas.
How can VS Program be Offered

- Other paths for local schools:
  - Join a virtual school collaborative
    - Example: The Virtual High School (VHS, Inc.)
  - Become an online charter school
    - Example: Basehor-Linwood Virtual Charter School; Appleton eSchool
Welcome to Virtual High School! - Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by Warpnet Communications
Basehor-Linwood Virtual Charter School

Mission Statement:

The mission of the VCS is to create and develop alternative approaches to delivering educational processes through the use of current and emerging technologies.

Goals:

- To provide via the Internet educational resources and instructional support to those students who are pursuing alternative educational approaches.
- To provide enrichment and networking opportunities.
- To validate student's academic achievements, and establish a valid academic record which includes standardized tests and local assessments.

VCS News 4:20PM CST

- End of Year Considerations. As the academic year comes to a close please consider the following tasks and requirements:
  - School Day with the KC Royals. Join us for a day of fun with the Royals Baseball Team.
  - Note of Appreciation. The BLVCS staff would like...
Virtual Charter School

Appleton eSchool

Virtual High School

HOME GETTING STARTED ABOUT US FAQ CONTACT US

TOP 10 Reasons for Taking an Online Course

Why eSchool

Appleton eSchool is a virtual charter high school developed as an initiative of the Appleton Area School District.

Enroll Today

Course Login

2003-2004 School Year Courses!

Creative Writing  Biology
English I  Earth Science
English II  Health - Life Management Skills
Algebra I  Government/Civics
Geometry  American History
Algebra II  World History

more info »
descriptions »
Some Key Components

- Funding
- Technology
- Curriculum & instruction
- Academic services
- Professional development
- Access/equity planning
- Assessment
- Policy & administration
- Marketing & public relations
Success Factors

• For selected key components --
• What are some “lessons learned” by virtual school planners?
• How does it help explain their success?
Lessons Learned/Success Factors

- **Funding:**

- **Strategy:** VHS, Inc. successfully transitions in 01-02 from 5-year federal grant to membership and professional development fees paid by participating schools.

- In year 4, “An eighteen-month budget cycle was built into the business plan to give schools time to incorporate membership fees”

-- Liz Pape, Exec. Dir., and others
Lessons Learned/Success Factors

• **Funding:**

  → **Strategy:** Sagemont Virtual School is a full-fare, prestigious private school venue for a select college prep group ($9750/yr.)

  → **Strategy:** statewide Florida Virtual School transitions from line item funding to being part of state funding formula, 03-04; in return receives FTE funding only for successful public school students

  → “It means virtual learning options are here to stay in Florida” -- Julie Young, FLVS Exec. Dir.
Lessons Learned/Success Factors

• **Equity:**

→ **Strategy:** The University of California College Prep (UCCP) program successfully focused on access and equity for minority students, with 59% minority enrollment in AP® courses.

→ “Virtual schools should set a goal that their student body reflect the ethnic/racial makeup of their related area of service.”

– Francisco Hernandez, Exec. Dir., UCCP
Lessons Learned/Success Factors

• **Curriculum & Instruction**

  ➜ **Strategy:** Cumberland County Schools (CCS)

  Web Academy successfully created own online instructional model, blending asynchronous and synchronous instruction

  ➜ “Recently I have seen a national trend … some virtual schools that have offered asynchronous instruction alone are adding elements of synchronous instruction”

  -- Allan Jordan, CCSWA Principal; Chair, NACOL
Lessons Learned/Success Factors

• Marketing & Public Relations

→ Strategy: The University of Missouri-Columbia High School (MUHS), traditionally independent study, has succeeded in adding an online curriculum that expands reach in schools

→ “Public school officials may mistakenly believe that an online high school program will draw students away … the utmost care must be taken to keep the proper officials informed of your plans.”

-- Kristi Smalley, MUHS Principal
Road Map

• Is there a “road map” to success in planning a virtual school program?
• A work in progress
• Clearly, paths to success differ significantly depending on the nature of the virtual school effort
• Not “one size fits all”
Questions and Ideas

• If you are exploring, starting, or operating a virtual school …

• What do you think are some key factors for virtual learning success in your unique context?
Virtual Schools and e-Learning

• Thanks for attending!

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