

Welcome to the Webinar!

SEA Community of Practice: Virtual Schools—Assessing Progress and Accountability

We will be starting soon.



SEA Community of Practice: Virtual Schools—Assessing Progress and Accountability

August 29, 2013



About the Resource Center

The **U.S. Department of Education** is committed to promoting effective practices, providing technical assistance, and disseminating the resources critical to ensuring the success of charter schools across the country. To that end, the Education Department, under a contract with American Institutes for Research, has developed the **National Charter School Resource Center**.

Presenters

Joe Ableidinger
Public Impact

Gillian Locke
Public Impact

About Public Impact

Public Impact is a growing national research and consulting organization focused on education policy and management. Our mission is to dramatically improve learning outcomes for all children in the U.S., with a special focus on students who are not served well. We are a team of professionals from many backgrounds, including former teachers. We are researchers, thought leaders, tool-builders, on-the-ground consultants, and former educators who work with leading education reformers. For more on Public Impact, please visit www.publicimpact.com.

Agenda

Key Background and Definitions

Study Findings

Recommendations

Discussion

About This Study

- Primary focus: Fully online schools
- Findings also apply to:
 - State-run virtual schools
 - Supplemental online programs
 - District consortium programs
 - Full-time blended schools.
- Study addresses authorizer practice and state accountability policy.

About This Study: Six Priority Goals

1. Examine best practices for assessing quality and establishing rigorous accountability measures.
2. Analyze input measures used in evaluating fully online schools.
3. Evaluate current outcomes-based evaluation efforts.
4. Assess types of data needed to assess quality.
5. Identify approaches used to address challenges unique to, or more prevalent for, fully online schools.
6. Pinpoint implications for discussions of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization and/or future ESEA waiver process.

Methodology

- **Literature review.** Major reports, issue briefs, policy briefs, white papers, and news articles.
- **Expert interviews.** Leaders with expertise running and overseeing virtual schools; experts on accountability in online and blended learning.
- **Technical working group meeting.** March 2013 meeting in Washington, D.C. including expert panels and small-group breakout sessions.

Key Background and Definitions: Online and Blended Learning Alternatives

- **Fully online schools.** Students' *entire* course schedules taken online; many are multidistrict; many are charter schools.
- **Supplemental online programs.** Individual online courses supplement or serve as part of full-time traditional school programs.
- **Blended learning models.** Online and face-to-face instruction combined; often mixed within individual courses.

Key Background and Definitions: Overview of Virtual Schooling in the U.S.

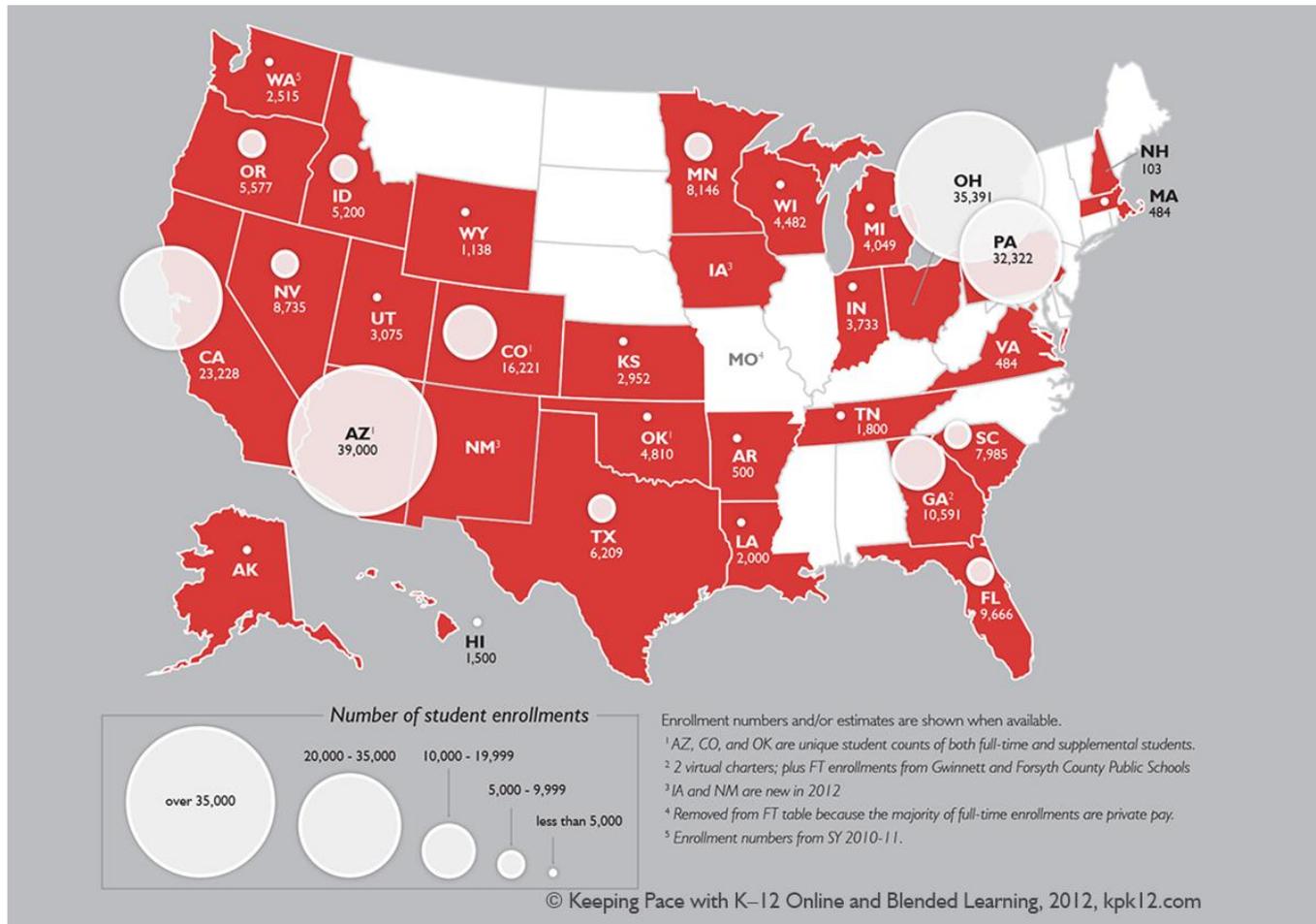
Fully Online Schools

- In 2012–13, 31 states and D.C.
- Served 275,000 students
- More than half attend schools operated by education management organizations (EMOs)

State-run Virtual Schools

- 28 state-run virtual schools
- ~620,000 course enrollments—nearly half at Florida Virtual School (2011-12 data)

States With Multidistrict Fully Online Schools (2012)



■ states with a multi-district fully online school
■ states without a multi-district fully online school

Key Background and Definitions: Accountability in Virtual Schools

- **Fully online charter schools** held accountable by authorizers.
- **District-run virtual programs** typically treated like brick-and-mortar district schools.
- **State-run virtual schools** accountable to state through agencies or separate organizations.
- **External partners** (e.g., education management organizations) difficult to hold accountable.

Key Background and Definitions: Other Key Definitions

- **Inputs.** The essential elements that comprise the development and delivery of a course or school.
- **Outputs.** The end result of a process, such as course completions.
- **Outcomes.** The measure of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students have attained from an educational experience.

Source: Patrick, S., Edwards, D., Wicks, M., & Watson, J. (2012). *Measuring quality from inputs to outcomes: Creating student learning performance metrics and quality assurance for online schools*. Vienna, VA: iNACOL. Retrieved from http://www.inacol.org/research/docs/iNACOL_Quality_Metrics.pdf

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Study Findings: Background

- **School accountability issues are not unique to virtual schools.**
 - Accountability systems:
 - **Vary from state to state** for fully online schools;
 - **Are not strong** for supplemental providers;
 - **Typically use identical standards** for virtual and brick-and-mortar schools.
 - **Strict media and public scrutiny** have generated concerns about virtual schools.
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Study Findings: Types of Accountability Measures

- **Inputs** play a significant role in quality assurance for virtual schools.
- **Outputs** can be tracked using virtual schools' significant capacity to utilize data.
- **Outcomes-based measures** are also common, especially measures of student proficiency.
- **Competency-based alternatives** to traditional measurement and accountability systems are receiving increased attention.

Study Findings: Capacity to Collect and Analyze Student Data

- **Large amounts of student data** are captured by virtual schools, relative to traditional schools.
- **Portability of data is critical**, but state data systems may not be up to the task.

Study Findings: Consequences of Performance

- **Consequences are limited** for virtual schools, just as they are for traditional schools.
- **Closures of low-performing schools** are no less challenging with virtual schools.
- **Performance-based funding** has been implemented for some supplemental online programs.

Study Findings: The Role of Teachers and Other Adults

- **Teacher preparation programs** are not adequately held accountable for preparing candidates to teach online.
- **Teacher ability to reach more students** with excellence is not captured in accountability systems.
- **Requirements for adult involvement** in virtual course delivery are not clear.

Study Findings: Additional Challenges and Opportunities

- **Lack of physical school buildings** challenges current charter authorizer monitoring practices.
- **Certain types of students** – such as highly mobile and overage, undercredited students – present special accountability challenges.
- **Student enrollment tracking issues** in virtual schools need to be addressed.
- **Year-end assessment timing** does not fit well with students who start or finish courses on different schedules.

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Recommendation 1

- **Focus accountability for all schools, including virtual schools, on outcomes.**
 - **Use the best available data** to scrutinize fully online schools' performance.
 - **Use multiple measures** to evaluate student outcomes.
 - **Use ESEA reauthorization discussions** to focus on outcomes, increased frequency of measurement, and student progress based on competencies.

Recommendation 2

- **Address accountability challenges related to unique student populations.**
 - **Carefully track individual student growth**, and use on-demand assessments.
 - **Develop fluid student-count procedures** that follow highly mobile students from school to school.
 - **Create rigorous but sensible accountability systems** for schools with high numbers of overage, undercredited students.

Recommendation 3

- **Improve data collection and oversight systems to better fit the delivery method and capacity of virtual schools.**
 - **Upgrade state data systems** to meet accountability challenges.
 - **Target areas for improvement and identify gaps in service** using input-based measures and surveys.
 - **Develop practices to allow levels of on-demand scrutiny** on par with those in traditional site visits.
 - **Hold boards accountable** for managing vendor relationships.
 - **Share lessons learned.**
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Recommendation 4

- **Better link accountability to providers, teachers, and other adults.**
 - **Require virtual schools to disclose external partners;** link partners to student learning data.
 - **Develop new measures of effectiveness** to capitalize on available data.
 - **Tie student data to teacher preparation programs,** to hold them accountable as well.
 - **Consider threshold activity requirements for adults** in virtual schools.

Recommendation 5

- **Ramp up consequences attached to performance.**
 - **Make expansion contingent on performance.**
 - **Close persistently low-performing** fully online schools.
 - **Consider performance-based formulas** for a portion of virtual schools' funding.
 - **Encourage serving the most disadvantaged students well** in any performance-based funding system.

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National **Charter School** **Resource** Center

at American Institutes for Research

Joe Ableidinger

Senior Consultant

Public Impact

Phone: 919-782-3628

E-Mail:

Joe_Ableidinger@publicimpact.com

Gillian Locke

Consultant

Public Impact

Phone: 919-908-6053

E-Mail:

Gillian_Locke@publicimpact.com

National Charter School Resource Center

1000 Thomas Jefferson Street NW

Washington, DC 20007-3835

Phone: 877-277-2744 or 202-403-6222

Website: charterschoolcenter.org

E-Mail: charterschoolcenter@air.org

Questions?



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on the left side of your screen.

Thank you for participating.

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- This webinar will be archived at the following website:
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- Please share your feedback with us through the evaluation.

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Washington, DC 20007-3835

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E-Mail: charterschoolcenter@air.org



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