

Technology is at the helm of education

Virtual classrooms provide opportunities for all

Informing policymakers through research

The issue. Online learning is an important trend in the systemic reform and improvement of our nation's K-12 schools. In order to meet the demands for qualified teachers to teach students in every subject, virtual schooling is an option that will help ease the inequity in distribution of teachers to students in all areas and bring innovation to all school models. In rural Iowa areas, this is an important concept that furthers the educational opportunities of our youth.

The potential for schools utilizing online learning is tremendous: schools may improve equitable access for all students by providing a wider range of high quality courses to all students.

Within our state, Iowa Learning Online serves as a virtual school, and has experienced increases in enrollment each year since its inception in the summer of 2004. Virtual schooling provides a bridge between the traditional classroom and 21st century education by linking high quality teaching and high quality courses with the collaborative, networked, information-rich environments that are a hallmark of the information age.

According to our research. Within the last five years, online education has evolved to become a widely accepted practice in K-12 education. According to John Watson in *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning* (2007), "As of September 2007, 42 states have significant supplemental online learning programs (in which students enrolled in physical schools take one or two courses online), or significant full-time programs, or both." Various surveys also indicate that at least one-third of high school students have had some form of online education experience, including students in every state. In order to provide the highest

quality education to students, educators need to be prepared.

We recommend. There is a need for all educators to become aware of virtual schooling through professional development because it is part of 21st century education and becoming a part of K-12 education nationwide. All teachers plus a learning coach in each school should be prepared to support students learning from a distant teacher. Iowa State University's teacher education program is leading the way.

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Professional development support for administrators is also needed to adjust the standards and policies to include virtual education as part of the overall curriculum.

By Niki Davis (Iowa State University).

For more information, visit:
www.hs.iastate.edu/makeadifference or
www.nacol.org

This policy brief is based on published research: Davis, N., Rose, R. in conjunction with the NACOL Research Committee Working Group. 2007. Professional Development for Virtual Schooling and Online Learning.

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