

Chapter 57

Taking Responsibility for the Future: A Case Study of a State–Run Program to Train K–12 Online Teach

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ABSTRACT

Although K–12 online education is becoming more common in the United States, there is still much we do not know about how K–12 online teachers are being prepared. Given that few teacher education programs include online pedagogy in their teacher training efforts, it becomes incumbent on states to find alternative ways to prepare teachers for virtual instruction. This chapter analyzes a nine-week orientation session that is part of an established, state-run induction program for prospective K–12 online instructors. Although the findings are specific to the program being studied, the authors believe they can serve as a model for educators in other states wishing to develop similar types of induction programs to meet the rising demand for K–12 online instruction in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

The state of K–12 online learning in the United States is increasingly difficult to measure. On one hand, the number of K–12 students taking online coursework has grown considerably over the past two decades, and some states have made online coursework a high school graduation requirement. On the other, it is possible that online learning enrollments have plateaued (Borup & Kennedy, 2017). As recently as 2008, some experts believed that as many as half of all secondary students would be taking online classes by 2020 (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2008). However, online enrollments, both in K–12 and higher education, have slowed in recent years, and it is unlikely that online learning will these meet earlier

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projections or challenge brick-and-mortar schools' supremacy in K–12 education (Borup & Kennedy, 2017; Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018).

Yet, all 50 states have online options for K–12 public school students (Borup & Kennedy, 2017). Moreover, online learning remains a primary means for K–12 school choice. The number of virtual charter and private schools continues to grow across the United States, and online courses are often used as a way for students in restrictive situations (e.g., homeschoolers, students whose schools do not offer certain Advanced Placement courses, and students who cannot physically attend school due to illness) to access a high-quality curriculum (Barbour, 2017). In other words, there remains a demand for K–12 online education in the United States.

As a result, there remains a need to train teachers in online pedagogy. Research suggests, however, that few online K–12 teachers have received any formal training in online instruction. In a study of over 500 online K–12 teachers in the United States, for example, Archambault and Crippen (2009) found that less than one percent had received degrees in online or distance education. Moreover, few teacher education programs offer explicit training in K–12 online pedagogy (Barbour, Siko, Gross, & Waddell, 2013). The responsibility for training online K–12 teachers, then, falls to each specific state, district, or school that chooses to provide students with opportunities for online instruction.

This chapter describes the efforts of one state to prepare instructors for their state virtual high school. Specifically, we analyze the possibilities and limitations afforded by a nine-week orientation to online instruction, which serves as the first part of the state's induction program for future virtual high school instructors. Little is known about state efforts to train K–12 teachers for online instruction; therefore, by analyzing an established induction program, we hope to further existing knowledge about the training and professional development of K–12 online teachers.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As K–12 online learning continues to expand, students and their families seek options that provide the best fit for their needs. Sometimes these needs are met via online courses provided by a public school district. Many students across the United States, however, look beyond their local school districts and enroll in state-level virtual public schools or virtual charter schools. Virtual schools like the Florida Virtual School (FLVS) reach students in many U.S. states and in countries around the world (Watson, Murin, & Pape, 2014). Currently, state-level licensure requirements make it challenging for online teachers, schools, and programs to meet the needs of online learners. Watson et al. (2014) recommend that states design an online teaching certification that would allow a teacher who is licensed in any state to teach online learners in any state and avoid having to complete additional licensure requirements for every state in which online students reside. Such a certification program would provide targeted preparation to K–12 online teachers and ensure that online learners anywhere have access to quality online instruction.

Since no common preparation and certification program exists and very few states require specific professional development for online teachers (Watson et al., 2014), the amount and type of preparation K–12 online teachers receive varies tremendously. Teacher education programs are charged with preparing future teachers for successful instruction. Historically, this preparation has focused on the traditional, brick-and-mortar classroom. With growing K–12 online enrollments, however, researchers have long suggested that teacher education programs provide coursework and field experiences to equip future K–12 teachers with competencies for quality online teaching (Barbour et al., 2013; Davis & Roblyer,

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