

Case 09



Online Learning: Virtual School



Background Information

Many students in today's society have the opportunity to learn from online high school classes. "Students turn to virtual schools when their own school lacks the resources to offer the courses they want or need, or when physical handicaps or disciplinary problems prevent them from attending a face-to-face classroom, or simply because they want the flexibility – or sometimes the invisibility- that they feel virtual courses offer" (Roblyer, 2006). Students have the opportunity to either register for a few courses or to completely enroll in virtual high schools all across the country. This can be very beneficial for course recovery or students who want to graduate early. Parents need to do proper research into virtual schools, looking into dropout rates and how those rates are calculated, how the teachers are prepared to teach online classes and resources for students.

Virtual Schools, such as Florida Virtual School "offers more than 90 courses and employs 295 full-time teachers and 160 adjunct teachers" (Starkman, 2007). Another virtual school, Virtual High School in Maynard, MA has students from 30 states and 20 countries. Some of these courses also require students to interact with each other, so imagine the learning possibilities that are available! However, it is important to remember that the "ultimate goal of distance learning is to make education available to anyone anywhere at any time, this goal cannot be realized unless courses are designed to be accessible to all potential students, including those with disabilities" (Burgstahler, Corrigan, McCarter, 2004). Accommodations need to be made in online courses so that they are available to all students, regardless of ability levels.

Focus Questions

As you study the following case, keep the following questions in mind: 1) Who should pay for online schools? 2) Should state governments be required to have an online high school?

Case Study

Michael is a high school junior. All through elementary school and middle school he was typically an A/B student. When he started high school, teachers noticed a change in his grades. He also was struggling to stay awake in class and he often did not have his homework completed. Michael was having to work full time after school to help support his family and did not have time to complete his homework. He was a highly motivated student who wanted to graduate from high school and was trying to keep his grades up and help his family.

Fortunately for Michael, his state has a virtual high school that he can attend for credit recovery and for online courses that he can take on his own time. Currently this virtual high school is funded by tuition that Michael cannot afford to pay.

Questions for Discussion

- 1) Who is responsible to pay for students attending virtual high schools?
- 2) Should all public schools have a virtual high school component?
- 3) How should parents be notified of the opportunity for online courses?
- 4) Should teachers receive a degree in teaching online courses before being allowed to teach an online course?

References:

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- Starkman, N. (2007). Going the distance. *THE Journal*, 34(2), 18-24.