

# Online Learning Guide

## National Association of Independent School's 21st Century Curriculum/Technology Task Force, September 2011

In the past decade, the number of K-12 and post-secondary students taking blended and fully online courses has grown rapidly. Close to 30 percent of college and university students have taken at least one online course.<sup>1</sup> Ambient Insight Research, a market research firm specializing in elearning, estimates that by 2014, the number of K-12 students with some experience with online learning could increase to 13 percent.<sup>2</sup> A lack of standard definitions for what constitutes an online course, different accounting methods among institutions and states for online students, and the absence of counting and reporting of online students in some states make it difficult to accurately estimate the total number of students currently enrolled in online K-12 courses, or to estimate future market growth. While estimates vary, there is widespread agreement that online learning will continue to grow.

Online learning occurs along a continuum ranging from a traditional course or program where technology is not used to a fully online course or program where most of the teaching, learning, and coursework take place online. *Web-facilitated courses* often use online tools such as online syllabi and assignments to help facilitate a traditional face-to-face course. *Blended courses* deliver a significant portion of the course online and “integrate online with traditional face-to-face class activities in a planned, pedagogically valuable manner.”<sup>3</sup> Whether a school decides to embrace online learning, adopt a “wait and see” approach, or not use online learning at all, decisions about online learning should reflect the school’s strategic goals and mission and include careful consideration of possible risks, benefits, and challenges.

In varying degrees, independent schools have adopted online learning into their teaching and learning practices. Close to 70 percent of independent schools currently offer web-facilitated classes where most of the course takes place in a traditional classroom and up to 29 percent of the course takes place online. *The NAIS 2011 Hybrid/Blended Learning in Independent Schools* report indicates that there has been some growth over the past year in the number of schools that currently offer fully and blended online courses or programs (20 percent) and that are actively planning to offer online courses (13 percent). Four-in-10 schools are considering and researching online courses and one-quarter do not offer, or plan to offer, any online courses.

Schools have found specific benefits from blended courses, including allowing all students to participate and have a voice, providing expanded opportunities for collaboration, enabling teachers to provide more expansive materials and resources, enabling students to prepare in advance for class time, freeing class time for more coaching and collaboration, enabling teachers to respond to and encourage different learning styles, and allowing students to learn more deeply from a community of learners.

### Reasons independent schools offer fully and blended online courses

1. For enrichment, or to supplement existing curricula
2. To maximize the respective strengths of online and face-to-face learning
3. To prepare students for online college and university courses
4. To keep students engaged in learning
5. As part of a 21st Century learning initiative
6. To provide access to courses the school would not otherwise offer
7. As part of the school’s strategic plan
8. For acceleration or advanced study
9. To meet a student’s special interest
10. To address students’ scheduling conflicts
11. To help continue school during closings due to unusual circumstances

### Resources

This introduction originally appeared in NAIS’s *Savvy Trustee* newsletter, August 2011.

1. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, *Class Differences: Online Education in the United States*, 2010 (Newburyport, MA: Sloan Consortium, 2010), p. 8; online at [http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/pdf/class\\_differences.pdf](http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/pdf/class_differences.pdf).
2. NAIS, K-12 Online Learning: A Literature Review, p. 5; online at <http://www.nais.org/research/article.cfm?ItemNumber=153512>.
3. Anthony G. Picciano and Charles D. Dziuban, editors, *Blended Learning: Research Perspectives* (Needham, MA: Sloan Consortium, 2007), p. 9

# Developing a Strategic Approach to Online Learning: Asking the Right Questions

Successful online learning initiatives require strong support and leadership from trustees, heads of school, and school administrators; a strategic vision that supports the school's mission; and teacher preparation and professional development.

As school leaders ask “What might online learning actually look like at my school?,” the NAIS 21<sup>st</sup> Century Curriculum/Technology Task Force offers this framework for visualizing what online learning might look like at **entry**, **emerging**, and **innovative** stages. In each section, you will find questions from the *Online Learning: A Continuum of Opportunity* guide and examples illustrating how a school might address a critical question at different developmental stages. School leaders can begin to develop a framework for online learning that is unique to their schools by exploring the critical questions related to leadership and online learning and the examples highlighted in the following sections:

- Teaching and Learning , page 4
- Professional Development, page 7
- Human Relationships/Ethics, page 9
- Evaluation and Assessment, page 12
- Marketing, page 15
- Infrastructure, page 17

We hope that this guide, along with NAIS research resources, will provide useful talking points for dialog and decision-making about online learning at your school.

## Leadership and Online Learning: Critical Questions from *Online Learning: A Continuum of Opportunity*

Independent schools are uniquely positioned to explore new ways to engage students through online learning. Pursuing this opportunity helps schools shift from *talking* about 21st Century skills to *implementing* their vision. School leaders should consider online learning as an opportunity to deepen and broaden student learning choices, and to fully prepare students for the experience of college. Those schools that can leverage an environment of abundant online learning options will have a competitive advantage. The "agile" school will embrace new delivery models that add to its ability to offer a diverse curriculum while maintaining the high standards of quality expected of independent schools. Through skilled on-site facilitation, the agile school can manage online learning as a human-transactional endeavor in line with its mission and goals.

***Find this resource and others related to online learning at [www.nais.org/go/onlinelearning](http://www.nais.org/go/onlinelearning).***

It is critical that independent school leaders begin the process by determining why they wish to incorporate online learning into their programs and whether such a goal is mission-appropriate. To do so, they can start by asking their leadership team critical questions like the ones found on the next page.

## Critical Questions

1. How will online offerings support or distract from the school's unique brand and mission?
2. In developing online learning, what opportunities will schools have to build on their existing programs, goals, and strengths?
3. How will online learning help the school sustain mission-based goals such as community and global outreach, diversity, equity of access, and creating lifelong learners?
4. How will school leadership articulate the rationale for online learning and build widespread consensus for its adoption?
5. How will administrators and faculty be engaged in the development, implementation, modeling, and evaluation of online learning programs?
6. How will school leadership incorporate technology and staffing needs for online learning into strategic planning?
7. How will the school create a sustainable financial model for the online learning component of its program factoring in the blend of potential additional tuition revenues and additional costs (salaries and technology systems), depending on the delivery mechanism (current staff, new staff, consortia or other providers)?
8. How will the school address contractual implications and equity in teaching loads for teachers who teach online courses at the school or through an outside vendor?
9. How will the school manage online coursework outside its accredited curricula; and how will it handle grades, workload, credits and transcripts for online learning when the course comes from a consortium or outside vendor?
10. What are the essential conditions for success in online learning when supplementing current teaching practices with online learning or when offering it as a completely separate initiative? How do either or both of these two models coexist with or change the current pedagogical culture of practice of the school?
11. What are the school's implicit and explicit online learning expectations of students (how do they interface with standard academic policies), and how does the school communicate these expectations to prospective and current families?
12. How will online learning impact and ideally enable the school's continuity of program and legal/fiduciary obligations in the event of emergency closures?

# Teaching and Learning

Online learning has far-reaching implications for both teachers and students. It provides opportunities for students to take courses not offered in their school and to collaborate with a wide range of learners. Teachers who design online courses must consider the differences in pedagogy, communication tools, relationships with students, and their roles as instructors. Students must consider what it means to learn in this environment, how to be good digital citizens, and how to take more responsibility for their learning. Since online learning provides a potentially powerful option to expand the strength and reach of independent schools, it will be important to leverage these new technologies and delivery mediums for the purpose of enhancing teaching methods and supporting student learning. **In the tables below, you will find questions from the *Online Learning: A Continuum of Opportunity* guide and examples illustrating how a school might address online teaching and learning at entry, emerging, and innovative stages.**

Teaching and Learning			
Critical Questions	Entry	Emerging	Innovation
1. How will online learning impact the traditional classroom and allow teachers to enhance learning in other ways?	The school is just beginning to investigate or experiment with online learning opportunities. Some teachers in some courses implement online learning opportunities but the school as a whole does not investigate or determine how online learning fits the school mission and culture. The course development team and faculty do not participate in professional development regarding effective online instruction. Course delivery mirrors a traditional classroom setting on the computer and at a distance. The school's administration does not provide support for the needed resources, hardware, software, and instructional team to create an online course.	The school has a researched rationale for using or not using online learning in alignment with the school's mission. The school implements and periodically experiments with various online learning opportunities in some areas. The effectiveness of these experiences is evaluated. The school determines the degree to which different online learning opportunities fit its mission and responds accordingly in some departments and areas of the school. The school's administration supports some requirements for continued growth and transformation. The course development team and faculty participate in some professional development regarding effective online instruction and make some changes in instruction accordingly.	The school implements and experiments with various online learning opportunities on a regular basis in all areas of the school. Online learning methods are implemented because they have been proven effective or they are evaluated to determine their effectiveness and possible need for improvement. The school determines the degree to which different online learning opportunities fit its mission and responds accordingly. The course development team and faculty participate in frequent professional development regarding effective online instruction and update and enhance instruction accordingly. The school's administration supports all implementation requirements.

<p><b>2. What preparation or qualifications does a teacher need to deliver an online course?</b></p>	<p>The school is in the early stages of exploring what it means to teach online and how to best meet professional development needs related to online education.</p> <p>Some teachers begin to experiment with blended and fully online techniques. However, this work is mostly independent work on the part of the teacher.</p>	<p>The school supports online education initiatives but does not have a formal plan in place for supporting professional development of faculty and course team development members. Teachers get some professional development here and there, but do not participate in a comprehensive online education training program. School leaders and faculty begin to think about and experiment with Personal Learning Networks (PLN).</p>	<p>Teachers are supported by a team and participate in regular appropriate professional development to develop course materials, support students, and deliver courses. All teachers who are teaching online courses have successfully completed an online teaching orientation program developed and implemented by the school. This places the teacher in the role of online student and serves to orient the teacher to expectations of learning in the online environment.</p>
<p><b>3. What preparation does a student need to take an online course?</b></p>	<p>The school does not research student preparation needs for online courses and/or provide support services for them in any formal manner.</p>	<p>The school has some support for students to be successful in their online courses, but the support systems are not formalized or analyzed to determine their completeness.</p>	<p>The school prepares and supports students to be successful in their online courses. There are sufficient support services. Student needs are determined prior to courses, and instruction for their mastery is provided. The school's administration provides the needed resources to continue effective development and growth of online learning opportunities for students.</p>
<p><b>4. What digital literacy skills are critical for all students and how can these skills be supported by online learning?</b></p>	<p>The school does not have a formal plan for teaching students digital literacy skills and/or a plan for instruction is not integrated into the curriculum. The school assumes students will pick up skills on their own.</p>	<p>The school provides some instruction of digital literacy skills in curricular area instruction and provides some opportunities to learn these skills online. A comprehensive knowledge of students' digital literacy experiences does not exist.</p>	<p>Students have numerous opportunities to learn digital literacy skills in all of their content area courses. Curriculum is developed in line with the school's standards. Students have many online resources to support their individual digital literacy needs.</p>
<p><b>5. How will the instructional design of the school's online courses respond to the continual and rapid development of Internet tools?</b></p>	<p>Annually, the course development team and faculty revise a few but not the majority of courses and review best practices and changes in Internet tools. Course changes are incremental and only sometimes involve the course design.</p>	<p>The course development team and faculty periodically adjust course design to include or upgrade the application of new online tools. This happens in a majority of the school's courses and continues to grow.</p>	<p>The course development team and faculty regularly engage in professional development opportunities to stay abreast of changes in Internet tools and best practices for teaching online. They collaborate with each other in this growth and with others outside the school, as part of their Personal Learning Networks (PLNs).</p>

<p><b>6. How will online learning engage students across schools and borders, and open up opportunities for collaborative experiences?</b></p>	<p>Students read about and research other cultures and may engage in 'pen pal' type experiences with students outside the physical school.</p>	<p>Some courses include some interaction with students outside the physical school in projects or basic conversations and information-finding exercises. This begins to happen in a majority of courses, where it complements the course content.</p>	<p>The course development team and faculty regularly engage with students outside the physical school in rich projects directly related to curriculum. This improves and complements course content. Students experience these collaborations in most of their classes at some point during the year and/ or on an ongoing basis throughout the year. Successful emerging instructional trends are implemented as soon as possible.</p>
<p><b>7. How will teachers design online learning that serves a broad range of learning styles, needs, motivations, and student groupings?</b></p>	<p>Courses provide little, if any, individualized resources, practice tests, and feedback based on individual performance. Students do not regularly engage in group collaborative projects. Instructors provide general feedback and responses to individual work. Course activities are very similar throughout all the units of the course. Students are primarily asked to produce one type of work and are assessed in only one way. Students may experience some individualization in some of their courses, but not in a majority of them.</p>	<p>Courses provide some individualized resources, practice tests, and feedback based on individual performance. Students engage in some group collaborative projects. Instructors provide individualized feedback and responses on occasion. There is some variety in the types of activities that students engage in to demonstrate their learning. Most students experience these individual supports in most of their classes.</p>	<p>Courses regularly provide a variety of individualized resources and feedback that address multiple learning styles and learning needs. Students have a variety of opportunities to work in various groupings and rotate roles when they work in teams. Instructors provide specific feedback and individual responses to individual needs regularly. Students are intrinsically motivated to perform to their highest ability because the instructor brings personal meaning to students' understanding of course content.</p>
<p><b>8. How does the growth of online learning at the college level impact how the school prepares students?</b></p>	<p>The school does not analyze online learning and how it might impact students. The school does not have a plan to respond to these changes outside the school.</p>	<p>The school researches how online learning will impact students and what is necessary to prepare students for these changes. However, the school has not changed any practices related to this research.</p>	<p>In an effort to best prepare students for these new environments, the school continually researches online learning trends in higher education and has fluid processes in place for responding to research and augmenting practices.</p>

# Professional Development

Professional development and teacher training should be a central part of any plan to implement online learning. As students are increasingly faced with a variety of new online learning options, teachers will need to expand their skills to take advantage of these tools. These skills will extend beyond technical knowledge and will involve new pedagogical approaches that challenge previous notions of student engagement, assessment, group interaction, and student/teacher dialogue. Professional development models that take advantage of the participatory cultures enabled by online networking and that ask teachers to experience online learning as students will best prepare teachers to facilitate online learning.

Professional Development			
Critical Questions	Entry	Emerging	Innovation
1. How will the school prepare its teachers in the methods of online teaching?	<p>Teacher training is not always aligned with the school's mission and policies. Professional development opportunities tend to occur by happenstance with no formal organized plan for what skills teachers need to acquire or how they will acquire them. These opportunities are largely driven by individuals who are early adopters. A majority of the teachers are not engaged in this type of professional development.</p>	<p>The school has a framework that defines what skills teachers will need, and may be at the beginning stages of developing a comprehensive professional development plan. Training exists, but needs more continuity to ensure teachers are fully equipped with the skills that they need. Initially, only a few faculty receive training. The school may experiment with and support some Personal Learning Networks (PLNs) for its teachers. There is intention to organize these efforts further and include a growing number of faculty each year.</p>	<p>Skills that teachers need to acquire to be effective blended and fully online educators are clearly defined by the institution. Training in these skills is provided in comprehensive, connected lessons in an environment where mastery of requisite skills and pedagogical practices are demonstrated and documented. Instruction is provided, at least in part, in an online environment so that participants gain a perspective on what it is like to be a learner in these environments. A majority of the school's teachers participate in these opportunities regularly.</p>
2. How will the school assess that faculty are sufficiently trained and suited for online teaching?	<p>Some interested faculty members have experience with blended and/or fully online learning and have participated in conferences and other professional development opportunities. Training is not comprehensive enough to impact school programs as a whole. The school does not have an organized support structure for teachers.</p>	<p>A significant number of faculty members participate in professional development offerings focused on blended or fully online learning. The school subscribes to periodicals and journals focused on online learning. However, the school may not have an organized support structure in place for teachers. The school does not have a concrete plan in place to evaluate effective blended and fully online teaching.</p>	<p>All teachers who will teach blended and fully online courses have successfully completed a comprehensive training program. The program places the teacher in the role of online student as well as helps the teacher develop the skills needed to successfully teach a blended or fully online course. This comprehensive program reflects institutional standards and expectations and models design and pedagogical practices for the courses that will be taught. The program is based on best practices. The school has an organized support structure for teachers.</p>

<p><b>3. How will the school provide support for experimenting with new methods, time for faculty planning, and adjustment in the allocation of instructional time?</b></p>	<p>The definition of full and part-time teaching is based on traditional schedules and classes. The school does not have an organized support structure for teachers and blended and/or fully online classes. A few teachers may have individual plans or programs, however, in general, teachers do not know what would be provided if they were interested in teaching a blended or fully online class.</p>	<p>The school provides release time from face-to-face class(es) and/or stipends during non-work hours to allow for planning time for blended and/or fully online class(es). The school provides teachers with support through onsite access to effective Personal Learning Networks and to essential technological tools. Many teachers participate in these opportunities and involvement in these activities grows.</p>	<p>The definition of a full-time teacher reflects a nuanced understanding of prep periods, instructional time, student load, and classroom time, and takes into account differences in face-to-face, blended and fully online classes. Faculty members are expected to test new tools and techniques in class (face-to-face and online). The school actively adjusts the workloads and provides resources for teachers, recognizing their needs for teach in the blended and online environment.</p>
<p><b>4. How will the school prepare teachers for the pedagogical shift required to engage students in collaborative and networked online learning?</b></p>	<p>The school, while having an awareness of the shift in skills that students will need in the 21st Century, has a curriculum that is still predominantly focused on content coverage through teacher driven pedagogies. Skills related to collaboration, critical thinking, creative problem-solving, inquiry, and integrative technologies tend to be implemented in an ad hoc fashion that lacks cohesion or is limited to classroom, non-networked activities. Student participation in these activities is limited and does not occur across all content areas.</p>	<p>The school has identified the need to make pedagogical shifts that support collaborative blended and/or fully online experiences and has taken steps to develop a plan for teacher professional development. School leaders recognize the need for additional time to plan blended or fully online courses and understand that the demands of teaching online are different than teaching face-to-face. Teaching methods used in blended or fully online courses evolve from traditional practices to enhanced or transformational practices.</p>	<p>The school has a comprehensive plan, from mission to classroom practices that defines what the school believes about pedagogies that best support blended and/or fully online learning. Teachers receive specific training in online teaching that utilizes online learning networks. A majority of teachers regularly participate in Personal Learning Networks (PLNs). In addition to providing adequate technical support, school leaders reward faculty who participate in and lead this shift.</p>
<p><b>5. How will the school keep current in online course design and teaching methods?</b></p>	<p>Research into the latest trends in online education tends to be piecemeal and is not part of a comprehensive plan for developing and evaluating an online learning program.</p>	<p>The school works to develop a framework of components that define quality blended and/or fully online instruction and a specific plan for how those components will be supported and evaluated. These components are based on recent trends in blended and fully online instruction. Faculty participation is encouraged and grows.</p>	<p>The school implements a comprehensive course assessment program based on recent literature on blended and fully online learning. The school may serve as a resource for other schools that are starting or enhancing online initiatives. The school participates in and helps guide Personal Learning Networks (PLNs).</p>
<p><b>6. How will the school educate parents to support their children who are learning online?</b></p>	<p>Parent involvement tends to be more reactive than proactive. Communication with parents tends to be more individually based rather than part of a comprehensive communication plan.</p>	<p>Information on purpose and methodology for blended and/or fully online learning is part of admissions materials. Materials for families are contained inside the blended and/or fully online learning environments.</p>	<p>The school develops and offers parent education programs through their blended or fully online environments. These may be both informative of online learning as well as related to current parenting issues and topics (i.e. parenting in a connected world). Programs in place that support online students also support parents.</p>

# Human Relationships/Ethics

A hallmark of independent schools is the authentic and rich interaction between students and faculty, and the nurturing environment that leads students to become empathetic, responsible citizens who contribute significantly to their communities and the world. The traditional classroom offers familiar ways in which to establish these relationships; it is each school’s challenge to achieve similar meaningful connections with online learning experiences. In designing a course, careful attention should be given to engage each participant in the class, to assure that all voices are heard, and to recognize achievements. There must be a high standard set for honorable behavior with on-going guidance and discourse about how to ethically navigate the online world and its vast information resources. Above all, online courses should reach students where they are in their intellectual and emotional development, and bring out the best in them—just as schools strive to nurture and support students on campus.

## Human Relationships/Ethics

Critical Questions	Entry	Emerging	Innovation
1. How will the school’s values and culture be expressed in online courses and programs?	Courses with online elements (either fully online or blended) are designed to meet curricular expectations but do not attempt to reflect the values and culture of the school.	Online or blended learning courses are developed from face-to-face courses and are designed to both meet curricular expectations and to reflect the best practices of those face-to-face courses. There is intention to have students experience some elements of the culture and values of the school within the online experiences.	Courses are designed to meet curricular expectations and incorporate core school values and culture through the style of teaching, the interaction encouraged between students, and in the curriculum design.
2. How will online learning experiences enhance and promote meaningful relationships and a sense of community among and between students, teachers, and parents?	The teacher offers little opportunity for students to introduce themselves or interact when online. The teacher is available to answer questions but does not engage in class discussions or develop one-on-one relationships with students. Parents are provided with basic information, such as the syllabus and schedule.	Students have some online interaction, which builds classroom community. A variety of communications methods are shared to encourage student interaction. The teacher takes student experiences and comments into account when interacting online. The teacher builds some one-on-one relationships with students through digital tools. Parents are kept informed about the progress of the class and students’ participation through regular class newsletters or notification systems.	Blended or fully online experiences contribute positively to students’ sense of connection to the course. Small-group online meetings are encouraged and projects are designed to help students interact through productive, course-based work. The teacher engages in meaningful online interactions with students to build one-on-one relationships and community. Parents are kept informed about the progress of the class and students’ participation through regular class newsletters or notification systems and are encouraged to contact the teacher with questions and concerns.

<p><b>3. What will be the best proportion of online to face-to-face experiences in order to meet curricular and social objectives?</b></p>	<p>There is little thought given to how face-to-face classroom experiences and online learning can support and enhance each other. Blended and/or fully online courses don't embrace the human elements of emotional and social relationships that can strengthen and bring meaning to personal educational growth. Faculty may begin to research best practices for online and offline learning, experiment to achieve the best learning outcomes, and engage in action research.</p>	<p>Instructors make efforts to bridge the gap between electronically mediated and face-to-face meetings. Class sometimes meets virtually in a video conference or other online meeting place. Faculty use blended or fully online best practices and techniques that they have found through their own action research to create powerful learning environments.</p>	<p>A balance of online experiences and face-to-face meetings is achieved through the most effective methods. Faculty members define these methods through published research and their own action research projects. An agreed upon series of face-to-face class sessions, scheduled video conferences, and/or online meetings provide the opportunity for students to connect with each other directly and meaningfully. There is open communication between all course participants, and the social-emotional aspects of learning are incorporated into the learning process.</p>
<p><b>4. How will the school assure that questions of integrity, online behavior, and safe and ethical use of technology are addressed at all levels?</b></p>	<p>A responsible use policy for online learning is shared at the beginning of the class and signed (or agreed to) by students.</p>	<p>Early in the class, a discussion is held about expectations for integrity, positive personal interactions, and ethical behavior when interacting with others online.</p>	<p>The course curriculum includes an integrated approach to reviewing and discussing questions of academic integrity, positive personal interactions, and online behavior as they reflect the culture of the school.</p>
<p><b>5. How will students be known, nurtured, and supported in the school's online learning communities?</b></p>	<p>Students' electronic communications are mainly responses to the instructor, either through email, discussion boards, or by submitting work. Courses provide little, if any, individualized communication with teachers and peers. Students have limited opportunities to engage in online collaborative projects that build a sense of community within the course. Instructors provide generalized as opposed to personalized feedback to individual work produced online.</p>	<p>Students respond to instructor discussion prompts and receive occasional responses from the instructor. Students are encouraged to read one another's discussion comments and respond. Courses provide some opportunities for personal sharing, group collaboration, and discussion of social-emotional experiences. Instructors provide specific feedback and respond to individual needs on occasion.</p>	<p>Students regularly discuss ideas and assignments online, with frequent teacher comments to encourage and clarify. Students actively participate in small group discussions and are encouraged to express their thoughts and opinions in ways that are personally meaningful. Courses regularly provide individualized resources, practice tests, and feedback based on individual performance. Students engage in a variety of groupings for projects (partners, teams, small group activity) and, as a result, become familiar with their classmates. Instructors provide specific feedback and respond to individual needs regularly.</p>

**6. How will the school define standards and practice for acceptable use, including the amount of web filtering?**

The school applies the same policies for responsible use of technology and web filtering for onsite courses and online courses.

Administration and faculty collaborate to define the responsible use policy. The nature of the course and needs of students are considered when deciding whether or not to use web filtering for an online course.

The responsible use policy for online and blended learning courses is well defined and incorporated into the course curriculum. Faculty and students collaborate to adjust and enhance the responsible use policy. Web filtering may be used if it reflects a core value of the school, and if its use is discussed by students and teachers to clarify its purpose and value.

# Evaluation and Assessment

Skilled educators are adept at evaluation and assessment. Using this expertise within the context of online learning is critical to its success. Digital tools often include granular capability to track and analyze student performance in order to inform and adapt instruction. Digital portfolios, online peer feedback, and built-in self-tests provide new opportunities to enhance the assessment process, engage students in personal growth, and strengthen students' digital literacy skills. The structure of assessment has a direct impact on how instruction is delivered and where students focus their energy. Schools should carefully consider the desired skills and outcomes of online learning courses and programs in order to design and adopt the most effective assessments.

Evaluation and Assessment			
Critical Questions	Entry	Emerging	Innovation
1. How will the school evaluate its online learning programs, teachers, and courses?	<p>Assessment of online learning initiatives is based on the school's pre-existing "bricks and mortar" modes of course assessment. Assessment is often "top-down" and looks primarily at quantitative outcomes like test scores. Those conducting the assessment primarily do not have direct, personal experience with online learning.</p>	<p>In assessing online initiatives, the following areas are examined:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* the organization and structure of the blended and/or fully online courses</li> <li>* the engagement and participation of course participants</li> <li>* the quality of teacher-student interaction</li> <li>* the quality of student-student interaction.</li> </ul>	<p>A variety of assessment methods are used to evaluate the school's online learning initiatives. The assessment process and data lead to the frequent improvement and growth of blended and/or fully online programs.</p> <p>The school taps into funding sources to conduct research and assess the learning happening in online learning programs.</p>
2. How will the school address accountability and accreditation of online courses and teachers and address the question of equivalency between outside, vendor-provided courses and the school's own traditional courses?	<p><b>Blended Courses:</b> Blended courses and traditional courses operate in the same way.</p> <p><b>Fully Online Courses:</b> The school purchases courses from reputable online schools and confirms that its students are learning what the course descriptions say the students will learn.</p>	<p><b>Blended Courses:</b> Teachers participate in some professional development activities and organizations to support their blended curriculum.</p> <p><b>Fully Online Courses:</b> Online teachers have completed professional development training in online teaching and learning. The school compares results of fully online courses to those of face-to-face environments to see where there are benefits and aligns the goals of its program with these results.</p>	<p>Blended and fully online course instructors utilize peer feedback to improve their practice. Objective outside experts in the field conduct qualitative and quantitative data measurements.</p>

<p>3. How will online learning platforms support alternative assessment strategies, including formative assessments and real-time, adaptive testing?</p>	<p>The assessment process of student learning primarily evaluates the student's ability to memorize information. Assessments are primarily (half the time or more) multiple-choice or short-answer tests.</p>	<p>More than half of the time, student assessment includes attention to higher-order thinking.</p>	<p>Within courses, students are assessed for higher levels of knowledge and thinking (evaluation, synthesis of material, ability to see patterns) and produce "learning products" for portfolios. Student work is judged by criteria-based rubrics. Outside experts and other students from various parts of the world participate in courses to provide an authentic audience for student work and provide valuable feedback.</p>
<p>4. How will students' digital literacy skills be evaluated?</p>	<p>The school defines what it means by 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills such as collaboration, independent problem-solving, creativity, and global citizenship.</p>	<p>The school finds ways to evaluate these skills with students who are taking blended and fully online classes.</p>	<p>Students are assessed for skills such as collaboration, independent problem-solving, creativity, global citizenship, etc. and these skills are necessary for success within the course. The school is aware of the skills students are developing in blended and fully online courses and aligns these skills with its mission. The school may also highlight this skills differentiation in their marketing materials</p>
<p>5. How will the school ensure the validity and reliability of assessments?</p>	<p><b>Blended Courses:</b> The teacher defines the process for how students in blended courses will demonstrate what they are learning.</p> <p><b>Fully Online Courses:</b> The school defines the process for how students taking fully online courses will demonstrate what they are learning.</p>	<p><b>Blended Courses:</b> Regular school procedures for reliability of assessments are integrated into blended courses.</p> <p><b>Fully Online Courses:</b> An advisor is assigned to each student who is taking an online course. Students lead the advisor through the process of their learning. Online schools evaluate students and provide results of these assessments to the institution.</p>	<p><b>Blended Courses:</b> Regular school procedures for reliability of assessments is integrated into blended courses, focusing mostly on portfolio, reflective, authentic, peer and collaborative assessments of student work.</p> <p><b>Fully Online Courses:</b> Students in online courses must show what they have learned through online portfolios. Advisors work with students to evaluate these portfolios and students' work in online courses is assessed by more than one teacher/advisor.</p>
<p>6. How will course design include formative and summative evaluation in support of individualized instruction and student awareness of progress?</p>	<p>Assignments are mostly summative (tests, quizzes, multiple choice). Primarily, students wait for teacher evaluation for assessment of their work.</p>	<p>Assessments vary from summative (tests, quizzes) to formative (papers, projects, collaborative assessments). Evaluation of student work is more transparent, with rubrics or other assessment descriptions to measure the quality of work.</p>	<p>There are scaffolds in place that help students self-assess and provide peer feedback for themselves and each other at various benchmarking points of projects, and at appropriate intervals during the course's duration.</p>

**7. How will the school assess all stakeholders (students, teachers, parents) for satisfaction with the online learning experience?**

**Blended Courses:** Ongoing evaluation process might gather some information about stakeholders' opinions related to blended learning opportunities.

**Fully Online Courses:** Advisors check in on students (weekly or more often) and parents (1-2 times per course) to receive feedback on the course. Students and parents are surveyed about their experiences at the end of each course.

**Blended Courses:** Ongoing evaluation process includes questions to stakeholders related to blended learning opportunities.

**Fully Online Courses:** Advisors check in on students (weekly or more often) and parents (1-2 times per course) to receive feedback on the course. Students and parents are surveyed about their experiences at the end of each course. Results are used to create better online experiences and courses or to cancel options that are not working well.

**Blended Courses:** A program above and beyond the ongoing evaluation process includes questions to stakeholders related to blended learning opportunities. Procedures are put into place to respond regularly to feedback.

**Fully Online Courses:** Online students, and their parents, are regularly surveyed and invited to focus groups to establish levels of satisfaction and areas for improvement in online initiatives.

# Marketing

The rapidly evolving online learning market demands that independent schools consider new paradigms in their student recruitment and retention efforts. School leaders should include a market analysis of their school’s position in the online learning market as an essential part of their strategic planning efforts. Schools should consider colleges and universities, for-profit and non-profit organizations, charter schools, and other entities as both potential partners and competitors in this market. With added pressure from outside sources offering rich curriculum and online learning opportunities, independent schools must recognize that, in order to remain marketable and financially sustainable, new instructional delivery models will need to be considered.

	Marketing		
Critical Questions	Entry	Emerging	Innovation
1. How will the school position itself in the online education market?	The school has not considered blended or fully online learning in its strategic planning. The potential benefits and challenges of online learning and new sources of competition and opportunity are not part of the school's ongoing market analysis.	The school recognizes that online learning relates to competitiveness within the school's target market. There is in-depth research to determine how online learning will support the school's mission. There is a shift in mindset and blended and fully online learning become an integral part of the school's strategic planning.	The school commits to ongoing marketing adjustments based on technological innovations that become available. Knowing that word-of-mouth about what happens in the classroom is the most powerful marketing tool, teacher training prioritizes new tools to maintain a comfort level that allows for innovation rather than continually trying to catch up.
2. How will the school's traditional strengths become manifest in online learning programs to create a competitive advantage?	The school entering discussions of online learning uses traditional marketing methods to inform prospective families about integrating technology into the curriculum. Printed brochures, websites, and admissions events present 21st Century learning tools in a general way. Information is disseminated as a one-way flow as determined by the school.	The marketing process is increasingly relational. Prospective families are invited into school-sponsored social networks. Research, environmental scanning, and analysis lead to a mission-based marketing plan for blended and fully online learning. The school begins cost/benefit analyses specifically for online learning.	Blended and/or fully online learning are an integral part of the school's strategic plan. The school's brand benefits from, and contributes to, the success of online learning initiatives. Marketing processes focus on continually leveraging interactive, web-based tools for local and global outreach efforts. The school uses online learning to advance the public purpose of independent education.
3. How will school leadership keep current on university requirements, legislation, and regulations that could impact online learning initiatives?	The school leadership team lacks alignment re: online learning goals and awareness of requirements, legislation, and regulations. The team agrees on school's strengths being marketed but doesn't discuss how those strengths relate to online learning (internal course offerings OR marketing to students outside the school). Budget for online learning is non-existent or fragmented among departments.	Departments stay abreast of changes in secondary school and university requirements, both for secondary school and college admissions and for K-12 online experience that will be needed for post-secondary academic work. School leaders stay abreast of state and federal regulations related to online learning and online learning requirements.	The school takes a proactive leadership role in developing relationships with secondary schools, colleges, universities, and governmental or other organizations to inform and support further innovation in online learning initiatives.

<p><b>4. How will the school communicate the value of online learning and digital fluency to prospective families?</b></p>	<p>The school uses traditional marketing materials to market and communicate about online learning opportunities.</p>	<p>Regular communication between the school and constituents employs social media tools, is distinctively branded, and disseminates research on the value of online learning and importance of developing digital literacy.</p>	<p>The integration of blended and fully online learning as part of the school's identity is firmly established. Positive student outcomes (for example, preparation for college courses, development of 21st Century skills) are routinely shared with the school community and prospective families.</p>
<p><b>5. How will the school's overall marketability be enhanced through online courses offered with other schools or organizations?</b></p>	<p>The school does not offer blended or fully online learning opportunities or the use of web-based tools is supplemental rather than integrated into the curriculum. Students are taught in self-contained traditional classrooms during traditional time periods. Students who pursue online learning on their own are not given academic credit.</p>	<p>Blended and fully online courses are offered for credit within the school. The school is open to joining independent school consortia, partnerships with public/charter schools, for-profit and non-profit K-12 vendors, or universities with online offerings. The school begins to explore national and global collaborations.</p>	<p>The school establishes global partnerships with other schools, non-profits, corporations, individuals, etc. These partnerships are infused into the curriculum, as well as into the marketing plan.</p>
<p><b>6. How will online learning change the characteristics of the school's student population? If, for example, a school begins an online program, will that student population be different from those who are currently served?</b></p>	<p>The school does not offer blended or fully online learning options. Due to a lack of scheduling flexibility or course offerings, some prospective students may decide not to enroll in the school.</p>	<p>The school offers blended and fully online courses that increase scheduling flexibility and the number of course offerings. These offerings enhance student recruitment and retention efforts.</p>	<p>School leaders, including the head and board, support expanding blended and fully online student interactions beyond the current student population. Students from outside the traditional school population are allowed to join the school's blended and fully online courses, and current students can join classes outside the current school. Students are encouraged to engage in synchronous and asynchronous learning. Both current and "outside" students are enrolled in the same courses. Courses not taught by the school are evaluated, and may be approved for transcript credit. The school schedule becomes adaptable and flexible, not tied to time and place. Online courses may spin off into their own business entity--profit or non-profit. The marketing plan includes these expanded parameters.</p>
<p><b>7. How will online courses enhance the school's scheduling flexibility and number of course offerings?</b></p>	<p>Traditional on-campus courses are the basis for student scheduling. Scheduling conflicts occur and students must prioritize and limit what courses they take according to when and where courses are offered.</p>	<p>Blended and fully online courses provide students with greater scheduling flexibility and more extensive course offerings. If courses are not taught at the school, students have the option of pursuing approved online courses. The school's financial model includes fees for online courses and payroll for teachers offer online courses.</p>	<p>Learning is not defined by personnel or schedules. The school implements its mission-based educational vision without constraint. Vision includes not only the long-term sustainability of the individual school, but the future of independent schools collectively. As cost may be an issue for some students, the school ensures accessibility for all students.</p>

# Infrastructure

Schools that are considering the addition of online curricula will need to assess their technological readiness for such initiatives. School technology leaders should research and understand pedagogical expectations and teachers' and students' needs in order to ensure the development of a supportive and reliable infrastructure. Schools should evaluate possible options and models, including the use of consortia or outside providers, and learn from other schools' experiences. Some of the infrastructure issues that schools will need to manage include setting expectations for technical support and system availability, using open-source or freeware products to keep costs down, and assessing the ease with which third party tools can be embedded within course management pages.

Critical Questions	Infrastructure		
	Entry	Emerging	Innovation
1. How will the school determine what software, hardware, licenses, and infrastructure will be needed to facilitate online learning?	The school bases infrastructure judgments on its past history of use and budgeting. Decisions are managed by the technology department.	The school actively investigates what other schools/colleges are using, and what products are in the marketplace. Faculty members are involved in the decision-making process.	All constituencies (faculty, students, parents, administrators) are authentically engaged in those infrastructure decisions that affect them. Technology experts are regularly consulted to ensure best practices and current technologies are exploited to their fullest extent.
2. How will the school provide sufficient technical support for students and teachers?	Technology staffing is primarily reactive-responding to users' problems and requests for assistance during normal business hours.	Technology staffing is appropriate to the school's online learning goals and recognizes the "anytime" nature of online learning by providing after-hours support. Certain employees have dedicated duties to support online learning initiatives.	Supporting online learning initiatives is integrated into all of the technology department job descriptions where appropriate. The department has sufficient staffing to adopt a proactive stance reaching out to, and helping faculty and students maximize the opportunities of online learning. The technology department, library staff, and learning specialists work closely along aligned goals and outcomes related to blended and fully online learning.
3. How will the school determine sufficient network bandwidth, server space, and redundancy?	Access to the Internet is provided, though bandwidth needs are woefully below the levels required for properly accessing collaborative tools often referred to as Web 2.0 tools. In addition, the school struggles with appropriate server/storage needs for hosting collaborative projects.	Bandwidth needs are sufficient to support Web 2.0 tools without burdening network access. Network monitoring is in place to ensure all services are kept running at all times. Mechanisms are in place to guarantee an acceptable quality of service for all users. Cloud-based and hosted services (e.g. Google Apps) are used where appropriate, yielding	The school has a robust level of Internet bandwidth, virtualized servers, network-attached-storage, and redundant networking dedicated to handling the needs of online learning and virtual classrooms. Caching and compressions appliances maximize return on WAN and LAN bandwidth. Network monitoring analysis tools allow the school to predict

<p><b>4. How will the school determine which course management system will be used to facilitate online learning?</b></p>	<p>The school has a campus network; provides email to faculty and possibly students. Email serves as the primary means of student-teacher communication outside the classroom.</p>	<p>significant benefits for the school.</p> <p>The school not only provides email to faculty and students; it also provides some form of learning management software that allows faculty to post assignments, resources, and course specific content on the web for anytime access by students. Typically, content is only provided from teacher to student.</p>	<p>bandwidth needs and address them before users are impacted.</p> <p>The school has a dynamic learning management software ecosystem that enables all faculty members to post assignments, resources, content, and instructional materials. Real-time tools enable instant messaging, video-chat, virtual office hours, and synchronous virtual meeting spaces with electronic whiteboards and screen-sharing software. The school and teachers tap into a variety of Web 2.0 tools to accomplish various online teaching and learning tasks. These tools are easily accessible to students by virtue of being organized from within a consistent course management learning platform. Wherever possible, single sign-on has been enabled in order to reduce barriers to using a variety of tools and platforms in a seamless manner.</p>
<p><b>5. If they are used, how will web filters be managed to allow sufficient teacher and student access to online learning tools?</b></p>	<p>Web filtering is often overly restrictive. In addition, school policies often limit teaching and learning to the bricks and mortar buildings of the institution.</p>	<p>Web filtering is not overly restrictive and allows for some collaboration to take place outside the school walls. In addition, school policies allow for teaching and learning to take place in school hosted and/or sanctioned sites outside the normal academic hours.</p>	<p>Although some web content may still be filtered on campus, the school's approach to appropriate use is based on personal responsibility and ongoing dialog among participants about honoring the school's philosophy of respect for oneself and others.</p>
<p><b>6. If the school engages third-party providers, what safeguards will be in place to protect sensitive student assessment data and ensure alignment with school privacy policies?</b></p>	<p>The school assumes that third-party providers are adequately protecting sensitive school data.</p>	<p>The school ensures that all third-party providers use industry-standard security practices (e.g. encrypting all web-based data transmission, typical back-up policies and protocols, hardening of servers, etc.)</p>	<p>The school ensures that the privacy policies of all third-party providers align with the school's own privacy policies and openly communicates these documents with the community. Faculty members are educated and adhere to the school's privacy policies and best practice for data security.</p>

## Conclusion

When it comes to K-12 online learning in the independent sector, schools find themselves all over the map. Schools thinking strategically are well aware of the *Disrupting Class* prognostication (confirmed by other recent studies) that the adoption curve for high school students taking coursework online is steeply rising and will inevitably change the way schools offer courses, as it already has in the higher education sector. *The NAIS 21<sup>st</sup> Century Curriculum/Technology Task Force Online Learning Guide* is a timely map for schools as they explore the many facets of online learning. Whether a school is at the Entry Stage (just beginning to think about online learning), the Emerging Stage (aware and taking action), the Innovation Stage (an industry leader), or a combination of different stages in different areas, the *Guide* offers a quick and easy evaluative tool of the school's "readiness" as well as a rubric on moving from one stage to the next. There are not many issues more programmatically strategic than this one, so the task force hopes that our schools find this to be an effective tool to help growth in this important arena.

## NAIS Resources on Online Learning [www.nais.org/go/onlinelearning](http://www.nais.org/go/onlinelearning)

- *NAIS 2010 K-12 Online Learning: A Literature Review* provides the basics about online learning definitions, market size, motivations for offering online learning, professional development, and evaluation.
- *NAIS 2010 K-12 Online Learning Survey* investigates independent schools' online learning offerings, reasons for offering online courses, and platforms for developing online courses.
- *NAIS 2011 Hybrid/Blended Learning in Independent Schools* covers independent school trends related to online learning with a special focus on hybrid/blended learning.

## NAIS 21<sup>st</sup> Century Curriculum/Technology Task Force Members

*NAIS thanks the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Curriculum/Technology Task Force for creating this guide! Its members are listed below. We also thank the individuals who provided feedback and comments on the draft version of this document.*

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