



# Best Practices For Distance Education in K-12 Schools<sup>1</sup>

National Council for Private School Accreditation

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## Introduction

These Best Practices have been developed by the NCPA Commission on Technology and Distance Education, in cooperation with CITA, in response to the emergence of technologically mediated instruction offered at a distance as an important and growing component of K-12 education. Expressing in detail what currently constitutes best practice in distance education, specifically electronically offered courses, they seek to address concerns that regional accreditation standards are not relevant to the new distributed learning environments, especially when those environments are experienced by off-campus students. The *Best Practices*, however, are not new evaluative criteria. Rather they explicate how the well-established essentials of school quality found in regional accreditation standards are applicable to the emergent forms of learning; much of the detail of their content would find application in any learning environment. Taken together those essentials reflect the values which the accrediting agencies foster among their affiliated schools:

- that education is best experienced within a community of learning where competent professionals are actively and cooperatively involved with creating, providing, and improving the instructional program;
- that learning is dynamic and interactive, regardless of the setting in which it occurs;
- that instructional programs and courses are organized around substantive and coherent curricula which define expected learning outcomes;
- that schools accept the obligation to address student needs related to, and to provide the resources necessary for, their academic success;
- that schools are responsible for the education provided in their name;
- that schools undertake the assessment and improvement of their quality, giving particular emphasis to student learning;
- that schools voluntarily subject themselves to peer review.

These *Best Practices* are meant to assist schools in planning distance education activities regarding the electronically offered courses, and to provide a self-assessment framework for those already involved. For the accrediting agencies they constitute a common understanding of those elements which reflect quality of technologically mediated instruction offered at a distance. As such they are intended to inform and

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<sup>1</sup> Supplements *Guidelines for Distance Education*

facilitate the evaluation policies and processes of each agency.

Developed to reflect current best practice in electronically offered programming, these *Best Practices* were initially drafted by the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications ([www.wiche.edu/telecom/](http://www.wiche.edu/telecom/)), an organization recognized for its substantial expertise in this field. Given the rapid pace of change in distance education, these *Best Practices* are necessarily a work in progress. They will be subject to periodic review by the NCPSA Commission on Instructional Technology and Distance Education (CITDE), who welcomes comments and suggestions for their improvement.

## **NCPSA ROLE**

NCPSA Associations accredit schools and not programs or curriculum. This document is designed to guide associations' delivery of quality distance education through their schools.

## **Overview to the *Best Practices***

These *Best Practices* are divided into five separate components, each of which addresses a particular area of school activity relevant to electronically offered curricula and educational programs. They are:

1. School Context and Commitment
2. Curriculum and Instruction
3. Faculty Support
4. Student Support
5. Evaluation and Assessment

Each component begins with a general statement followed by individual, numbered paragraphs addressing specific matters describing those elements essential to quality distance education. These in turn are followed by protocols in the form of questions designed to assist in determining the existence of those elements when reviewing either internal or external distance education activities.\*

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# The Best Practices and Protocols

## 1. School Context and Commitment

**Electronically offered programs both support and extend the roles of educational schools. Increasingly they are integral to academic organization, with growing implications for educational infrastructure.**

**1a.** In its content, purposes, organization, and enrollment history, if applicable, the program is consistent with the school's role and mission.

- What is the evidence that the program is consistent with the role and mission of the school including its goals with regard to student access?
- Is the school fulfilling its stated role as it offers the program to students at a distance, or is the role being changed?

**1b.** It is recognized that a healthy school's purposes change over time. The school is aware of accreditation requirements and complies with them. Each accrediting association has established definitions of what activities constitute a substantive change that will trigger prior review and approval processes. The appropriate accreditation commission should be notified and consulted whether an electronically offered program represents a major change. The offering of distributed programs can affect the school's educational goals, intended student population, curriculum, modes or venue of instruction, and can thus have an impact on both the school and its accreditation status.

- Does the program represent a change to the school's stated mission and objectives?
- Does the program take the school beyond its "school boundaries," e.g., students to be served, geographic service area, locus of instruction, curriculum to be offered, or comparable formally-stated definitions of school purpose?

**1c.** The school's budgets and policy statements reflect its commitment to the students for whom its electronically offered programs are designed.

- How are electronically offered curricula included in the school's overall budget structure?
- What are the school's policies concerning the establishment, organization, funding, and management of electronically offered curricula? Do they reflect ongoing commitment? (See also item **1e** below.)

42 **1d.** The school assures adequacy of technical and physical plant facilities including  
43 appropriate staffing and technical assistance, to support its electronically offered  
44 programs.

- 45
- 46 • Do technical and physical plant facilities accommodate the curricular
  - 47 commitments reviewed below, e.g., instructor and student interaction (**2e**), and
  - 48 appropriateness to the curriculum (**2a**)?
  - 49 • Whether facilities are provided directly by the school or through contractual
  - 50 arrangements, what are the provisions for reliability, privacy, safety and security?
  - 51 • Does the school's budget plan provide for appropriate updating of the
  - 52 technologies employed?
  - 53 • Is the staffing structure appropriate (and fully qualified) to support the programs
  - 54 now operational curricula and that envisioned in the near term?
  - 55

**1e.** The internal organizational structure which enables the development, coordination, support, and oversight of electronically offered curricula will vary from school to school. Ordinarily, however, this will include the capability to:

- ❖ Facilitate the associated instructional and technical support relationships.
- ❖ Provide (or draw upon) the required information technologies and related support services.
- ❖ Develop and implement a marketing plan that takes into account the target student population, the technologies available, and the factors required to meet school goals.
- ❖ Provide training and support to participating instructors and students.
- ❖ Assure compliance with copyright law.
- ❖ Contract for products and outsourced services.
- ❖ Assess and assign priorities to potential future projects.
- ❖ Assure that electronically offered programs and courses meet school-wide standards, both to provide consistent quality and to provide a coherent framework for students who may enroll in both electronically offered and traditional on-campus courses.
- ❖ Maintain appropriate academic oversight.
- ❖ Maintain consistency with the school's academic planning and oversight functions, to assure congruence with the school's mission and allocation of required resources.
- ❖ Assure the integrity of student work and faculty instruction.

56  
57 Organizational structure varies greatly, but it is fundamental to the success of an school's  
58 programs. The points above can be evaluated by variations of the following procedure  
59 and inquiries:

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- 61 • Is there a clear, well-understood process by which an electronically offered
  - 62 program evolves from conception to administrative authorization to
  - 63 implementation? How is the need for the program determined? How is it assigned
  - 64 a priority among the other potential programs? Has the development of the

- 65 program incorporated appropriate internal consultation and integration with  
66 existing planning efforts?
- 67 • Track the history of a representative project from idea through implementation,  
68 noting the links among the participants including those responsible for  
69 curriculum, those responsible for deciding to offer the program electronically,  
70 those responsible for program/course design, those responsible for the  
71 technologies applied, those responsible for faculty and student support, those  
72 responsible for marketing, those responsible for legal issues, those responsible for  
73 budgeting, those responsible for administrative and student services, and those  
74 responsible for program evaluation. Does this review reveal a coherent set of  
75 relationships?
  - 76 • In the school's organizational documentation, is there a clear and integral  
77 relationship between those responsible for electronically offered programs and the  
78 mainstream academic structure?
  - 79 • How is the organizational structure reflected in the school's overall budget?
  - 80 • How are the integrity, reliability, and security of outsourced services assured?
  - 81 • Are training and technical support programs considered adequate by those for  
82 whom they are intended?
  - 83 • What are the policies and procedures concerning compliance with copyright law?
  - 84 • How does curriculum evaluation relate to this organizational and decision-making  
85 structure?
- 86

87 **1f.** What are the school's policies concerning credit transfer? What are decisions  
88 regarding transfer of academic credit based upon?

89

90 **1g.** The school strives to assure a consistent and coherent technical framework for  
91 students and faculty. When a change in technologies is necessary, it is introduced in a  
92 way that minimizes the impact on students and faculty.

- 93
  - 94 • When a student or instructor proceeds from one course or program to another, is it  
95 necessary to learn another software program or set of technical procedures?
  - 96 • When new software or systems are adopted, what programs/processes are used to  
97 acquaint instructors and students with them?
- 98

99 **1h.** The school provides students with reasonable technical support for each educational  
100 technology hardware, software, and delivery system required.

- 101
- 102 • Is a help desk function realistically available to students during hours when it is  
103 likely to be needed?
- 104 • Is help available for all hardware, software, and delivery systems specified by the  
105 school as required for the program?
- 106 • Does the help desk involve person-to-person contact for the student? By what  
107 means, e.g., email, phone, fax?
- 108 • Is there a well-designed FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) service, online and/or

109 by phone menu or on-demand fax?  
110

111 **1i.** The selection of technologies is based on appropriateness for the students and the  
112 curriculum. It is recognized that availability, cost, and other issues are often involved,  
113 but program documentation should include specific consideration of the match  
114 between technology and curricula.

- 115  
116 • How were the technologies chosen for this school's-curricula?  
117 • Are the technologies judged to be appropriate (or inappropriate) to the curricula in  
118 which they are used?  
119 • Are the intended students likely to find their technology costs reasonable?  
120 • What provisions have been made to assure a robust and secure technical  
121 infrastructure, providing maximum reliability for students and faculty?  
122 • Given the rapid pace of change in modern information technology, what policies  
123 or procedures are in place to keep the infrastructure reasonably up-to-date?  
124

125 **1j.** The school seeks to understand the legal and regulatory requirements of the  
126 jurisdictions in which it operates, e.g., requirements for service to those with  
127 disabilities, copyright law, state and national requirements for schools offering  
128 international restrictions such as export of sensitive information or technologies, etc.

- 129  
130 • Does school documentation indicate an awareness of these requirements and that  
131 it has made an appropriate response to them?  
132

## 133 **2. Curriculum and Instruction**

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136 **Methods change, but standards of quality endure. The important issues are not**  
137 **technical but curriculum-driven and pedagogical. Decisions about such matters are**  
138 **made by qualified professionals and focus on learning outcomes for an increasingly**  
139 **diverse student population.**  
140

141 **2a.** As with all curriculum development and review, the school assures that each school  
142 will ensure that online courses have academic rigor and breadth as compared to the  
143 same course offered in a traditional face-to-face classroom.  
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- 145  
146 • What process resulted in the decision to offer the program?  
147 • By what process was the program developed? Were academically qualified  
148 persons responsible for curricular decisions?  
149 • How were learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the courses  
150 established? Does the program design involve the demonstration of such skills as  
151 analysis, comprehension, communication, and effective research?

- 152       • Is the program coherent and complete?  
153       • Are related instructional materials appropriate and readily accessible to students?  
154

155       **2b.** Academically qualified persons participate fully in the decisions concerning program  
156       curricula and program oversight. It is recognized that traditional faculty roles may be  
157       unbundled and/or supplemented as electronically offered programs are developed and  
158       presented, but the substance of the program, including its presentation, management,  
159       and assessment are the responsibility of people with appropriate academic  
160       qualifications.

- 161  
162       • What were the academic qualifications of those responsible for curricular  
163       decisions, assessment, and program oversight?  
164       • What are the academic qualifications of those presenting and managing the  
165       program?  
166       • If the principal instructor is assisted by classroom facilitators or student mentors,  
167       what are their qualifications?  
168       • Are these qualifications considered appropriate to the responsibilities of these  
169       persons?  
170

171       **2c.** In designing an electronically offered curricula, the school provides a coherent plan  
172       for the student to access all courses necessary to complete the program, or clearly  
173       notifies students of requirements not included in the electronic offering. Hybrid  
174       programs or courses, mixing electronic and on-campus elements, are designed to  
175       assure that all students have access to appropriate services. (See also **2d** below,  
176       concerning program elements from consortia or contract services.)

- 177  
178       • How are students notified of program requirements?  
179       • If the school relies on other providers to offer program-related courses, what is the  
180       process by which students learn of these courses?  
181       • Is the total program realistically available to students for whom it is intended? For  
182       example, is the chosen technology likely to be accessible by the target student  
183       population? Can target students meet the parameters of program scheduling?  
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**2d.** Although important elements of a program may be supplied by consortia partners or  
outsourced to other organizations, including contractors who may or may not be  
accredited, the responsibility for performance remains with the school awarding the  
degree or certificate. It is the school in which the student is enrolled, not its suppliers  
or partners, that has a contract with the student. Therefore, the criteria for selecting  
consortia partners and contractors, and the means to monitor and evaluate their work,  
are important aspects of the program plan. In considering consortia agreements,  
attention is given to issues such as assuring that enhancing service to students is a  
primary consideration and that incentives do not compromise the integrity of the  
school or its educational program. Consideration is also given to the effect of

administrative arrangements and cost-sharing on an school's decision-making regarding curriculum.

Current examples of consortia and contractual relationships include:

- ❖ Faculty qualifications and support.
- ❖ Course material:
  - Courses or course elements acquired or licensed from other schools.
  - Courses or course elements provided by partner schools in a consortium.
  - Curricular elements from recognized industry sources, e.g., Microsoft or Novell certification programs.
  - Commercially produced course materials ranging from textbooks to packaged courses or course elements.
- ❖ Course management and delivery:
  - Blackboard, Moodle, D2L, etc.
- ❖ Library-related services:
  - Remote access to library services, resources, and policies.
  - Provision of library resources and services, e.g., online reference services, document delivery, print resources, etc.
- ❖ Bookstore services.
- ❖ Services providing information to students concerning the school and its programs and courses.
- ❖ Technical services:
  - Server capacity.
  - Technical support services, including help desk services for students and faculty.
- ❖ Administrative services:
  - Registration, student records, etc.
- ❖ Services related to orientation, advising, counseling, or tutoring.
- ❖ Online payment arrangements.
- ❖ Student privacy considerations.

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189 Evaluation of contract services and consortia arrangements requires a review of pertinent  
190 formal agreements. Note, for example:

191

192 • Are performance expectations defined in contracts and agreements? Are  
193 conditions for contract termination defined?

194 • Are there adequate quality control and curriculum oversight provisions in  
195 agreements concerning courseware?

196 • Are there appropriate system reliability and emergency backup guarantees in  
197 agreements concerning technology services?

198 • What are the provisions for protection of confidentiality and privacy in services  
199 involving personal information?

200 • What are the assurances concerning qualifications and training of persons  
201 involved in contact with students? These services may range from help desk to  
202 tutoring or counseling.

203 • Are the expectations of the receipt or purchase of curriculum clear concerning the  
204 non-transfer of accreditation? Programs or materials are not accredited, only  
205 schools.

206 • Consortia agreements introduce additional elements to be evaluated:

207 – How are curriculum-related decisions made by the consortium, noting the  
208 requirement that “Academically qualified persons participate fully in the  
209 decisions regarding program curricula and program oversight?”

210 – Is the school fully engaged in the consortia process, recognizing the decision-  
211 making responsibilities of shared ownership?

212 – What are the financial arrangements among the parties to the consortia  
213 agreement? What are the implications of these arrangements for school  
214 participation and management?

215 – What entity awards the certificates and degrees resulting from the consortia  
216 program?

217 – What articulation and transfer arrangements are applicable to courses offered  
218 via the consortium? Did these arrangements involve specific curricular  
219 decisions by the academic structures of the participating schools? Were they  
220 prescribed in a state or system decision?

221 – To what extent are the administrative and student services arrangements of the  
222 consortium focused on the practical requirements of the student?

223 – Are the expectations of the receipt or purchase of curriculum clear concerning  
224 the non-transfer of accreditation?

225

226 **2e.** The importance of appropriate interaction (synchronous or asynchronous) between  
227 instructor and students and among students is reflected in the design of the program  
228 and its courses, and in the technical facilities and services provided.

229

230 • What provisions for instructor-student and student-student interaction are  
231 included in the program/course design and the course syllabus? How is  
232 appropriate interaction assured?

233 • Is instructor response to student assignments timely? Does it appear to be

- 234 appropriately responsive?
- 235 • What technologies are used for program interaction (e.g., email, telephone office
- 236 hours, phone conferences, voicemail, fax, chat rooms, Web-based discussions,
- 237 computer conferences and threaded discussions, etc.)?
- 238 • How successful is the program's interactive component, as indicated by student
- 239 and instructor surveys, comments, or other measures?

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### 3. Faculty Support

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244 **As indicated above, faculty roles are becoming increasingly diverse and reorganized.**

245 **For example, the same person may not perform both the tasks of course**

246 **development and direct instruction to students. Regardless of who performs**

247 **which of these tasks, important issues are involved.**

248

249 **3a.** In the development of an electronically offered program, the school and its

250 participating faculty have considered issues of workload, compensation, ownership of

251 intellectual property, and the implications of program participation for the faculty

252 member's professional evaluation processes. This mutual understanding is based on

253 policies and agreements adopted by the parties.

254

- 255 • Have decisions regarding these matters been made in accordance with school or
- 256 system processes customarily used to address comparable issues?

257

258 **3b.** The school provides an ongoing program of appropriate technical, design, and

259 production support for participating faculty members.

260

- 261 • What support services are available to those responsible for preparing courses or
- 262 programs to be offered electronically? What support services are available to
- 263 those faculty members responsible for working directly with students?

- 264 • Do participating faculty members consider these services to be appropriate and
- 265 adequate?

- 266 • Does the staff include qualified instructional designers? If so, do they have an
- 267 appropriate role in program and course development?

268

269 **3c.** The school provides to those responsible for program development the orientation and

270 training to help them become proficient in the uses of the program's technologies,

271 including potential changes in course design and management.

272

- 273 • What orientation and training programs are available? Are there opportunities for
- 274 ongoing professional development?

- 275 • Is adequate attention paid to pedagogical changes made possible and desirable
- 276 when information technologies are employed?

- 277       • Given the staff available to support electronically offered programs, are the  
278       potential changes in course design and management realistically feasible?  
279       • Do those involved consider these orientation and training programs to be  
280       appropriate and adequate?

281       **3d.** The school provides to those responsible for working directly with students, such as  
282       instructors and/or facilitators, the orientation and training to help them become  
283       proficient in the uses of the technologies for these purposes, including strategies for  
284       effective interaction.

- 285       • What orientation and training programs are available? Are there opportunities for  
286       ongoing professional development? Do those involved consider these orientation  
287       and training programs to be appropriate and adequate?  
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## 4. Student Support

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293       **Educators have learned that the twenty-first century student is different, both**  
294       **demographically and geographically, from students of previous generations.**  
295       **These differences affect everything from admissions policy to library services.**  
296       **Reaching these students, and serving them appropriately, are major challenges**  
297       **to today's schools.**  
298

299       **4a.** The school has a commitment – administrative, financial, and technical – to the  
300       continuation of the advertised course of study for a period sufficient to enable all  
301       admitted students to complete the program in a publicized timeframe.

- 302  
303       • Do course and program schedules reflect an appropriate commitment to the  
304       program's students?  
305       • Do budget, faculty, and facilities assignments support that commitment?  
306  
307

**4b.** Prior to admitting a student to the program, the school:

- ❖ Ascertains by a review of pertinent records and/or personal review that the student is qualified by prior education or equivalent experience to be admitted to that program, including in the case of international students, English language skills.
- ❖ Informs the prospective student and parent concerning required access to technologies used in the program.
- ❖ Informs the prospective student and parent concerning technical competence required of students in the program.
- ❖ Informs the prospective student and parent concerning estimated or average program costs (including costs of information access) and associated payment and refund policies.
- ❖ Informs the prospective student concerning curriculum design and the time frame

in which courses are offered, and assists the student in understanding the nature of the learning objectives.

**4b.** continued

- ❖ Informs the prospective student and parent of library and other learning services available to support learning and the skills necessary to access them.
- ❖ Informs the prospective student and parent concerning the full array of other support services available from the school.
- ❖ Informs the prospective student and parent about arrangements for interaction with the faculty and fellow students.
- ❖ Assists the prospective student in understanding independent learning expectations as well as the nature and potential challenges of learning in the program's technology-based environment.
- ❖ Informs the prospective student and parent about the estimated time for program completion.

308

309 To evaluate this important component of admission and retention/completion, it is  
310 appropriate to pursue the following:

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312 • How do potential students learn about the electronically offered program? Is the  
313 information provided sufficient, fair, and accurate?

314 • How are students and parents informed about technology requirements and  
315 required technical competence?

316 • How are students and parents informed about costs and administrative  
317 arrangements?

318 • What information and/or advice do students receive about the nature of learning  
319 and the personal discipline required in an anytime/anywhere environment?

320 • What criteria are used to determine the student's eligibility for admission to the  
321 program?

322 • What steps are taken to retain students in the program?

323 • What is the history of student retention/completion in this program?

324

**4c.** The school recognizes that appropriate services must be available for students of electronically offered programs, using the working assumption that these students may not be physically present on campus. With variations for specific situations and programs, these services, which are possibly coordinated, may include:

- ❖ Accurate and timely information about the school, its programs, courses, costs, and related policies and requirements.
- ❖ Pre-registration advising.
- ❖ Application for admission.
- ❖ Placement testing.
- ❖ Enrollment/registration in programs and courses.

- ❖ Financial aid, including information about policies and limitations, information about available scholarships, processing of applications, and administration of financial aid and scholarship awards.

**4c.** continued

- ❖ Secure payment arrangements.
- ❖ Academic advising.
- ❖ Timely intervention regarding student progress.
- ❖ Tutoring.
- ❖ Career counseling and placement.
- ❖ Academic progress information, such as degree completion audits.
- ❖ Library resources appropriate to the program, including, reference and research assistance; remote access to data bases, online journals and full-text resources; document delivery services; library user and information literacy instruction, reserve materials; and school agreements with local libraries.
- ❖ Training in information literacy including research techniques.
- ❖ Bookstore services: ordering, secure payment, and prompt delivery of books, course packs, course-related supplies and materials, and school memorabilia.
- ❖ Ongoing technical support, preferably offered during evenings and weekends as well as normal school working hours.
- ❖ Referrals for student learning differences, physical challenges, and personal counseling.
- ❖ Access to grievance procedures.

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Within the context of the program, the requirements of the program's students, and the type of school, review each of the services and procedures listed above from the standpoint of a student for whom access to the campus is not feasible.

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- Are the school's policies and procedures appropriate and adequate from the standpoint of the distant student?

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- If all appropriate resources are not routinely available at a distance, what arrangements has the school made to provide them to distant students?

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- Are these services perceived by distant students to be adequate and appropriate?

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- Are these services perceived to be adequate and appropriate by those responsible for providing them? What modifications or improvements are planned?

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**4d.** The school recognizes that a sense of community is important to the success of many students, and that an ongoing, long-term relationship is beneficial to both student and school. The design and administration of the program takes this factor into account as appropriate, through such actions as encouraging study groups, providing student directories (with the permission of those listed), including off-campus students in school publications and events, including these students in definitions of the academic community through such mechanisms as student government representation,

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347 invitations to campus events including graduation ceremonies, and similar strategies  
348 of inclusion.

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- 351 • What strategies and practices are implemented by this school to involve distant  
352 students as part of an academic community? By their statements and actions, do  
353 administrators and participating faculty members communicate a belief that a  
354 sense of academic community is important?
  - 355 • How are the learning needs of students enrolled in electronically offered programs  
356 identified, addressed, and linked to educational objectives and learning outcomes,  
357 particularly within the context of the school's definition of itself as a learning  
358 community?
  - 359 • Do representative students feel that they are part of a community, or that they are  
360 entirely on their own?
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## 365 5. Evaluation and Assessment

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367 **Both the assessment of student achievement and evaluation of the overall program**  
368 **take on added importance as new techniques evolve. For example, in**  
369 **asynchronous programs the element of seat time is essentially removed from the**  
370 **equation. For these reasons, the school conducts sustained, evidence-based and**  
371 **participatory inquiry as to whether distance learning programs are achieving**  
372 **objectives. The results of such inquiry are used to guide curriculum design and**  
373 **delivery, pedagogy, and educational processes, and may affect future policy and**  
374 **budgets and perhaps have implications for the school's roles and mission.**  
375

376 **5a.** As a component of the school's overall assessment activities, documented assessment  
377 of student achievement is conducted in each course and at the completion of the  
378 program, by comparing student performance to the intended learning outcomes.

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- 380 • How does the school review the effectiveness of its distance education programs  
381 to assure alignment with school priorities and educational objectives?
  - 382 • How does evaluated student performance compare to intended learning  
383 outcomes?
  - 384 • How is student performance evaluated?
  - 385 • How are nationally standardized tests administered and correlated to student  
386 performance?
  - 387 • How are assessment activities related to distance learning integrated into the  
388 school's broader program of assessment?
- 389

390 **5b.** When examinations are employed (paper, online, demonstrations of competency,  
391 etc.), they take place in circumstances that include firm student identification. The

392 school otherwise seeks to assure the integrity of student work.

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394 • If proctoring is used, what are the procedures for selecting proctors, establishing  
395 student identity, assuring security of test instruments, administering the  
396 examinations, and assuring secure and prompt evaluation?

397 • If other methods are used to identify those who take the examination, how is  
398 identification firmly established? How are the conditions of the examination  
399 (security, time limits, etc.) controlled?

400 • Does the school have in place effective policies and procedures to assure the  
401 integrity of student work?

402

403 **5c.** Documented procedures assure that security of personal information is protected in  
404 the conduct of assessments and evaluations and in the dissemination of results.

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406 • What procedures assure the security of personal information?

407 • How is personal information protected while providing appropriate dissemination  
408 of the evaluation results?

409

**5d.** Overall program/course effectiveness is determined by such measures as:

- ❖ The extent to which student learning matches intended outcomes.
- ❖ Student retention/completion rates, including variations over time.
- ❖ Student, parent and faculty satisfaction, as measured by regular surveys/evaluations and by formal and informal review processes.
- ❖ The extent to which access is provided to students not previously served.
- ❖ Measures of the extent to which library and learning resources are used appropriately by the students.
- ❖ Measures of student competence in fundamental skills such as communication, comprehension, and analysis.
- ❖ Cost effectiveness of the program to its students, as compared to campus-based alternatives.

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411 Although not all of these measures will be applicable equally at every school, appropriate  
412 evidence is generally available through:

413

414 • Evaluations of student performance (see **5a** above).

415 • How are nationally standardized tests administered and correlated to  
416 program/course effectiveness?

417 • Review of student work and archive of student activities, if maintained, in the  
418 course of program reviews.

419 • Results from students' routine end-of-course and -program evaluations.

420 • Student and parent surveys of overall satisfaction with the experience of  
421 electronically offered programs; surveys reflecting student cost trade-offs

- 422 experienced as they pursued the program.
- 423
- 424 • Faculty surveys/evaluations.
  - 425 • Documentation concerning access provided to students not previously served,  
426 through a combination of enrollment records and student surveys.
  - 427 • Usage records concerning use of library and learning resources, and instructor  
428 assignments that require such usage.
  - 429 • Assessment of students' fundamental skills in communication, comprehension,  
430 and analysis. How have the school's usual measures of these skills been adapted  
431 to assess distant students?
  - 432 • Documentation of the school's analyses that relate costs to goals of the program.

433 **5e.** The school conducts a program of continual self-evaluation. Efforts are directed  
434 toward program improvement, targeting more effective uses of technology to improve  
435 pedagogy, advances in student achievement of intended outcomes, improved  
436 retention/completion rates, effective use of resources, and demonstrated  
437 improvements in the school's service to its internal and external constituencies. The  
438 program and its results are reflected in the school's ongoing self-evaluation process  
439 and are used to formulate the future plans of the school and those responsible for its  
440 academic programs.

- 441
- 442 • How is the school's ongoing program of assessment and improvement developed  
443 and conducted?
  - 444 • Does it cover the essential categories of improved learning outcomes,  
445 retention/completion, use of resources, and service to core constituencies?
  - 446 • Does the program appropriately involve academically qualified persons?
  - 447 • What are the school's mechanisms for review and revision of existing programs  
448 and courses?
  - 449 • How does program evaluation affect school planning?
  - 450 • What constituencies are actively involved in the ongoing process of planning for  
451 improvement?
  - 452 • Has the process had measurable results to date?
  - 453 • How does the program evaluate the equitable relationships between distance  
454 education of students and on-site students?