OII Exchange Series
Innovations in Education
Virtual Schools

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My Agenda

- Overview of virtual schools
- Quick look at The Virtual High School – the Coop model
- Future progress and policy issues
Quick History

- Correspondence Courses (snail mail)
- 21-inch Classroom
- ITV courses
- Technology enhanced Correspondence courses (email)
- Lectures / books on line (web pages)
- Online courses delivered on the Internet
  - Course Management Systems
• VHS and Florida Virtual School been in existence since 1997
  – Currently enroll over 15K students
• During the 2000/01 school year, nearly 50,000 students in 48 states enrolled in Apex Learning online curriculum.
The 40 virtual school programs profiled [in the 2002 PEAK Report] reported a total of 85,500 students in (2002)…. Projections for a broader spectrum of virtual school programs…estimate the total number of students at the 88 identified K-12 virtual schools to be 275,000 in 2001-2002.

PEAK report Virtual Schools Across America: Trends in K-12 Online Education 2002
Goal and Audience for Virtual Schools

Home-based Students

Provide a high school diploma

Support F2F Courses

School-based Students
Virtual School Providers

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• 1996 Technology Innovation Challenge Grant to Hudson, MA, Public Schools and Concord Consortium

• Coop model
  – Participating schools offer courses

• Self-sufficient, membership-funded for the past 2 years
  – www.goVHS.org
Students Succeed Online if…

• Self-motivated
• Interested in the course content
• Don’t have technology problems
  – Including access problems
• Access not limited by assumptions made in design.
Evaluations Exist

- Illinois Virtual High School (01-02)
- Virtual High School (www.goVHS.org)
- **The Virtual High School** Teaching Generation V
  - Teachers College Press
My Frustrations

• Assumption that all F2F is inherently better than any online education.

• New programs that don’t *research or build* on the learnings of existing virtual schools.
  – Retention
  – Teacher training
  – Instructional models

• We’re too wedded to the traditional school, course, class model.
Issues to Watch

• Access issues
  – Universal design
  – Requiring students to own computers and Internet access

• Data collection
  – Disaggregated student performance data
Research Directions

• What can we learn about online interaction patterns to improve communications?
• What’s the most effective F2F model?
• What’s an effective online synchronous learning model?
• What do we know about basic learning?
Policy Concerns

• Funding requirements
  – Teacher Certification
  – Who “Owns” the Students (ADA)

• Seat-time as a measure of learning

• Restrictions on progress and development of new, potentially more effective learning due to policy reinforcement of School, Building, Course, and Classroom model
Future Directions

- Open Source Courseware
- Learning Objects
- Standards for use of content
  - The Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM)
• **Remember:**
  – Not all virtual schools are the same, don’t paint them with the same brush.
  – Virtual schools aren’t automatically second best to the brick and mortar alternative.

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