

*A Study of* **ONLINE LEARNING:**  
*Perspectives of Online Learners  
and Educators*

October 2012



**Buechner Institute  
for Governance**

**Report to the Colorado Department of Education  
Unit of Online Learning**



School of Public Affairs  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO DENVER

[www.spa.ucdenver.edu/BIG](http://www.spa.ucdenver.edu/BIG)

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The landscape of Colorado’s online schools has experienced dramatic changes in recent years. The number of online schools has increased and student enrollment has grown from 3,248 in 2003-2004 to 16,464 in 2011-2012. Additionally, student demographics have shifted. Students enrolled in online schools in 2003-2004 consisted primarily of white students and few were eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch. Currently, the proportion of racial/ethnic groups in online schools more closely represents the statewide distributions. Further, in 2003, the majority were students in elementary grades. By 2011, high school students were the majority of enrolled students.<sup>1</sup> Demographic changes, increased enrollment and poor student performance in some of Colorado’s online schools are partially responsible for the lively debate concerning the failures and successes of online schooling, prompting several recent studies of online learning. The Colorado Department of Education asked the Center for Education Policy Analysis, in the Buechner Institute for Governance, University of Colorado Denver to conduct a study to gain a better understanding of online learning and previous experiences in brick-and-mortar classrooms from the perspective of high school students and parents of students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

### ***Background***

Across the country, online education has experienced phenomenal growth over the last decade. In 2010, the National Association for Independent Schools (NAIS) conducted a survey of online schools, reporting that two-thirds (65%) of online programs offer online courses to provide resources that the brick-and-mortar schools would not otherwise offer; nearly half (48%) offer classes to serve accelerated or advanced students and an equal number to meet students’ special needs. Well over three-quarters (83%) offer online learning to enrich or supplement current curricula.<sup>2</sup>

According to Colorado legislation, an Online Program is defined as a non-religious, and non-sectarian full-time online education program that delivers instruction by a state certified, highly qualified teacher to a student through technology, via the Internet. It does not include supplemental online programs. Supplemental online programs offer one or more online courses to students to augment their education program. An online student must be a resident of Colorado, verified by documentation. A single district online program only serves students who reside within a single school district; a multi-district online program serves students drawn from two or more school districts. As in brick-and-mortar schools, the head count of online students takes place each year on October 1. The online school curriculum is aligned with Colorado Model Content Standards, assessment frameworks, and is consistent with grade level expectations. Various assessments are used by teachers and staff to obtain information on student learning, monitor student progress, identify achievement and curricular gaps and to refine instruction. The online program meets industry accepted accessibility standards and appropriate access for learners with special needs. Technological support structures and programs are in place to reduce barriers to learning for all students. In addition, online programs must comply with all statutory requirements. Online schools in Colorado are full-time, sequential schools with their own administration, budget and

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<sup>1</sup> Colorado Department of Education. Unit of Online Learning.

<sup>2</sup> University of Florida Virtual School Data Clearinghouse. [www.vsclearinghouse.com](http://www.vsclearinghouse.com)

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accountability, and all the budgets and accounting records are transparent and open to the public. A full-time student will receive funding if the student has a schedule that provides a minimum of 360 hours of instruction. Regular assessment of a student’s academic progress by a site coordinator is required. Additionally, student performance is assessed based on Colorado’s standards-based assessment, CSAP, now TCAP. Mentoring services deemed necessary for a participating student are also available.<sup>3</sup>

In 2012, the International Association for k-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) reported that the current U.S. average per pupil expenditure for a fully-online program is \$6,400 and \$8,900 for a blended-learning model. iNACOL reported an average cost of \$10,000 per student for traditional brick-and-mortar school models. In states such as Colorado that allow for full-time online learning, funding is normally based on the number of students enrolled. iNACOL reports that “Colorado funds full-time online schools at a state-set, per pupil minimum level for online students.”<sup>4</sup>

## II. METHODOLOGY

### **Sample – Students, Parents, Educators**

The study explored the experiences of high school students and parents of students across grades k-12 in online learning and their most recent experience in brick-and-mortar schools. To provide additional context, the researchers interviewed principals and teachers in online schools, as well.

We identified a sample of schools that would best represent a cross-section of Colorado’s online schools. First, we developed a categorization of schools based on three variables: 1) single/multi/multi-charter; 2) existence of ESP; 3) school performance. We attempted to select one school from each category, and more in those instances where there were many schools in one category. Additionally, we tried to include all of the very large schools for efficiency. The researchers developed a matrix to include descriptive variables such as district, pupil count, years in operation, improvement plan and grade levels served, and tested whether the sample of schools yielded a proportion on each of the descriptive variables that was roughly in line with the total population of schools. Ultimately, the identified sample of online schools had to agree to participate in the study. Those schools are:

Branson School Online	eDCSD Colorado	HOPE Online Learning
Canon Online Academy	Edison Academy	Insight School
Colorado Calvert	Grande River Virtual	Monte Vista Online
Colorado Virtual	Guided Online Academy	Southwest Colorado

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<sup>3</sup> Colorado Department of Education. (2009). *Rules for the administration, certification and oversight of Colorado online programs*. Denver, CO: Colorado State Board of Education

<sup>4</sup> International Association for K-12 Online Learning. *Fast Facts About Online Learning*. February 2012. [www.inacol.org](http://www.inacol.org).

Students and parents did not complete surveys from every school in the sample and students and parents from online schools that were not in the identified sample completed surveys. Table 1 shows the number of respondents and their online school.

**Table 1. Online Schools of Student and Parent Respondents**

Online School	Student Respondents		Parent Respondents	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Guided Online Academy Learning (GOAL) Academy	529	42.4	124	6.3
Insight School of Colorado	230	18.4	172	8.7
Colorado Virtual Academy (COVA)	149	11.9	1,287	65.0
HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op	84	6.7	47	2.4
Academy Online	78	6.3	22	1.1
Branson School Online	77	6.2	149	7.5
eDCSD Colorado Cyberschool	30	2.4	54	2.7
Grande River Virtual Academy	10	0.8	38	1.9
Canon Online Academy	9	0.7	0	0
Colorado Calvert Academy	9	0.7	50	2.5
Colorado Connections Academy	9	0.7	4	0.2
Southwest Colorado eSchool	9	0.7	12	0.6
PSD Global Academy	8	0.6	3	0.2
ACHIEVEk12	4	0.3	5	0.3
Center Virtual Academy	2	0.2	12	0.6
Provost Academy-Colorado	2	0.2	1	0.1
70 Online	1	0.1	0	0
APS Online	1	0.1	0	0
Buena Vista Online Academy	1	0.1	0	0
Delta County Virtual Academy	1	0.1	0	0
DPS Online High School	1	0.1	0	0
Eng@ge Online Academy	1	0.1	0	0
JEFFCO's 21st Century Virtual Academy	1	0.1	0	0
World Academy	1	0.1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,247</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1,982*</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\* Parents = 2 missing schools

Seventeen educators were interviewed – 5 teachers and 12 principals. Teacher respondents provided the most detailed responses. However, the researchers chose to limit the number of teacher interviews after the first five because responses were nearly identical in tone and content.

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### ***Instruments***

Online school staff asked students and parents to complete surveys from mid-August through early September 2012. The student and parent surveys included identical questions that addressed length of time and reasons for choosing an online school, respondents' most recent experiences in a brick-and-mortar school, and for those who were not new to online learning, their experiences in their online school in the previous year. Parents were able to complete a survey in either English or Spanish.

In the spring of the 2011-2012 school year, the researchers conducted interviews with principals and teachers from the sample of schools to explore similar issues asked of students and parents, but from the perspective of school staff. We asked, from their experience, why parents and students choose online schools, what types of students do they feel are successful in online learning, and probed for their thoughts about how students perform in an online school who are not successful in a traditional setting. School staff answered questions about their curriculum, enrollment processes, how students and parents communicate with teachers and what they feel are the strengths and challenges of their online school. Finally, interviewees commented on what is still needed in Colorado with regard to online learning. The surveys and interview protocols may be found in the Appendices.

### III. FINDINGS

Some survey respondents did not answer every question. Additionally, some questions sorted out respondents. For example, students and parents new to online learning did not answer questions about their previous experience in online schools. As a result, the percentages reported in each sub-section of the report, in tables and in graphs represent only those people who answered the particular question and not the total number of respondents. In other words, unless otherwise noted, the percentages do not include “missing” responses.

#### A. FINDINGS - High School Students and Parents

In this section, we report on the findings for students and parents of students in high school (grades 9-12). The student findings are highlighted, and where the findings of parents of high school students depart substantially from the student findings, we describe these differences. There are a total of 1,247 high school students and 778 high school parents.

##### Time in Online School

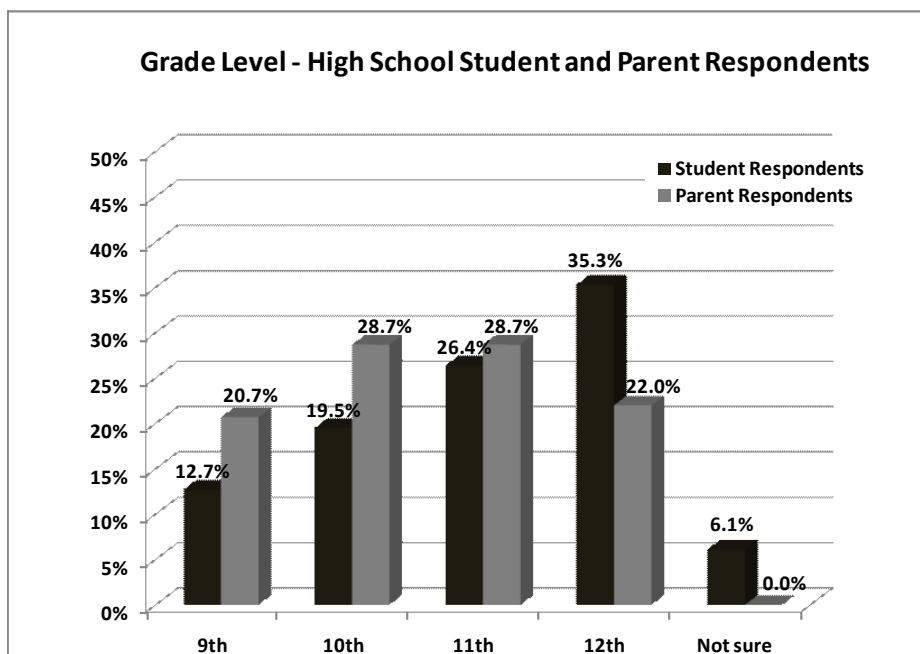
The slight majority of students and high school parents are in their second year or more in an online school. Table 2 shows that approximately half have been in online schools for two years or more.

**Table 2. Time in Online School**

	Students		Parents	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Just starting this year	614	49.3	349	45.2
Second year in an online school	372	29.9	189	24.5
Third year or more in an online school	260	20.9	234	30.3
Total	1246	100.0	772	100.0

**Figure 1. Grade Level – High School Student and Parent Respondents**

The majority of students are in the upper grades – 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade; the smallest number of students are in 9<sup>th</sup> grade.





The greatest proportion of students just starting online schooling is 9<sup>th</sup> graders. Table 3 shows that of student respondents, as the number of students new to online learning decreases, students' grade level increases. Parent respondents reported about half of their students in grades 9-11 were in their first year and half had been in online learning for two years or more, although as expected, they reported fewer 12<sup>th</sup> graders were in their first year versus in online for two years or more (compare 32.9% to 67.1%).

**Table 3. Time in Online Learning and Grade Level - Student Respondents**

Time in Online Learning	Grade Level					Total
	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	Not sure	
Just starting this year	86 58.9%	127 56.4%	157 51.6%	151 37.2%	38 54.3%	559 48.6%
This is second year or more	60 41.1%	98 43.6%	147 48.4%	255 62.8%	32 45.7%	592 51.4%

The survey asked if students have a learning disability. Slightly more than one in ten students (11.8%) reported they have a learning disability compared to 15.7 percent of parents who reported their high school student has a disability. Just four parents of high school students completed the survey in Spanish.

**High School Students/Parents: BRICK-AND-MORTAR SCHOOL EXPERIENCE**

We asked if respondents had ever attended a brick-and-mortar school, and if so, to describe their experiences during their most recent year. Nearly all students (90.8%) reported they had attended a brick-and-mortar school at some time as did parents of high school students (93.6%).

Students and parents were asked to rate how students were doing in their last brick-and-mortar school regarding their overall grades, and specifically their math, language arts and science classes. We also asked how respondents felt students were doing socially. Respondents used a 1-5 rating scale where 1 indicated “very badly” and 5 indicated “very well.” One quarter (25.2%) of the student respondents reported they were not doing well in school overall (a rating of 1 or 2), while 46.5 percent felt they were doing well (a rating of 4 or 5). Students reported doing less well in math, followed by science and language arts. The parent findings mirrored this pattern, although parent respondents tended to rate their high school students' performance lower, on average, than did the student respondents. Nearly two-thirds (64.8%) of students reported they were doing just fine socially (a rating of 4 or 5), while only half (49.9%) of parents said their child was doing well socially. Table 4 gives the student and parent respondents' average scores.

**Table 4. Performance in Last Brick-and-Mortar School**

	Students		Parents	
	N	Mean	N	Mean
How were you/your child doing in school overall (grades)?	1125	3.32	727	3.22
How were you/your child doing in your math classes?	1114	3.08	716	3.06
How were you/your child doing in your science classes?	1102	3.38	704	3.26
How were you/your child doing in your language arts classes?	1111	3.50	713	3.33
How would you say you/your child were doing socially?	1124	3.84	722	3.40

A large number of students indicated that they had little motivation and had trouble staying focused on their work in their brick-and-mortar classrooms. Nearly three-quarters (70.2%) of students reported very low to moderate levels of motivation for doing their class work, specifically, 16.1 percent reported they were not motivated *at all*. Similarly, three-quarters (73.1%) of students said it was very hard to moderately hard to stay focused. Parent survey findings showed nearly identical results regarding students' motivation and ability to focus in the classroom.

Students and parents reported how satisfied they were with the amount of communication that students had with their teachers, where 1 was not satisfied at all and 5 was very satisfied. Nearly half (46.6%) of the students indicated they were not satisfied (a rating of 1 or 2) and well over half (60.2%) of parents were not satisfied. Fewer parents than students reported they were satisfied with the level of communication that students had with teachers (compare 19.5% to 26.4%).

Students and parents were asked if students had failed any classes in the most recent year they were in a brick-and-mortar school and if they had ever been suspended or expelled. There were substantive differences between the responses of students and parents to these questions. Although the parent and student respondents were not necessarily reporting on the same students, we can get a sense of the general differences in either knowledge or perceptions between the two groups. Many more students than parents reported that students had failed any classes or had been suspended/expelled from school, although parents reported a higher number of failed classes than did students. The majority (57.0%) of students and less than half (48.7%) of parents reported that students had failed any classes. The number of failed classes in their most recent year in a brick-and-mortar school ranged from one to nine or more. Overall, one-third (33.6%) of student respondents reported they had failed one to two classes (parents reported 40.1%); two-thirds (66.5%) had failed from one to six classes (parents reported 75.9%). Just 6.1 percent of student respondents reported they had failed more than six classes in their last brick-and-mortar school. Fully 27.3 percent of students and nearly one in five (17.8%) of parents were not sure of the number of failed classes.

As Table 5 shows, the proportion of students who reported they had failed classes increased as their satisfaction with teacher communication decreased, that is, three quarters (73.7%) of student respondents who reported they were not at all satisfied also reported having failed classes, while just one-third (31.7%) who were very satisfied with their communication with teachers failed any classes. The findings for parent respondents show the same pattern.

**Table 5. Failed Classes and Satisfaction with Teacher Communication – Student Respondents**

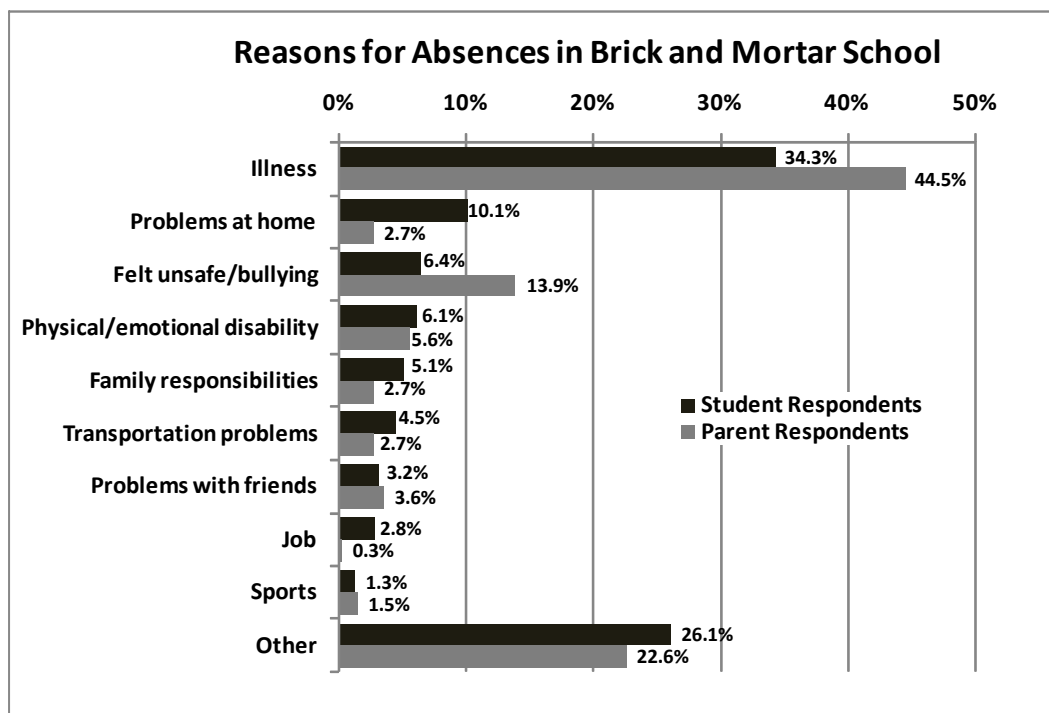
		When you were in a brick-and-mortar school, how satisfied were you with the amount of communication you had with your teachers?					
		1 Not satisfied at all	2	3	4	5 Very satisfied	Total
Did you fail any classes in the most recent year you attended a brick-and-mortar school?	Yes	174	183	162	77	40	636
		73.7%	64.7%	53.6%	46.1%	31.7%	57.1%
	No	62	100	140	90	86	478
		26.3%	35.3%	46.4%	53.9%	68.3%	42.9%
Total		236	283	302	167	126	1114
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

More students than parents reported suspensions and expulsions in their last brick-and-mortar school. Over one-quarter (29.7%) of students compared to 16.9 percent of parents reported that the student had been suspended or expelled at some time.

Clearly, absenteeism is a risk factor for course completion and high school graduation. Students and parents were asked if students had been absent from school for more than five to six days each semester in their most recent brick-and-mortar school. Students and parents report very different incidence and reasons for students' absences. Nearly two-thirds (61.8%) of students said they had been absent for more than five to six days, while slightly less than half (49.4%) of the parents reported their student had been absent for more than five to six days each semester.

**Figure 2. Reasons for Absences in Brick-and-Mortar School**

'Problems at home' was one of the top four reasons students gave for their absences, while parents reported problems at home much less often than did students. The top four reasons students gave for their absences were illness followed by problems



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at home, bullying and physical or emotional disabilities. Parents' top four reasons for students' absences were illness, bullying, physical or emotional disabilities and problems with friends.

A number of students and parents (14.7% and 9.1% respectively) wrote in a reason for missing school other than the categories provided in the survey. Of the students who provided an additional major reason for missing school in their most recent brick-and-mortar school, the majority said they simply did not want to go, did not like school, skipped school frequently and were not motivated to attend. Students reported having problems with teachers, often describing how they could not get along with their teachers, and therefore, did not want to go to school. A few students said teachers and principals bullied them. A number of students missed school due to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Others reported they had behavioral issues at school including "hanging out with the wrong crowd." A number of students said they were pregnant in their most recent year in a brick-and-mortar school, and some students said they felt like a failure, felt alone, and they were not getting the help they needed at school. A small number of students reported that family issues were responsible for their absences. Very few students missed school because they were struggling academically.

Parents echoed many of the students' reasons for missing school. However, more parents than students reported problems with teachers and the school overall. Many parents said that teachers were mean to their child, teachers did nothing to help their child when they needed it, and when there were major issues, the school did nothing to solve the problems. A large number of parents reported their child was bullied at school, which often caused the child to become so anxious either they begged to stay home from school or they skipped classes. Similar to students, parents said their child was bored or simply did not want to go to school. Some described that instead, their child made the choice to just, "hang out with friends." Many parents said their child suffered from anxiety, depression or was bi-polar. A few had family issues, such as a sick parent or a father in prison. A few parents reported their child was pregnant, and a surprising number of parents said that their children missed school due to family travel and vacations.

### **High School Students/Parents: DECISION TO ATTEND AN ONLINE SCHOOL**

We asked students and parents about how they heard about their online school and why they chose to participate in online learning. Generally, students and parents used the same resources to obtain information about their online school. Both students and parents heard about their online school much more often from a friend or family member than from someone or somewhere else (68.6%, 44.5% respectively). After friends and family, both groups learned about their school most often from the internet followed by television/radio, or a teacher or administrator at their brick-and-mortar school. Some students and parents reported they had learned about their school some other way. Students tended to identify a public venue such as a shopping mall, while parents were inclined to report that they simply started researching possible options, without identifying their information sources. Many parents had older children in online schools. One student learned of his/her school from the Colorado Department of Education's annual online school report.

Students and parents described the reasons they decided to attend an online school, using a 1-5 scale to rate the importance of these reasons, where 1 is "not important at all" and 5 is "very important." The top three

most important reasons students gave for attending an online school are related to school success. Their most important reasons are: 1) they like the choice of classes that are available; 2) they want to graduate early, and 3) students want classes to move faster than they did in their brick-and-mortar school. However, the fourth and fifth most important reasons overall were that students were falling behind in their classes and they needed to “change something” and students needed to make up credits for classes they had failed.

Parents’ top choice for attending an online school was the same as the students’ reason – both groups like the choice of classes that are available. Parents’ remaining top two choices differed markedly from students’ choices. Parents reported they have concerns about the environment in brick-and-mortar schools, followed by choosing an online school as an alternative to home schooling. Table 6 gives the average score given by students and parents.

**Table 6. Importance of Reasons for Attending Online School**

	Students	Parents
	Mean	
Like the choice of classes available online	3.68	3.89
Want to graduate early and can do that faster at an online school	3.47	2.81
Want classes to move faster than in brick-and-mortar classrooms	3.14	3.09
Was falling behind in classes and needed to change something	2.91	3.14
Need to make up credits for failed classes	2.82	2.47
Want to take specific college prep courses that were unavailable in previous brick-and-mortar school	2.76	2.65
Need flexible schedule because of family responsibilities	2.73	2.20
Chose online school as alternative to home schooling	2.67	3.41
Didn’t feel comfortable or “fit in” at brick-and-mortar school	2.45	3.03
Need a flexible schedule because of work	2.42	2.23
Have concerns about the environment in brick-and-mortar schools	2.41	3.78
Need classes to move at a slower pace than in a brick-and-mortar classroom	2.34	2.46
Was getting into trouble at previous brick-and-mortar school	2.00	1.80
Need to make up credits because of district transfer	1.71	1.52
Preparing for GED	1.69	1.31
Have physical or emotional disability that made it difficult to learn in brick-and-mortar school	1.66	1.93
Have other special needs	1.45	1.79
Live in an isolated area and it is hard to get to the brick-and-mortar school	1.41	1.35

We asked students and parents to describe other important reasons why they decided to attend an online school. Some of the additional reasons for choosing an online school were the same reasons that students gave for their low attendance rates in their recent brick-and-mortar school. In addition to those reasons given above, students said they chose an online school most often due to problems with teachers, primarily where they were

struggling academically and not getting any help. The second most often given reason was simply convenience and the need or desire to have a flexible schedule. Additional reasons in order of frequency are:

- Catch up on course credits/graduate early
- Family issues including pregnancy
- Bullying/social issues
- Fewer distractions
- Did not like brick-and-mortar school/lack of motivation
- Health issues
- Other time commitments
- Behavioral issues

Parents echoed these findings, although they reported problems with teachers and with the school overall, much more often than did students.

**High School Students/Parents: PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN AN ONLINE SCHOOL**

We asked returning online parents and students a series of questions about their experiences in their online school last year.

***Grades, Course Completion and Overall Progress***

First, parents and students reported how the student performed in their online school overall, how they did socially, and specifically, how they did in their math, language arts and science classes. They used a 1-5 scale where 1 indicated “very badly” and 5 indicated “very well.” Some students may not have taken an online math, language arts or science course in their previous year. In these cases, we provided the option to choose “Not Applicable.”

Generally, students reported doing well in all of these areas – over half of the students reported a rating of 4 or 5. However, parent respondents gave higher ratings overall than did student respondents. Students reported doing less well in their math classes and better in their language arts classes than in the other areas, although the differences are minimal. Table 7 shows the average scores based on the 1-5 scale.

**Table 7. Performance in Online School in Previous Year**

	Students	Parents
	Mean	
How did you/your child do in online language arts classes?	3.82	4.07
How did you/your child do in online school overall (grades)?	3.80	4.03
How did you/your child do in online science classes?	3.76	4.02
How would you say you/your child did socially since taking online classes?	3.63	4.02
How did you/your child do in your online math classes?	3.57	3.80

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Next, students and parents were asked if students had failed any online classes last year and if they feel they are making progress in their online program. A substantially smaller proportion of students said they had failed one or more of their online classes compared to the proportion of students who reported they had failed classes in their most recent brick-and-mortar school: compare 29.0 percent to 57.0 percent. Additionally, of students who had failed classes, the number of failed classes is lower in their online school last year than they reported failing in their last brick-and-mortar school. Over half (57.2%) failed one to three classes in their online school versus 66.3 percent in their most recent brick-and-mortar school, and, just 3.3 percent had failed more than six online classes compared to 14.6 percent who had failed that number of classes in their most recent brick-and-mortar school. However, more than one-third (34.8%) of students were not sure of the number of online classes they had failed last year. Generally, parent respondents showed similar results, although fewer parents than students were unsure of the number of classes their child had failed (compare 14.7% to 34.8%).

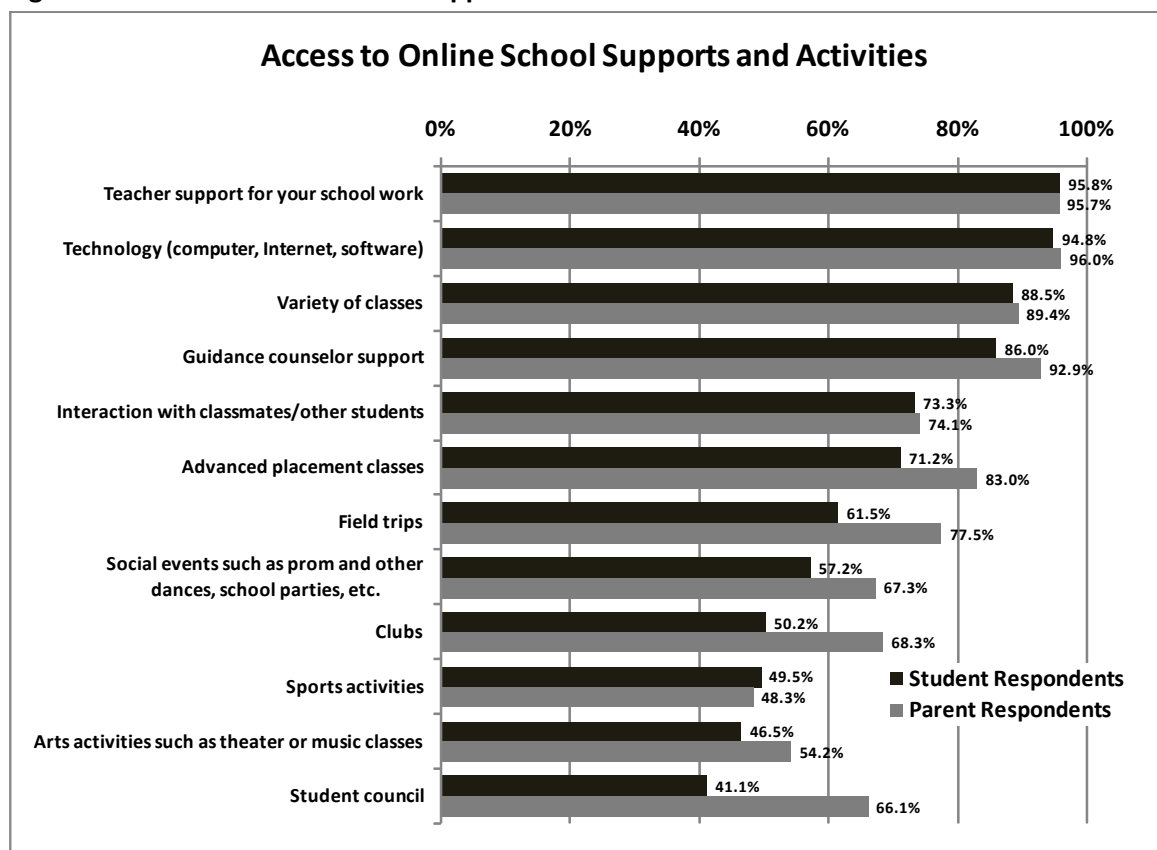
The majority of students and parents feel students are making good progress in their online program. Using a 1-5 scale where 1 was “very poor progress” and 5 was “very good progress,” over two-thirds (68.6%) of students and three-quarters (74.8%) of parents reported good to very good progress (a score of 4 or 5), while just 5.9-6.2 percent of students and parents reported poor to very poor progress (a score of 1 or 2).

### ***School Supports and Activities***

Extracurricular activities benefit students socially, academically and physically. An element of the current debate in the field of online learning is some concern that online students do not have enough access to various activities including direct support from within the online school, for example, enough teacher support and access to extracurricular activities, such as field trips, clubs and sports activities. As expected, fewer students and parents reported having enough access to sports and arts activities, and a greater number of students and parents were comfortable with their access to technology and their teachers. Additionally, the survey specifically asked respondents how satisfied they are with the amount of communication students have with their teachers, where 1 is “not at all satisfied” and 5 is “very satisfied.” In contrast with their experience in brick-and-mortar schools, students and parents are very satisfied with the communication with their teachers – the average rating is 4.24 to 4.37 based on a 1-5 scale. Just one in twenty students and parents (5.5% and 4.8% respectively) are not satisfied with the communication with their teachers.

Figure 3 describes the percentage of students and parents that reported students have enough access to the listed supports and activities. In most areas, the majority of respondents report having enough access to the various school supports and activities, although parents reported more access to a number of activities than did students. More parents than students feel that students have enough access to advanced placement classes, field trips, social events, clubs, arts activities, student council and enough support from a guidance counselor.

**Figure 3. Access to Online School Supports and Activities**



**Motivation and Focus**

Self-motivation and the ability to focus are challenges faced by students in all situations. Students reported that feeling motivated to attend and complete school was often so difficult that they simply stopped attending their brick-and-mortar school. We asked students and their parents to rate the students’ level of self-motivation to do their online class work and their ability to stay focused when doing their work online.

Students have a little more trouble staying focused than feeling motivated while doing their online class work. Nearly three-quarters (72.4%) of students reported they were motivated to complete their class work (a score of 4 or 5). Again, the respondents used a rating scale of 1-5 where 1 was “not motivated at all” and 5 was “very motivated.” Less than one in ten (8.5%) students reported they had very little motivation or were not motivated at all. Students rated their ability to stay focused slightly lower than their motivation to do their class work. The same number of students (8.7%) said it was hard stay focused (a score of 1 or 2) as reported very little motivation, while two-thirds (65.3%) reported it was easy to stay focused (a score of 4 or 5). Parents reported nearly identical results.

**Satisfaction**

We asked if students and parents are satisfied, overall, with their online program, and if they think that online learning is a better fit for them than a traditional brick-and-mortar school. Students reported a high rate of satisfaction with their online program. The great majority of students and parents (83.1% and 88.1%



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respectively) gave a rating of 4 or 5 where 1 is “not satisfied at all” and 5 is “very satisfied.” Over three-quarters of students (78.5%) and 89.1 percent of parents think that online learning is a better fit than a traditional brick-and-mortar school, although nearly one in five (17.2%) students and one in ten (9.6%) parents are not sure.

We asked students and parents to describe what they like best and like least about their online school. By far, flexibility is what students and parents reported they like best about their online school. Next, students feel their online school has no distractions, or at least many fewer distractions than they experienced in their brick-and-mortar school. After flexibility, parents reported that the online teachers are what they like best. Parents said their online school has great teachers, teacher support, effective teacher communication, individualized help and access to their teachers. Similarly, several things that students like about their school is related to teachers. Students reported they have great teachers, they have a lot of communication with their teachers, and more than anything else they receive individualized help from their teachers. Some students reported the best thing about their online school was the curriculum, and others reported they like the fact that their motivation to do their schoolwork has increased.

The following are elements of their online school that parents reported they like best after online teachers, in order of frequency:

- Curriculum
- Fewer distractions
- Parent involvement
- Increased student motivation
- “Everything”
- Help with special needs
- No homework

Of the students and parents who answered the question about what they like least about their online school, the greatest proportion said there was “nothing” they liked least, followed by the lack of social interaction. The following are additional elements that students do not like about their online school in order of frequency:

- Technology problems
- No extracurricular activities
- Too many requirements
- Lack of motivation
- Too difficult
- Teacher quality
- Lack of teacher accessibility
- Standardized testing
- Too easy

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Surprisingly, a number of parents reported “no flexibility” as something they liked least about their child’s online school. The following are additional elements that parents do not like about their online school in order of frequency:

- More requirements
- Curriculum
- Technology
- No flexibility
- Lack of communication, generally
- Lack of extracurricular activities
- Standardized testing
- Parent involvement
- Lack of motivation
- Lack of help with special needs
- Lack of support
- Bad teachers
- No hands-on activities

### **COMPARISONS OF BRICK AND MORTAR AND ONLINE SCHOOLS – STUDENTS ONLY**

We compared student performance in their last brick-and-mortar school to their performance in their online school on a number of factors, such as failed classes, communication with teachers, motivation and focus, and how students were doing in specific subjects and in school overall.

In every area of student performance, save how students are doing socially in online compared to their brick-and-mortar school, students reported they are doing far better in their online school. These differences between online and brick-and-mortar schools are statistically significant.<sup>5</sup> Table 8 gives the average scores based on a 1-5 scale where 1 is “very badly” and 5 is “very well.” The average scores presented in Table 8 are different from the averages reported in each section above because of the differences in sample size. We compared paired samples. Therefore, the number of students that provided an answer to the questions regarding their brick-and-mortar experience had also to provide a response to the same question regarding their online school last year.

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<sup>5</sup> These differences are significant at the .01 level for all areas other than how students are doing socially, where the difference is significant at the .05 level.

**Table 8. Comparison of Student Performance in Online/Brick-and-Mortar Schools, Paired Samples – Student Respondents**

		<b>Brick-and-Mortar</b>	<b>Online</b>
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>
How were you doing in school overall (grades)?	553	3.43	3.81
How would you say you were doing socially?	553	3.74	3.60
How were you doing in your math classes?	517	3.14	3.59
How were you doing in your language arts classes?	532	3.57	3.85
How were you doing in your science classes?	493	3.44	3.76

Students are highly and significantly more likely to be motivated to do their work and to stay focused on their class work in their online program than they were in their brick-and-mortar school.<sup>6</sup> The average scores are based on the 1-5 scale.

**Table 9. Comparison of Motivation and Focus in Online/Brick-and-Mortar Schools, Paired Samples – Student Respondents**

		<b>Brick-and-Mortar</b>	<b>Online</b>
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>
How motivated were you to do class work?	562	2.81	3.96
Were you able to stay focused on your class work?	561	2.66	3.83

Also significant was the substantive difference in students’ satisfaction with the amount of communication they had with their teachers in their brick-and-mortar and online schools.<sup>7</sup> Based on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is “not at all satisfied” and 5 is “very satisfied,” students’ average satisfaction score for teacher communication in their online school was 4.24 compared to 2.62 in their most recent brick-and-mortar school.

The majority of students who reported class failures in their brick-and-mortar school were no longer failing classes in their online school (58.6%).<sup>8</sup> However, there were a number of students who had failed classes in their most recent year in a brick-and-mortar school, who also failed classes in their online program (41.4%).

As expected, students who were doing well, overall, in their brick-and-mortar school were more likely to have chosen their online school because they wanted to take courses that prepared them for college and that were unavailable in their previous brick-and-mortar school. On a scale of 1-5 where 1 was not doing well at all and 5 was doing very well in school, 58.7 percent of students who reported doing well in school (a score of 4 or 5)

<sup>6</sup> These differences are significant at the .01 level.

<sup>7</sup> This difference is significant at the .01 level.

<sup>8</sup> This relationship is significant at the .01 level.

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rated the availability of online college prep courses as very important.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, students who reported doing well in school rated their ability to graduate early as a very important reason for attending an online school.<sup>10</sup>

Principals and teachers in online schools mirrored these decisions students made for choosing an online school. Through interviews, school staff reported that online schools provide high school students the opportunity to graduate -- students who, for a variety of reasons, are not able to succeed in traditional high schools, for example:

- Students who are uncomfortable and/or unhappy in traditional high school because they are being bullied, need classes to move at a lower or faster pace or have difficulty focusing in class
- Students who need a “last chance” because they have “failed everywhere else . . . online school is successful for some but not most of these students, because students need to be self-motivated and independent learners to succeed in online schools.”
- “Star” students who cannot attend traditional schools because they are traveling for sports, music, etc.
- Students with physical or emotional problems who have difficulty functioning well in a classroom

### **COMPARISON OF 9<sup>TH</sup> AND 12<sup>TH</sup> GRADE LEVEL STUDENTS**

In order to target appropriate supports and services for younger and older students who attended an online school last year, we explored students’ reasons for choosing online learning and their performance and perceptions about their online learning experience in the previous year. The researchers found statistically significant differences between grade levels and reasons for choosing online learning. Ninth grade students were significantly more likely to rate concerns about the environment in their brick-and-mortar school, feeling like they did not fit in and preparing for the GED as important reasons for choosing an online school.<sup>11</sup> Seniors were far more likely than 9<sup>th</sup> graders to rate the following as important reasons for choosing an online school:

- Fallen behind in classes in brick-and-mortar school
- Wanted classes to move faster than they did in their brick-and-mortar school
- Needed to make up credits for failed classes
- Needed to make up credits because of district transfer
- Needed a flexible schedule because of work
- Needed a flexible schedule due to family responsibilities<sup>12</sup>

There were no significant differences between grade levels and students’ online school performance in the previous year, nor were there any differences in students’ rating of their overall progress in the online program.

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<sup>9</sup> This relationship is significant at the .01 level.

<sup>10</sup> This relationship is significant at the .05 level.

<sup>11</sup> These differences are statistically significant at the .01 level, other than not “fitting in” which is significant at the .05 level.

<sup>12</sup> These differences are statistically significant at the .01 level.

However, 12<sup>th</sup> graders were significantly more motivated to do their online class work than were 9<sup>th</sup> grade students.<sup>13</sup>

There were differences in a couple of areas across grade levels and students' perception of access to school supports and services. Seniors were more likely than 9<sup>th</sup> graders to feel they had enough access to a variety of classes and younger students (9<sup>th</sup> graders) were significantly more likely than 12<sup>th</sup> graders to report they did not have enough support from a guidance counselor.

**B. FINDINGS - Description Of All Parent Survey Respondents**

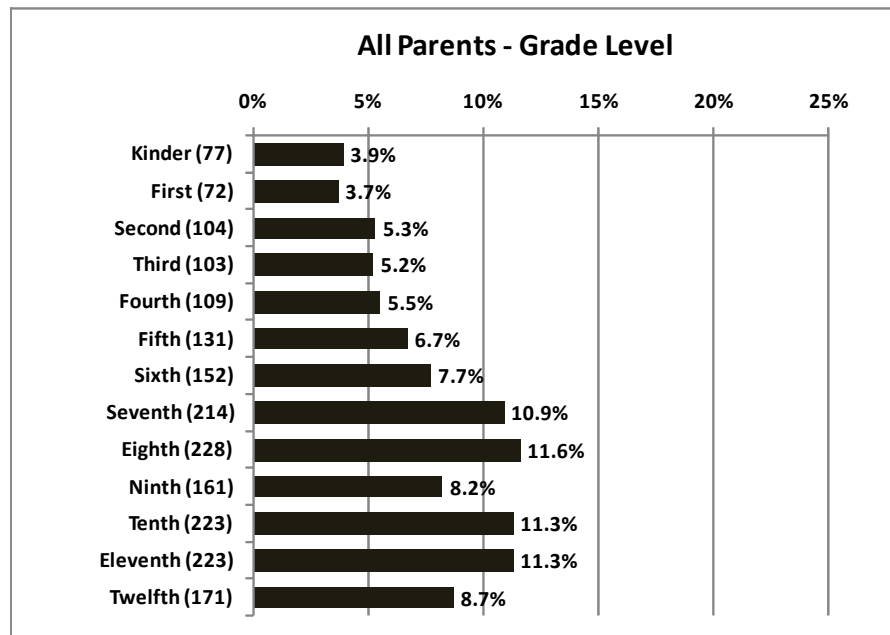
This section discusses survey results for all parents and compares results for parents of elementary and secondary school students. It also presents the perspectives of a sample of online principals and teachers and how they relate to parents' views. The percentages for each question are based only on those parents who answered that question.

A total of 1,982 parents of students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade completed surveys. The great majority of parents – 85 percent (1,685 parents) – said that their child has attended a brick-and-mortar school in the past. Only 297 parents said their child has never attended a brick-and-mortar school. Slightly more than half (51.6%) of parents report that their child is a returning online student, while nearly half (48.4%) said that their child is new to online schooling.

As Figure 4 shows, the greatest proportion of respondents had children in 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades, while the smallest proportion of respondents had children in kindergarten and first grades.

**Figure 4. All Parents – Students' Grade Level**

Overall, more than two-thirds (69.7%) of parents have children attending secondary school, while less than one-third (30.3%) have elementary school students.



<sup>13</sup> This difference is statistically significant at the .01 level.

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**All Parents: *BRICK-AND-MORTAR SCHOOL EXPERIENCE*<sup>14</sup>**

As we would expect based on the previous high school parent findings, all parents were not particularly happy with their child’s experience in a brick-and-mortar school. They felt their children were not motivated or focused on their work, and that they did not communicate enough with their child’s teacher. A substantial minority failed at least one course and many were absent from school more than 5-6 days each semester, primarily because of illness.

Parents rated how their child did in their last brick-and-mortar school on a 5-point scale, where 1 is “very badly” and 5 is “very well.” As Table 10 shows, on average, parents reported that their child was doing somewhat well in each of the rated areas.

**Table 10. All Parents: Rating of Child’s Performance in Last Brick-and-Mortar School**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
How was your child doing in school overall (grades)?	1677	3.49
How was your child doing socially?	1677	3.55
How was your child doing in his/her math classes?	1654	3.31
How was your child doing in his/her language arts classes?	1643	3.46
How was your child doing in his/her science classes?	1597	3.54

Approximately half of parents said that their child did “very well” in each area (rating of 4 or 5), while approximately one-quarter said that their child did “very badly” (rating of 1 or 2).

Parents of elementary school students rated their child’s performance in every area significantly higher than parents of secondary school students, although all average ratings for both groups are below “very good” (rating of 4 or 5).<sup>15</sup>

Parents gave lower ratings on average to their child’s motivation and focus while in brick-and-mortar school. Using a 5-point scale where 1 is “not motivated at all” and 5 is “very motivated,” the average score for motivation is 2.82. More than two-fifths of parents (43.1%) said that their child was “not motivated at all” (rating of 1 or 2) to do class work in their last brick-and-mortar school. Further, using a 5-point scale where 1 is “very hard to stay focused” and 5 is “very easy to stay focused,” the average score for ability to stay focused when doing work in class is 2.60. Fully half (50.3%) of parents said that their child found it “very hard to stay focused” (rating of 1 or 2) when doing work in class.

Parents also rated their satisfaction with the amount of communication they had with their child’s teachers in their last brick-and-mortar school. Using a 5-point scale where 1 is “not at all satisfied” and 5 is “very satisfied,”

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<sup>14</sup> The questions about their child’s experience in brick-and-mortar school were completed only by parents whose child had attended brick-and-mortar school.

<sup>15</sup> All differences between elementary and middle school parents are statistically significant at the .01 level.

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parents' average satisfaction score is only 2.42, with more than half (57.3%) indicating they are "not at all satisfied" with the amount of communication (rating of 1 or 2).

Parents of elementary school students reported that, on average, their children were more motivated to do class work: compare 2.97 with 2.77. Elementary parents also were significantly more satisfied with the amount of communication they had on average with their child's teacher(s): 2.58 versus 2.37.<sup>16</sup> Parents of elementary school children also reported that their children found it easier to stay focused on average – 2.70 versus 2.57 – but this difference was suggestive at the .10 level.

Nearly one-third (31.7%) of parents reported that their child failed a class in his/her most recent year in brick-and-mortar school. Of these children, approximately one-in-four (24.8%) failed one class, and 27.8 percent failed two classes. Slightly less than half (47.4%) failed three or more classes in their most recent year in brick-and-mortar school. In addition, one-in-eight (12.5%) parents reported that their child had been suspended or expelled from brick-and-mortar school.

Fully two-fifths (41.3%) of parents said that their child was absent from school more than 5-6 days each semester in their most recent brick-and-mortar school. Parents were asked to indicate the major reason their child missed school. By far the most frequent reason was illness, cited by 43.8 percent of parents. Sixteen percent (16.1%) said their child missed school because of bullying or because he/she felt unsafe at school.

Consistent with their higher ratings of their child's performance, elementary school parents were significantly less likely to say that their child failed any classes in the most recent year he/she was at a brick-and-mortar school: compare 13.1 percent with 37.2 percent. They are half as likely to say that their child was ever suspended or expelled from brick-and-mortar school – 6.4 percent versus 14.1 percent. They also are substantially less likely to say that their child was absent from school more than five to six days each semester in his/her most recent brick-and-mortar school: compare 33.9 percent with 43.3 percent.<sup>17</sup> Both elementary and secondary students missed this much school primarily because of illness. Secondary school students were somewhat more likely to miss school because they felt unsafe at school and/or were bullied: 16.8 percent versus 13.1 percent.

### **All Parents: DECISION TO ATTEND AN ONLINE SCHOOL**

#### ***How Heard About Online School***

Parents heard about online schools from a number of different sources, but primarily from a friend or family member (42.3%), the Internet (33.0%) and television/radio (29.3%). They were much less likely to hear about online schools from a flyer (4.6%) or an event held by their child's online school (3.2%). Interestingly, only five percent (5.4%) heard about online school through a teacher or administrator at their child's brick-and-mortar school.

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<sup>16</sup> Both of these differences between elementary and secondary school students are statistically significant at the .01 level.

<sup>17</sup> All of these differences between elementary and secondary school students are statistically significant at the .01 level.

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Parents of elementary and secondary school students predominantly heard about online schools from the same three sources, in the same order, as all parents: from a friend or family member, the Internet and television or radio.

### ***Enrolling in Online School***

While interviews with teachers and principals did not address marketing strategies, we did ask about schools' enrollment processes. The interviews indicate that a number of online schools educate parents and students about the requirements of online schooling. Schools want families to know that online school is as rigorous as brick-and-mortar school so that they can make an informed decision about whether or not online school is a good fit. Many online schools have parent and student orientations, and some schools require parents and students to learn about online school by trying it out and doing some work online. For example, one school asks students to complete a questionnaire designed to help both students and the school determine if the students are good candidates for online learning. They are required to complete the questionnaire before they are admitted. It asks students if they are able to work independently, if they like working on computers, are good with computers and are good at scheduling their own time. Based on the results, the school discourages students who are not a good fit and counsels them to think hard about starting the online program.

At another school, the principal meets with parents individually, one-on-one:

“Hopefully, through face to face meetings and visiting with each parent and explaining the dedication it takes to be an online student, they have an idea if it is right for their kid or not.”

One school created an enrollment “mini-class” that teaches the skills online students need. The short (5-6 hours) class is required as a condition of enrollment:

“Students have a week to complete the class. It is an opportunity for students to experience what it takes to be an online student and to demonstrate that they have the motivation and follow-through to be online students.”

A principal stressed the importance of setting clear expectations. This school asks families to sign a student performance agreement. Families attend a mandatory orientation session where they learn how the learning process works, and they take a mini-online course which includes a quiz, live instructional session, emailing the teacher, etc. “On the first day of school, the kids are ready to go.”

One school asks parents to complete an online form and to send the child's birth certificate and immunization records. The parent fills out a questionnaire about the child's needs and their idea about how online learning works, and then the school calls the parent to discuss their child's particular needs. The principal said, “At that point, some parents back out because it's too much work.”



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One teacher stressed that their school tries to educate families well before they sign up on what the online program entails and on the level of parent involvement that is required:

“Online is not for every student or every parent. Our learning guides have a lot of support but it is a huge commitment, it is a full-time job for most parents. We have a learning guide class to give parents a feeling of what this looks like before they enroll their child. As a child gets older, the parent may not be a learning guide but parents need to make sure that their child completes work. There is a lot more independent learning in older grades, but parents still need to be aware if their child is doing work and staying caught up.”

While several online public schools said that their school is required to accept everyone who wants to attend, other schools said that they strongly suggest students who are not a good fit for online school go elsewhere.

### ***Reasons for Choosing Online School***

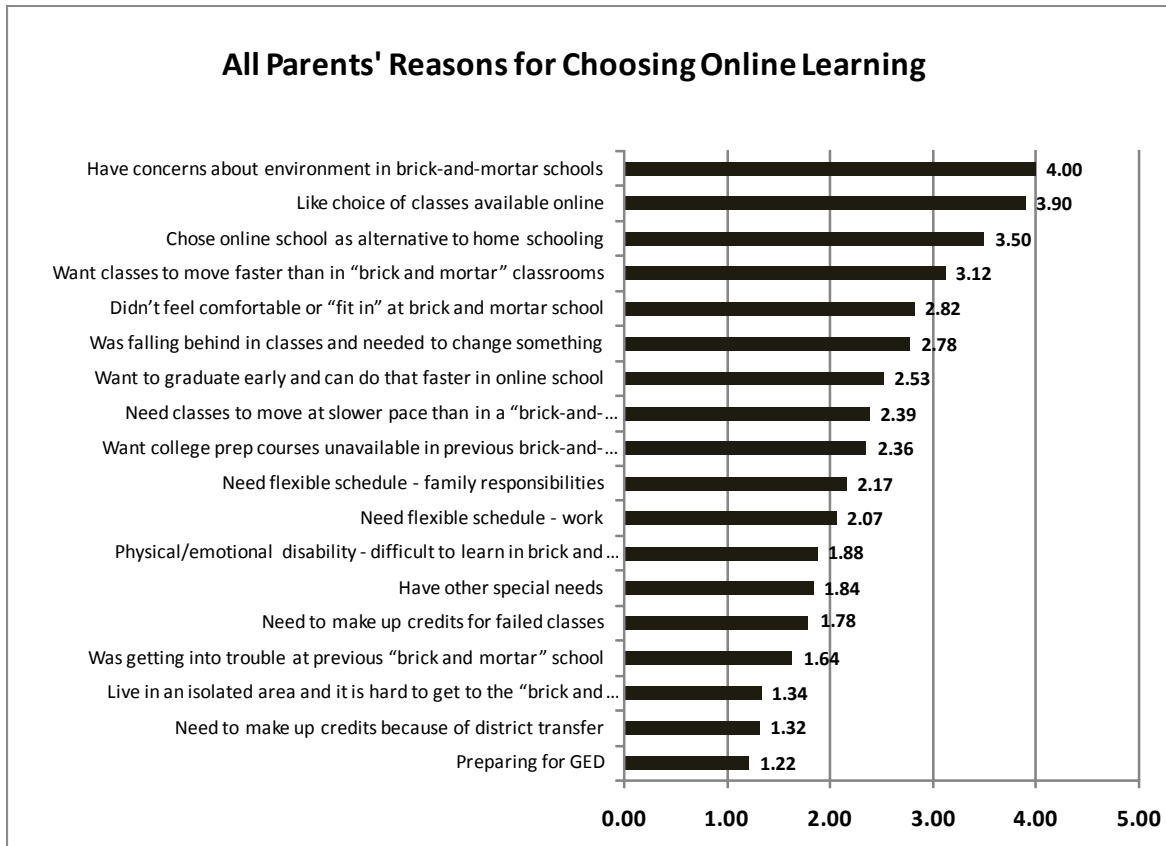
Parents were given a series of reasons why their child might have decided to attend an online school and asked to rate each reason on a 5-point scale where 1 is “not important at all” and 5 is “very important.” Parents only rated one reason – concerns about the environment in brick-and-mortar schools – as “very important” (rating of 4 or 5) on average.

The three most important reasons on average are:

1. Parents have concerns about the environment in brick-and-mortar schools (4.00)
2. Parents or their child like the choice of classes available online (3.90)
3. Parents or their child chose online school as an alternative to home schooling (3.50)

As Figure 5 shows, all other reasons are rated as considerably less important on average. It is important to note that 17.5 percent of parents said that their child has learning disabilities.

**Figure 5. All Parents' Reasons for Choosing Online Learning**



Parents of elementary and secondary school students give the same three reasons, in the same order of importance, for why their child decided to attend an online school. However, parents of elementary school students give significantly higher importance ratings to concerns about the environment in brick-and-mortar schools (4.18 versus 3.92) and choosing online school as an alternative to home schooling (3.62 versus 3.45). Further, as we would expect, there are statistically significant differences between the groups in their ratings of a number of reasons, although none of these reasons are rated as particularly important by either group. Parents of secondary school students say every one of the following reasons is significantly more important than did parents of elementary school students:

- Your child didn't feel comfortable or "fit in" at his/her brick-and-mortar school (2.97 versus 2.47)
- Your child was falling behind in his/her classes in brick-and-mortar school (2.98 versus 2.28)
- Your child wants to graduate early and can do that faster at an online school (2.67 versus 2.18)
- Parents or their child want specific courses that prepare him/her for college that were unavailable in his/her previous school (2.50 versus 2.03)
- Your child needs to make up credits for classes that he/she failed (2.01 versus 1.23)
- Your child needs to make up credits because he/she transferred from another district (1.39 versus 1.16)
- Your child was getting into trouble at his/her brick-and-mortar school (1.72 versus 1.46)
- Your child needs a flexible schedule because of work (2.12 versus 1.96)
- Your child is preparing for the GED (1.25 versus 1.12)

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We asked teachers and principals working in online schools for their perspectives of why parents and students choose online schools. Generally, they believe that parents and children need more options than those provided by brick-and-mortar schools. Several explicitly said that parents choose online because they want to home school but are not comfortable doing it alone: “parents who worry about the school environment but don’t want to home school.” These families want teacher support. Further, “parents are looking for schools where they have control over what is happening to their kids.”

They also said that online school is a good option for students with health problems who miss a lot of school because online school is “flexible” in terms of schedule; the same is true of families who travel a lot. Several interviewees said that parents choose online school for children with autism or Asperger’s Syndrome. One teacher said that they have families in small communities who choose online school in the years that they perceive that the only teacher for their child’s grade level is a bad teacher. The same teacher said that 25 percent of families need online schooling for religious reasons: Muslims and Jehovah’s Witnesses do not celebrate birthdays, holiday parties or do the pledge of allegiance, so the children are ostracized in traditional school. One principal stated that some students choose online school,

“...because they want the opportunity to review material in a way that is difficult in a traditional environment. A certain type of student needs to hear information repeatedly and have it delivered in different ways with different instructional strategies. With digital information, they can go faster or slower – learning is very individualized.”

Interviewees made a distinction between why elementary and secondary families choose online school. Several teachers reported that online schools are a good option for parents of elementary school children who “want to keep their children close.” They believe that choosing online school is more about the parents’ needs than the students’. These parents don’t want their children to “grow up too fast” by being exposed to the real world too early. This view is consistent with the reasons rated as most important in the parent survey: parents are concerned about the environment in brick-and-mortar schools. It should be noted that teachers and principals understand that this choice works only if parents are “willing to put in the time and effort to be their child’s ‘learning partner.’”

“Parents really want high-end involvement with their students – they want to be very involved in their education. They are not quite ready to let their kids go to their neighborhood school.”

Teachers and principals think that secondary school students, particularly high school students, choose online school for different reasons than elementary school parents and students. They believe that online school offers an opportunity to graduate for a number of groups of students who are unable to succeed in traditional brick-and-mortar high schools. As reported previously, teachers and principals identified a number of types of students as falling into this group, including:

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- Students who are uncomfortable and/or unhappy in traditional high school because they are being bullied, need classes to move at a slower or faster pace, and/or can't focus in brick-and-mortar classes.
  - Students who need a "last chance" because they have failed everywhere else -- "a whole group of kids for whom public school has not worked out." School staff stress that some of these students are successful in online school but most are not because students need to be self-motivated and independent to succeed in online schools.
  - "Star" students who cannot attend traditional school because they are traveling for sports, music, or other activities.

For example, one teacher reported:

"All of my families have activities – soccer, church, another aspect of socialization in their lives. Children need sports, Brownies, etc., so they have an element outside of what online schools offer."

Teachers' and principals' views generally are consistent with the parent survey findings -- secondary school students are more likely than elementary school students to choose online schools because they didn't feel comfortable or "fit in" at their brick-and-mortar school or were falling behind in brick-and-mortar school and needed to change something.

### ***Characteristics of Successful Online Students***

We asked online teachers and principals to identify the characteristics of successful online students. Interviewees repeatedly stressed the importance of parent support, especially for elementary school students but to some extent for students in all grades.

"Successful kids are kids with parents who are very excited about a home-based opportunity, always communicating with teachers, very involved in their child's education. There is a three-way chain of communication: between teacher and student, student and parent and parent and teacher."

"The main equalizing factor is supportive parents. In high school, students can do it themselves if self-motivated, but in the lower grades a supportive family is critical."

"Kids vary so much but the most successful have parent involvement in their education."

"We count on a partnership with parents. It looks very different in elementary, middle and high school, but even high school parents need to check in with their student. The more involved the parent is, the better the student does."

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They also emphasized that students need to be motivated to succeed in online school, just like they have to be motivated in brick-and-mortar school. Although online school does not require students to adhere to the same schedule, it requires as much work as traditional school:

“We get students who think it’s easier than traditional school, and then find it’s not easier and in fact that it’s harder to skate by under the radar because teachers have contact with every single student.”

“The most successful students are self-motivated and have a tremendous amount of parent support. Children have to learn to be organized. It is a good lesson in time management and one that serves them well into adulthood.”

“Common characteristics of successful students are a high degree of motivation, self-discipline and involved parents who assist with providing structure and accountability.”

Online schools work for some students who were struggling in brick-and-mortar schools, but certainly not for all students.

“We graduate some kids who wouldn’t have graduated otherwise. In other cases, students are struggling with something outside of school and don’t do better in online than they did elsewhere because they are still facing some challenges such as substance abuse. But sometimes the last resort works for students and they graduate.”

“Students who are not successful in an online environment often have a history of not being successful in a traditional environment.”

Staff at a number of online schools said that, when students are unsuccessful at their schools, they encourage the students to go to a brick-and-mortar school.

### **All Parents: PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN AN ONLINE SCHOOL**

We asked parents of returning online students a series of questions about their child’s experience in online school last year.<sup>18</sup>

#### ***Grades, Course Completion and Overall Progress***

Table 11 shows that parents believe their child performed very well in online school last year. Using a 5-point scale, where 1 is “very badly” and 5 is “very well,” on average, parents believe that their child performed “very well” (rating of 4 or 5) in each area. Approximately four-fifths of parents said their child was doing “very well”

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<sup>18</sup> A total of 931 parents, or 51.6 percent of parents who told us whether or not their child had been in online school before, said that their child is returning to online schooling, while 875 parents said their child is new to online schooling. One hundred and seventy-six (176) parents did not tell us whether or not their child had previously attended online school.

(rating of 4 or 5) in each area, while fewer than ten percent said their child was doing “very badly” (rating of 1 or 2).

**Table 11. All Parents: Rating of Child’s Performance in Online School Last Year**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
How did your child do in his or her online school overall (grades)?	907	4.36
How would you say your child did socially since taking online classes?	897	4.27
How did your child do in his or her online math classes?	897	4.16
How did your child do in his or her online language arts classes?	895	4.31
How did your child do in his or her online science classes?	880	4.33

While both elementary and secondary school parents say that their child is doing “very well” on every performance measure, parents of elementary school children are significantly more likely to say that their child is doing “very well” in each area.

Nearly one-in-eight parents (12.1%) said that their child failed an online class. Of these children, more than one-third (35.9%) failed one course, one-quarter (25.0%) failed two courses, and the remaining 39.1 percent failed three or more courses in online school last year. On average, parents were very positive about their child’s overall progress in their online program. Using a 5-point scale where 1 is “very poor” and 5 is “very good,” the average rating was 4.36, or “very good” (rating of 4 or 5).

Only one elementary school parent said that their child failed an online class, while approximately one-in-six (16.5%) secondary school parents reported that their child failed at least one online class. Of this latter group, more than one-third (35.6%) said their child failed one online class, one-quarter (24.4%) said their child failed two courses, and 40 percent said their child failed three or more online classes.

**Online Curricula**

Interviews with teachers and principals working in online schools indicate that the only similarity in curricula across online schools is that all curricula need to be aligned with state standards. At one extreme, some online schools create their own curriculum. In these cases, the curriculum is very, very flexible and can be adjusted to best meet individual students’ needs. One school has licenses to various online programs and purchases pieces of different curricula. Teachers write their own manuals and put it all together because “no one curriculum works completely.” At the other extreme, the online school buys a curriculum and uses it as is. For example, K-12 Schools use this approach.

A number of online schools are extremely committed to tailoring their curriculum to meet the needs of individual students. These teachers and principals talk about “catering to each individual student.” They want to allow more advanced students to work ahead of their grade level, and also to allow students who have fallen behind grade level to learn in a way that helps them catch up. For example, one school just completed a professional development session with teachers on how to individualize the learning experience as much as possible “to provide an authentic learning experience that deals with each child as an individual based on their personality and learning style.” One teacher uses blackboard to give different assignments to different students.

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Since the students only see their own assignments, they don't know if they are doing extra work because they need help in a specific area. Other online schools, while flexible, do not let students work ahead of their grade level. Some of the flexible schools buy curricula, while others design it themselves. Several interviewees said that their math program is based on assessments, and that students are placed at the appropriate instructional level and given remediation until they reach grade level.

"Our school is able to adjust our curriculum for individual student needs because we have small class sizes. My middle school classes have less than 10 students, and my high school classes range from 12-15 to 30 students. If students can't find resources to do research I help them, and if a student is having trouble understanding a concept after using all available resources I talk to the student for as long as I need to. I've changed assignments for students; for example, rather than making a student who has trouble writing a three-page paper, I let him do a poster or a PowerPoint presentation."

"Our curriculum is very flexible! The school purchases a curriculum but we can change things. Curriculum is individualized for gifted and talented as well as for special education. Online teachers are versed in individualized learning. This year we've given teachers free rein and we do a lot of individualization for the kids. It is way more fun for teachers and a better learning experience for students."

"We design our own curriculum, mapped from state requirements. It is very easy to tailor to student needs. Teachers work in teacher teams to develop and tailor the curriculum."

"We partner with K-12, a management company that also provides curricula to schools. We customize the curriculum for every single student according to their needs."

"We use a math program that is customized for each student. Students take an initial assessment and then the program creates a custom plan for them based on where they are in the initial assessment. Every four to six weeks we reassess students and remove what they mastered and pull back in what they are weak in. No two students experience the exact same class."

"Our biggest strength in general is that we have a highly individualized curriculum for each student. The classes are mastery-based so they can move at a pace that works best for them."

Other online schools more or less follow the curriculum as is:

"We have had instances of altering the curriculum for SPED but for the most part the curriculum stays the same. An 8<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum is an 8<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum. What is individualized is that kids get to learn at their own pace."

"The teachers are just now learning how to modify the curriculum and assignments. All the teachers except one are first year teachers who are hesitant to make modifications because they want to keep the fidelity to the program."

To the extent that parents who completed surveys have children who are attending schools with more flexible curricula, it is possible that their children are more successful in online than in brick-and-mortar schools because the school is adapting the curriculum to best meet their child’s learning style and needs.

**School Supports and Activities**

The great majority of parents believe that their child has enough access to important school supports: teacher support, technology, variety of classes, guidance counselors and advanced placement classes. More than three-quarters (77.7%) think that their child has enough interaction with classmates/other students in the online environment. In addition, a majority of parents think that their child’s online school offers enough activities, for example, field trips, clubs and social events.

**Table 12. All Parents: Enough Access to Supports/Activities Through Online School**

School Supports and Activities	Percentage
Teacher support for child’s school work	96.5
Technology (computer, Internet, software)	96.4
Variety of classes	91.7
Guidance counselor support	87.7
Advanced placement classes	82.6
Field trips	82.4
Interaction with classmates/other students	77.7
Clubs	70.4
Social events such as prom and other dances, school parties, etc.	66.1
Arts activities such as theater or music classes	62.6
Student council	55.3
Sports activities	51.6

As Table 13 shows, parents of elementary and secondary school students differed significantly in their perceptions of whether or not their child has enough access to several school supports and activities. Parents of an elementary school child are significantly more likely to think that their child has enough access to a variety of classes, field trips, interaction with classmates/other students and arts activities such as theater or music classes in his/her online school. In contrast, parents of a secondary school child are significantly more likely to think that their child has enough access to guidance counselor support and student council.



**Table 13. Comparison of Elementary/Secondary Parents: Enough Access to Supports/Activities Through Online School**

School Supports and Activities	% of Elementary School Parents	% of Secondary School Parents
Teacher support for child’s school work	98.1	96.0
Technology (computer, Internet, software)	97.3	96.0
Variety of classes**	96.2	89.9
Guidance counselor support**	82.0	90.0
Advanced placement classes	83.3	82.4
Field trips*	86.7	80.8
Interaction with classmates/other students*	81.7	76.2
Clubs	71.2	70.2
Social events such as prom and other dances, school parties, etc.	66.5	65.9
Arts activities such as theater or music classes**	74.3	57.9
Student council**	45.9	59.0
Sports activities	55.5	50.0

\*\*Difference between elementary and secondary parents is significant at the .01 level.

\*Difference between elementary and secondary parents is significant at the .05 level.

One of the major concerns about online schooling is that children do not have enough interaction with their classmates. The parent survey data show that the great majority of parents think that this is not a problem for their child. Interviews with a sample of online teachers and principals shed some light on this issue. As is the case for most aspects of online schooling, online schools vary greatly in their commitment and efforts to facilitate social interaction among students. Some online schools proactively provide opportunities for students to communicate both online and in-person, while other schools assume that students have sufficient social opportunities outside of school. Teachers and principals believe that younger students typically get their social needs met through contacts at church and from events and social interactions that their parents arrange for them. They think that older students have friendship networks that they already have established, and also make friends through sports or other special activities. Further, older students may have left brick-and-mortar school because they were having problems with other students.

The interviews with teachers and principals indicate that online schools vary greatly in their commitment and ability to provide opportunities for students to interact with each other. Some schools assume that students have sufficient interaction opportunities outside of school, while others try to differing degrees to provide students with opportunities to communicate with each other.

Interaction takes different forms in different schools, partly because students may be geographically distant from each other. For example, one school has a social network that lets students communicate with each other – they use it within the school walls to create groups and classrooms so that students have the chance to socialize. This school also has optional monthly field trips and weekly or bi-weekly in-person study sessions at which students are welcome to come and socialize. Another school has a weekly online assembly and, at least once a week, a live instructional session “where the kids can chat, talk on the microphone, and talk during and

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after class. Once a month we have a social activity like bowling, fall festival, or prom, and once a month students get together with advisor groups to do activities like pizza parties and visits to the museum.” One school has clubs for secondary school students and monthly hikes and picnics, while the elementary school holds cultural events. Since they are a single district school, all of the students are local and can participate in these activities.

One principal of a k-12 school bristled at being asked how online students get their social needs met:

“This is one of the biggest misconceptions of online schools. We provide a number of social activities and even have a prom. They have small group get-togethers. Kids collaborate all the time in online school sessions, we have 102 clubs that kids can join, we have student government and we have traditional socialization opportunities. Kids can be in a club with kids in another country. Kids communicate over Facebook, they text and they instant message. I don’t think that the Internet connection is different than ‘real world’ connection to kids.”

Despite the plethora of opportunities for students to interact, this principal noted that most of their families “have Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, church and other activities. Kids who were bullied especially had too much social drama in high school, they don’t want that drama. They have friends outside of school and want to learn in school.”

Other principals voiced the belief that students do not need to interact with other students because they have ample opportunities to socialize outside of school: “Most students are involved in church activity and they socialize there. All socialization is outside of school. We present a curriculum and counseling but that’s as far as it goes for us.”

### ***Motivation, Focus and Communication***

On average, parents are very positive about their child’s motivation, focus and especially the amount of communication they have with their child’s teacher(s). Using a 5-point scale where 1 is “not motivated at all” and 5 is “very motivated,” parents rate their child’s motivation to do his/her online class work as 4.04 on average, or “very motivated” (4 or 5 rating). They are slightly less positive about their child’s ability to stay focused when doing work online. Using a 5-point scale where 1 is “very hard to stay focused” and 5 is “very easy to stay focused,” the average score is 3.93, or almost “very easy to stay focused.” Parents give communication an extremely high rating. On a 5-point scale where 1 is “not at all satisfied and 5 is “very satisfied,” parents average satisfaction with the amount of communication they have with their child’s teacher(s) is 4.49, or “very satisfied.”

Parents of elementary and secondary school students rate their child’s motivation to do online work and ability to stay focused when doing work online similarly. Although both groups are very satisfied with the amount of communication they have with their child’s teacher(s) on average, elementary school parents are significantly more satisfied: compare 4.67 with 4.41.

We asked teachers and principals how students and parents communicate with online teachers. Some schools set a minimum requirement for how often teachers need to communicate with students and/or parents – once

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a week, twice a month, once a month -- while other schools leave it to the teacher's discretion: "Teachers communicate when they need to, if the student is having problems." The amount of communication also depends on the students and their preferences:

"Some students do an awesome job and communicate directly very rarely because they don't need help and understand what they are doing. Others communicate daily with teachers with questions and comments. They value that interaction."

Similar to other aspects of online schooling, there is a great deal of variety in how and how often teachers communicate with students and parents – and how and how often students and parents communicate with teachers. Many schools are proactive about reaching out to students, particularly those who are not doing well. For example, one principal said that their school has a "hot list," which is a spreadsheet with students' current average in each class and overall average. They sort this list from low to high and have different colors to alert them to students with a problem.

"A student with a problem in only one class knows to work with their teacher, but if a student is struggling in all classes I need to be aware. We really target students in red in the hot list for communication, and teachers, counselors and I work with them."

One k-8 principal stated: "Communication increases learning. We do a tremendous amount of communication with parents." This school uses virtual classrooms, and students are required to be in the virtual classroom twice a week for at least one hour. Parents meet teachers in the virtual classroom so the teacher can show parents the work their child has completed. The principal reported: "We encourage as much communication as the parent is comfortable with. Sometimes parents want less communication from teachers." Another principal said that, if a parent calls, the teacher needs to respond within 24 hours.

Some schools go beyond communication to provide additional services to students. For example, one high school has academic coaches who meet face-to-face with students living in their communities. The coaches help students with career plans: college, internships, vocational training, etc. They also offer in-person tutoring. In addition, this school has wrap-around services provided by counselors and intervention specialists.

"If a student is not engaging in school, they meet directly with the family and the academic coach and try to figure out what the best intervention is – social, emotional, etc. They figure out if the family/child needs food, shelter, family counseling, drug and alcohol counseling, etc. Response to Intervention (RTI) only deals with academic and behavioral issues. We do that plus social, emotional, life, etc."

At most schools, teachers, students and parents communicate by email, but they also are able to communicate by telephone. At several schools teachers have regular office hours for phone calls, but will answer emails at any time. Other methods include virtual classrooms, web conferencing, blackboard, texting, Facebook and instant messaging. Some schools have counselors, advisors and/or mentors who work with students and parents.

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Schools also use creative approaches to communicate. For example, one school uses mentors as liaisons between students and teachers. The mentors communicate with their students weekly, and know the students well. The mentors contact the teacher if they feel a student is struggling with a topic or needs extra help. One principal stressed that teachers are “constantly giving the kids feedback on their work/assignments,” and other principals said that their teachers provide feedback on assignments.

At some schools teachers also communicate regularly with each other. At one k-12 school, teachers meet every week in an online classroom; they have four in-person full day meetings each year. This teacher said: “I feel like I have colleagues. They know a lot of the same families because kids have siblings. We plan together about how to help them. We work together all the time on families and curriculum.” Schools may have teams of teachers who work together.

Every interviewee thinks that there is enough communication with teachers. One teacher stated: “I have a lot more contact with my parents than I ever did in the classroom. We are more of a team. If something is not working, I work with the parents.” Another teacher said: “I can give them more attention online than in a classroom. There is limited time in a classroom so I can’t spend time with each kid individually.” And one principal stated:

“Students, parents and teachers communicate all the time. As a former traditional teacher and a former online teacher, I know I communicated better with my kids and parents in the online school. Online teachers communicate with parents several times a week. You wouldn’t see that in a traditional school.”

### **Satisfaction**

Parents are extremely satisfied with the online program. On the same 5-point satisfaction scale described above, on average, parents rated their satisfaction with the online program as 4.52 – an extremely high satisfaction score. Only 1.4 percent said they are “not at all satisfied” (rating of 1 or 2), while an unusually high 63.9 percent rated their satisfaction as a 5 – “very satisfied.” Consistent with these responses, fully 90.4 percent of parents said that they think online learning is a better fit for their child than a traditional brick-and-mortar school. Only eight parents (0.9%) said online school is not a better fit, while less than ten percent (8.7%) said they weren’t sure.

While parents of elementary and secondary school students are extremely satisfied overall with online school, elementary school parents are significantly more satisfied: 4.65 versus 4.48. Both groups are equally likely to think that online learning is a better fit for their child than a traditional brick-and-mortar school.

**All Parents: COMPARISON OF ONLINE AND BRICK-AND-MORTAR EXPERIENCE**

This section uses paired t-tests to compare individual parent’s responses to some critical questions about brick-and-mortar and online school. It only includes parents whose children have experience in both settings.

**Grades**

Parents clearly report that their child is more successful in online school than they were in brick-and-mortar school. For each question about how their child was doing in school – overall, socially, math, language arts and science – the average rating is statistically significantly higher for online than for brick-and-mortar schools.<sup>19</sup> As Table 14 shows, in each case the average rating for online schools is at least 4.0, indicating that children are doing “very well” in each area.

**Table 14. All Parents: Comparison of Child’s Brick-and-Mortar and Online School Performance**

		<b>Mean</b>	<b>N</b>
Pair 1	How was your child doing in brick-and-mortar school overall (grades)?	3.45	705
	How did your child do in his or her online school overall (grades)?	4.28	705
Pair 2	How was your child doing socially in brick-and-mortar school?	3.44	698
	How would you say your child did socially since taking online classes?	4.16	698
Pair 3	How was your child doing in his/her math classes in brick-and-mortar school?	3.31	688
	How did your child do in his or her online math classes?	4.08	688
Pair 4	How was your child doing in his/her language arts classes in brick-and-mortar school?	3.46	681
	How did your child do in his or her online language arts classes?	4.24	681
Pair 5	How was your child doing in his/her science classes in brick-and-mortar school?	3.52	658
	How did your child do in his or her online science classes?	4.24	658

Parents report that their elementary and secondary school students are uniformly more successful in online than in brick-and-mortar school, with both groups indicating that their child performed substantially better in every area in online school. Differences for both groups are highly statistically significant.<sup>20</sup>

**Motivation, Focus and Communication**

Consistent with the above results, parents report that their child is more motivated to complete school work and finds it easier to stay focused in online than in brick-and-mortar school. The average rating for these questions is statistically significantly higher for online than for brick-and-mortar schools.<sup>21</sup> (See Table 15). The greatest difference in parents’ perceptions of the two settings is in their satisfaction with the amount of

<sup>19</sup> All of the differences between online and brick-and-mortar school are significant at the .01 level.

<sup>20</sup> All difference between online and brick-and-mortar performance are statistically significant at the .01 level for both elementary and secondary school students.

<sup>21</sup> The differences between online and brick-and-mortar schools are statistically significant at the .01 level.

communication they have with their child’s teacher(s). On average, parents are much more satisfied with the amount of communication in online than in brick-and-mortar schools: compare 4.46 with 2.42. This difference is highly significant.<sup>22</sup>

**Table 15. Parents: Comparison of Child’s Brick-and-Mortar and Online School Motivation and Focus, and Amount of Communication with their Child’s Teacher(s)**

		Mean	N
Pair 1	When your child was in a brick-and-mortar school, how motivated was he/she to do class work?	2.77	713
	Please rate your child’s level of motivation to do his/her online class work	4.03	713
Pair 2	When your child was in a brick-and-mortar school, how able was he/she to stay focused when he/she was doing work in class?	2.54	715
	Please rate your child’s ability to stay focused when he/she is doing work online	3.92	715
Pair 3	When your child was in a brick-and-mortar school, how satisfied were you with the amount of communication you had with your child’s teachers?	2.42	713
	How satisfied are you with the amount of communication you have with your child’s teacher(s) in online school	4.46	713

Similarly, both elementary and secondary school parents report that their children are substantially more motivated to do their class work and focused on their work in online than in brick-and-mortar school. Further, parents are much more satisfied with the amount of communication they have with their child’s online teacher(s). Differences for both groups are highly statistically significant.<sup>23</sup>

**WHAT DOES COLORADO NEED TO DO TO SUPPORT ONLINE LEARNING**

Generally, teachers and principals believe that online learning is developing and evolving and that it is becoming more important. They strongly feel that there is a need for online schools, and that online schools need more financial support. Further, several suggested the funding mechanism for online schools needs to be adjusted, and that funding should not be based on seat time the way it is in a traditional school. They feel this approach is not fair to online schools and also that it requires a great deal of paperwork, much more than what brick-and-mortar schools need to do. Suggestions for an alternate approach include basing funding on competency, the course level, or on average daily attendance. Another funding issue concerns technology. Schools want enough so that they can offer all families, including low income and rural families, the same technology that they need

<sup>22</sup> The difference between online and brick-and-mortar schools is statistically significant at the .01 level.

<sup>23</sup> All differences between online and brick-and-mortar are statistically significant at the .01 level for both elementary and secondary school students.

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to participate in online school. Finally, as with traditional schools, several suggested that online schools need enough funding to keep class sizes small because that improves communication, quality and effectiveness. One teacher stressed the need to educate the public and traditional schools “because there is a lot of negativity about online schools.” For example, at conferences that include teachers from traditional and online schools, online teachers “spend their time defending and explaining what they do.”

“There are so many positives, great success stories, so many students thriving and doing really well. We need to educate the public and traditional schools about the positive side of online learning. We are working with families who would be home schooling, and this is a better curriculum and provides more support and is good for kids who aren’t successful in traditional schools.”

Several interviewees said that they would like training for teachers in how to be effective online teachers, and more generally, professional development for teachers and staff. A principal wanted the state to move from a 9-month to year round calendar, because some students need extra time to master a course. One principal wanted a state online curriculum “so that if a kid moves from district to district he’s still in the same curriculum with the same language and same standards.” This would help students improve their TCAP scores. However, based on teachers’ and principals’ perspectives about the value of individualized curricula, this view may not be popular with all online schools.

Online teachers and principals want to figure out best practices in online schooling -- what works and what doesn’t work. One avenue for this could be an online conference in which teachers from schools across the state and possibly across the nation share what works at their schools. Teachers want the opportunity to collaborate beyond their individual schools.

Many schools reported that the logistics of administering TCAP are “very challenging” for online schools. Schools need to coordinate with other online schools so that all students are tested in person, and they need to supply a proctor for each grade. This is a problem for schools with small staffs and which serve students in a wide geographic area. One principal suggested that Colorado computerize the TCAP and create centers where students can go to be tested. Interviewees cited other problems with TCAP as well. First, that “testing should be given in the environment students are most comfortable with, so online students should be tested in an online setting, not a different location.” Second, schools don’t get TCAP results until August, which “doesn’t give us enough time to make adjustments.”

Some principals and teachers stressed that, while online schools need to be accountable, they should not be measured in the same way as a traditional school. They should use measures that suit the online environment. One principal stated:

“We are treated like other schools as far as the accountability framework. But when you look at our high school kids, 60 percent are coming in at least one year behind based on credits and then our graduation rate looks bad. I think that we should have similar standards and growth but there needs to be a definitional adjustment.”

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## KEY FINDINGS

- Of student respondents, the majority of students are in the upper grades (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade); the smallest number are in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and the greatest proportion of students just starting online schooling is 9<sup>th</sup> graders.
- Slightly more than one in ten student respondents reported a learning disability.
- Nearly all students in online schools have previously attended a brick-and-mortar school.

### *Brick-and-Mortar School Experience*

- One quarter of students reported they were not doing well in their last brick-and-mortar school, while nearly half reported they were doing well.
- Parents of elementary school students rated their child's performance in every area significantly higher than did parents of secondary school students.
- Nearly three quarters of high school students had little motivation and had trouble staying focused on their work in their last brick-and-mortar school.
- Of all parents, approximately half said their child was not motivated at all to do class work and found it very hard to stay focused when doing work in class. Parents of elementary school students reported that their children were more motivated to do class work, found it easier to stay focused and were more satisfied with the amount of communication they had with their child's teacher than did parents of secondary students.
- About half of high school students and parents reported they were not satisfied with the amount of communication that students had with their teachers in their last brick and mortar school.
- Over half of students reported they had failed classes in their last brick-and-mortar school. Many fewer elementary school parents than secondary parents reported their student failed classes.
- The proportion of students who reported they had failed classes increased as their satisfaction with teacher communication decreased.
- The majority of students were absent for more than five to six days each semester. Student respondents' top three reasons for their absences were illness, problems at home and bullying.
- Parents reported that their students were absent from school most often because of illness or bullying/felt unsafe at school.
- In narrative responses that describe reasons for absences, many students and parents reported having problems with teachers. A number of students missed school due to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Others reported pregnancy and some students said they felt like a failure, felt along and they were not getting the help they needed in their brick-and-mortar school.



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### ***Decision to Attend an Online School and Enrollment Process***

- Most parents and students heard about their online school from a friend or family member.
- Choice of available classes, early graduation and the desire for classes to move faster than they did in their brick-and-mortar school were the top reasons high school students decided to attend an online school.
- Parents' first choices for choosing to attend an online school were concerns about the environment in brick-and-mortar schools followed by choosing an online school as an alternative to home schooling.
- Generally, teachers and principals believe that parents and students choose online schools because they need more options. Specifically, educators reported that online learning is a good option for families that need flexibility due to illness and travel. Others said families choose online schools for religious reasons. They reported that parents of elementary students "want to keep their children close" and secondary students choose online learning because it offers an opportunity to graduate for various groups of students, e.g. star students, struggling students.
- Many online schools educate parents and students about the requirements of online schooling. For example schools provide orientation sessions, enrollment "mini-classes," questionnaires about needs and expectations, etc.

### ***Previous Experience in Online School***

- Students reported doing well last year in their online school overall, and in their math, language arts and science classes. Students report doing less well in math and better in language arts.
- Nearly all parents believe that their child performed well overall and in their math, language arts and science classes, although elementary school parents are significantly more likely than secondary school parents to say that their child is doing well in each area.
- A substantially smaller proportion of students said they had failed one or more of their online classes compared to the proportion of students who had failed classes in their most recent brick-and-mortar school.
- The majority of students said they have enough access to the various school supports and activities, such as access to a variety of classes, technology, teacher support, etc. However, fewer report having enough access to sports and arts activities, social events, clubs and student council.
- Parents of elementary school students are significantly more likely than parents of secondary school students to report that their child has enough access to a variety of classes, field trips, interaction with classmates and arts activities in their online schools.
- Teachers and principals indicate that online schools vary greatly in their commitment and ability to provide opportunities for students to interact with each other.

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- The great majority of students and parents are satisfied, overall, with their online program, are satisfied with their communication with online teachers and think that online learning is a better fit for them than a traditional brick-and-mortar school. Elementary school parents are significantly more satisfied than are secondary school parents with their online school.
  - There is a great deal of variety in how and how often teachers communicate with students and parents and how students and parents communicate with teachers. Many schools are proactive about reaching out to students, particularly those who are not doing well.
  - By far, flexibility is what high school students and parents reported they like best about their online school, followed by “great” teachers, teacher support, effective teacher communication, individualized help and access to teachers. Technology problems and no extracurricular activities are issues that high school students like least about their online experience.

### ***Comparisons of Brick-and-Mortar and Online Schools – Students Only***

- In every area of student performance, save how students are doing socially in online compared to their brick-and-mortar school, students report they are doing far better in their online school.
- Students are significantly more likely to be motivated to do their work and to stay focused on their class work in their online program than when they were in their brick-and-mortar school.
- Students are significantly more satisfied with the communication they have with their online teachers than they were in their more recent brick-and-mortar school.

### ***Comparisons of 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Level Students***

- Ninth grade students were significantly more likely to rate concerns about the environment in their brick-and-mortar school, feeling like they did not fit in and preparing for the GED as important reasons for choosing an online school. Seniors were far more likely than 9<sup>th</sup> graders to report that falling behind in classes, wanting classes to move faster and needing to make up credits were their primary reasons for choosing an online school.
- Seniors were more likely than 9<sup>th</sup> graders to feel they had enough access to a variety of classes, while 9<sup>th</sup> graders were more likely to report they did not have enough support from a guidance counselor in their online school.

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### ***Teachers and Principals***

- Educators cannot stress enough, the importance of parent involvement and support in students' online learning.
- Students must be motivated to succeed in online school.
- Online schools work for some students who were struggling in brick-and-mortar schools – “sometimes, the last resort works for students and they graduate.”
- The only similarity in curricula across online schools is that all curricula are aligned with state standards. At one extreme, schools create their own curriculum; at the other extreme, the online school buys a curriculum and uses it as is.
- Many online schools are extremely committed to tailoring their curriculum to meet the needs of individual students.
- Online schools need more financial support; funding should not be based on seat time.
- Online schools need to be able to offer technology access to all families, including low-income and families in remote areas.
- Teachers and principals want to develop best practices for online schooling.
- The logistics of administering the TCAP in online schools is extremely challenging.
- Teachers and principals want additional professional development, specific to the online learning environment.

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## **APPENDICES**

- A. Student Survey
- B. Parent Survey\_English
- C. Parent Survey\_Spanish
- D. School Staff Interview Protocol

# CDE Online Learning Research: Student Survey

The Colorado Department of Education is conducting a survey of students who are attending an online school. Your participation is completely voluntary. The survey does not ask for any information that can identify you. Your responses will be completely confidential, and will help improve schools. Thank you in advance for your help.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Tracey O'Brien by phone at (303) 315-2735 or by email at Tracey.O'Brien@ucdenver.edu

## \*1. What is the name of your online school?

## 2. How long have you been attending an online school?

- Just starting this year
- This is my second year in an online school
- This is my third year or more in an online school

## 3. What grade are you in now?

## 4. How old are you now?

## 5. Do you have any learning disabilities?

- Yes
- No

## \*6. A brick-and-mortar school is any school where teachers instruct students face to face in a regular classroom. Please tell us if you have **NEVER** been in a brick-and-mortar school. In other words, you have **ALWAYS** participated in an online school or been home schooled.

- I have NEVER attended a brick-and-mortar school. I have ALWAYS participated in an online school or been home schooled
- I have attended a brick-and-mortar school in the past

*We would like to ask you some questions about your school/classes back when you were attending a "brick-and-mortar" school.*

*For questions 7-11, please use a 1-5 scale where 1 indicates "very badly" and 5 indicates "very well."*

# CDE Online Learning Research: Student Survey

## During the most recent year that you attended a brick-and-mortar school:

	1-Very Badly	2	3	4	5-Very Well	Not Applicable
7. How were you doing in school overall (grades)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. How would you say you were doing socially?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. How were you doing in your math classes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. How were you doing in your language arts classes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. How were you doing in your science classes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**12. When you were in a brick-and-mortar school, how motivated were you to do class work? Please use a scale where 1 is “not motivated at all” and 5 is “very motivated.”**

- 1-Not Motivated at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very motivated

**13. When you were in a brick-and-mortar school, how able were you to stay focused when you were doing work in class? Please use a scale where 1 is “very hard to stay focused” and 5 is “very easy to stay focused.”**

- 1-Very hard to stay focused
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very easy to stay focused

**14. When you were in a brick-and-mortar school, how satisfied were you with the amount of communication you had with your teachers(?)**

*Please use a scale where 1 is "not satisfied at all" and 5 is "very satisfied."*

- 1-Not satisfied at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very satisfied

**15. Did you fail any classes in the most recent year you attended a brick-and-mortar school?**

- Yes
- No

**15a. How many classes did you fail?**

**16. Were you ever suspended or expelled from your brick-and-mortar school?**

- Yes
- No

**\*17. Were you absent from school more than 5-6 days each semester in your most recent brick-and-mortar school?**

- Yes
- No



# CDE Online Learning Research: Student Survey

**17a. What is the major reason you missed school? Please check *ONE* response only.**

- Illness
- Problems at home
- Felt unsafe at school/bullying
- Problems with friends
- Physical or emotional disability
- Family responsibilities
- Transportation problems
- Job
- Sports
- Other

If Other, please describe:

The next questions are about why you decided to participate in your ONLINE school.

**18. How did you hear about your online school? Please check *ALL* that apply.**

- Internet
- Television/radio
- Flyer
- An event held by my online school
- A teacher or administrator in my "brick-and-mortar" school
- Friend or family member
- Some other way

If some other way, please describe:

*For questions 19a-19r, please use a 1-5 scale where 1 is "not important at all" and 5 is "very important."*

# CDE Online Learning Research: Student Survey

## 19. How important a reason is each of the following for your decision to attend an online school?

	1-Not important at all	2	3	4	5-Very important
a. I need classes to move at a slower pace than they did in a "brick-and-mortar" classroom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. I didn't feel comfortable or "fit in" at my brick and mortar school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. I have concerns about the environment in brick-and-mortar schools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. I was falling behind in my classes in my "brick and mortar" school and needed to change something	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. I like the choice of classes that are available online	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. I want classes to move faster than they did in my "brick and mortar" classrooms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. I want to graduate early and can do that faster at an online school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. I have a physical or emotional disability that made it difficult to learn in my brick and mortar school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. I have other special needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j. I want to take specific courses that prepare me for college that were unavailable in my previous brick-and-mortar school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k. I need to make up credits for classes that I failed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
l. I need to make up credits because I transferred from another district	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
m. I was getting into trouble at my "brick and mortar" school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
n. I live in an isolated area and it is hard to get to the "brick and mortar" school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
o. I chose my online school as an alternative to home schooling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
p. I need a flexible schedule because of work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
q. I need a flexible schedule because of family responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
r. I am preparing for the GED	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### 19a. Are there any other important reasons why you decided to attend an online school? If yes, what are they?

### \*Are you *NEW* to online schooling?

- Yes
- No

If you are a *RETURNING* online student, we want to ask you some questions about your experiences in your online school last year.

# CDE Online Learning Research: Student Survey

For questions 20-24, please use a 1-5 scale where 1 indicates "very badly" and 5 indicates "very well."

## Last year in your online school:

	1-Very badly	2	3	4	5-Very Well	Not Applicable
Q20. How did you do in your online school overall (grades)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q21. How would you say you did socially since taking online classes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q22. How did you do in your online math classes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q23. How did you do in your online language arts classes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q24. How did you do in your online science classes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## \*25. Did you fail any of your online classes?

- Yes
- No

## 25a. How many online classes did you fail?

## 26. Please rate your overall progress in the online program. Please use a 1-5 scale where 1 is "very poor progress" and 5 is "very good progress."

- 1-Very poor
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very good

# CDE Online Learning Research: Student Survey

## 27. Do you have ENOUGH access to the following through your online school?

	Yes	No
a. Teacher support for your school work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Technology (computer, Internet, software)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Guidance counselor support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Interaction with classmates/other students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Advanced placement classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Variety of classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Sports activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. Arts activities such as theater or music classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. Social events such as prom and other dances, school parties, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j. Student council	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k. Clubs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
l. Field trips	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 28. Please rate your level of motivation to do your online class work. Please use a 1-5 scale where 1 is “not motivated at all” and 5 is “very motivated.”

- 1-Not motivated at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very motivated

## 29. Please rate your ability to stay focused when you are doing work online. Please use a 1-5 scale where 1 is “very hard to stay focused” and 5 is “very easy to stay focused.”

- 1-Very hard to stay focused
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very easy to stay focused

## CDE Online Learning Research: Student Survey

**30. How satisfied are you with the amount of communication you have with your teacher(s)? Please use a 1-5 scale where 1 indicates “not at all satisfied” and 5 indicates “very satisfied.”**

- 1-Not satisfied at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very satisfied

**31. Overall, how satisfied are you with the online program? Please use a 1-5 scale where 1 indicates “not at all satisfied” and 5 indicates “very satisfied.”**

- 1-Not satisfied at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very satisfied

**32. Do you think online learning is a better fit for you than a traditional brick-and-mortar school?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

**33. What do you like best about your online school?**

**34. What do you like least about your online school?**

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey! Your participation will help improve online schools.

# CDE Online Learning Research Parent Survey

The Colorado Department of Education is conducting a survey of parents whose child is attending an online school. Your participation is completely voluntary. The survey does not ask for any information that can identify you or your child. Your responses will be completely confidential and will help improve online schools. Thank you in advance for your help.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Tracey O'Brien by phone at (303) 315-2735 or by email at Tracey.O'Brien@ucdenver.edu

*If you have more than one child in kindergarten through twelfth grade who is in an online school, please complete the survey based on your OLDEST child.*

## \*1. What is the name of your child's online school?

## 2. How long has your child been attending an online school?

- Just starting this year
- This is his/her second year in an online school
- This is his/her third year or more in an online school

## 3. What grade is your child in now?

## 4. How old is your child now?

## 5. Does your child have any learning disabilities?

- Yes
- No

## \*6. A brick-and-mortar school is any school where teachers instruct students face to face in a regular classroom. Please tell us if your child has NEVER been in a brick-and-mortar school. In other words, he/she has ALWAYS participated in an online school or been home schooled.

- My child has NEVER attended a brick-and-mortar school. He/she has ALWAYS participated in an online school or been home schooled
- My child has attended a brick-and-mortar school in the past

*We would like to ask you some questions about your child's school/classes back when he or she was attending a "brick-and-mortar" school.*

*For questions 7-11, please use a 1-5 scale where 1 indicates "very badly" and 5 indicates "very well."*

# CDE Online Learning Research Parent Survey

## During the most recent year that your child attended a brick-and-mortar school:

	1-Very Badly	2	3	4	5-Very Well	Not Applicable
7. How was your child doing in school overall (grades)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. How was your child doing socially?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. How was your child doing in his/her math classes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. How was your child doing in his/her language arts classes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. How was your child doing in his/her science classes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 12. When your child was in a brick-and-mortar school, how motivated was he/she to do class work? Please use a scale where 1 is “not motivated at all” and 5 is “very motivated.”

- 1-Not Motivated at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very motivated

## 13. When your child was in a brick-and-mortar school, how able was he/she to stay focused when he/she was doing work in class? Please use a scale where 1 is “very hard to stay focused” and 5 is “very easy to stay focused.”

- 1-Very hard to stay focused
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very easy to stay focused

**14. When your child was in a brick-and-mortar school, how satisfied were you with the amount of communication you had with your child's teachers? Please use a scale where 1 is "not satisfied at all" and 5 is "very satisfied."**

- 1-Not satisfied at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very satisfied

**15. Did your child fail any classes in the most recent year he/she was at a brick-and-mortar school?**

- Yes
- No

**15a. How many classes did your child fail?**

**16. Was your child ever suspended or expelled from his/her brick-and-mortar school?**

- Yes
- No

**\*17. Was your child absent from school more than 5-6 days each semester in his/her most recent brick-and-mortar school?**

- Yes
- No



# CDE Online Learning Research Parent Survey

**17a. What is the major reason your child missed school? Please check ONE response only.**

- Illness
- Problems at home
- Felt unsafe at school/bullying
- Problems with friends
- Physical or emotional disability
- Family responsibilities
- Transportation problems
- Job
- Sports
- Other

If Other, please describe:

The next questions are about why your child is participating in an ONLINE school.

**18. How did you hear about your child's online school? Please check ALL that apply.**

- Internet
- Television/radio
- Flyer
- An event held by your child's online school
- A teacher or administrator in your child's "brick-and-mortar" school
- Friend or family member
- Some other way

If some other way, please describe:

*For questions 19a-19r, please use a 1-5 scale where 1 is "not important at all" and 5 is "very important."*

# CDE Online Learning Research Parent Survey

## 19. How important a reason is each of the following in the decision to have your child attend an online school?

	1-Not important at all	2	3	4	5-Very important
a. Your child needs classes to move at a slower pace than they did in a brick-and-mortar classroom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Your child didn't feel comfortable or "fit in" at his/her brick-and-mortar school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. You have concerns about the environment in brick-and-mortar schools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Your child was falling behind in his/her classes in brick-and-mortar school and needed to change something	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. You or your child like the choice of classes available online	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Your child wants classes to move faster than they did in brick-and-mortar classrooms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Your child wants to graduate early and can do that faster at an online school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. Your child has a physical or emotional disability that made it difficult to learn in his/her brick-and-mortar school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. Your child has other special needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j. You or your child wants specific courses that prepare him/her for college that were unavailable in his/her previous school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k. Your child needs to make up credits for classes that he/she failed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
l. Your child needs to make up credits because he/she transferred from another district	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
m. Your child was getting into trouble at his/her brick-and-mortar school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
n. You live in an isolated area and it is hard to get to the brick-and-mortar school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
o. You or your child chose online school as an alternative to home schooling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
p. Your child needs a flexible schedule because of work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
q. Your child needs a flexible schedule because of family responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
r. Your child is preparing for the GED	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### 19a. Are there any other important reasons why your child is attending an online school? If yes, what are they?

# CDE Online Learning Research Parent Survey

## \* Is your child *NEW* to online schooling?

- Yes
- No

If your child is a *RETURNING* online student, we want to ask you some questions about your child's experiences in his/her online school last year.

*For questions 20-24, please use a 1-5 scale where 1 indicates "very badly" and 5 indicates "very well."*

### Last year in your child's online school:

	1-Very badly	2	3	4	5-Very Well	Not Applicable
20. How did your child do in his or her online school overall (grades)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. How would you say your child did socially since taking online classes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. How did your child do in his or her online math classes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23. How did your child do in his or her online language arts classes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24. How did your child do in his or her online science classes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## \* 25. Did your child fail any of his/her online classes?

- Yes
- No

### 25a. How many online classes did he/she fail?

## 26. Please rate your child's overall progress in the online program, where 1 is "very poor progress" and 5 is "very good progress."

- 1-Very poor
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very good

# CDE Online Learning Research Parent Survey

## 27. Does your child have ENOUGH access to the following through his/her online school?

	Yes	No
a. Teacher support for his/her school work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Technology (computer, Internet, software)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Guidance counselor support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Interaction with classmates/other students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Advanced placement classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Variety of classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Sports activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. Arts activities such as theater or music classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. Social events such as prom and other dances, school parties, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j. Student council	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k. Clubs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
l. Field trips	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 28. Please rate your child's level of motivation to do his/her online class work, where 1 is "not motivated at all" and 5 is "very motivated."

- 1-Not motivated at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very motivated

## 29. Please rate your child's ability to stay focused when he/she is doing work online, where 1 is "very hard to stay focused" and 5 is "very easy to stay focused."

- 1-Very hard
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very easy

# CDE Online Learning Research Parent Survey

**30. How satisfied are you with the amount of communication you have with your child's teacher(s)? Please use a 1-5 scale where 1 indicates "not at all satisfied" and 5 indicates "very satisfied."**

- 1-Not satisfied at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very satisfied

**31. Overall, how satisfied are you with the online program? Please use a 1-5 scale where 1 indicates "not at all satisfied" and 5 indicates "very satisfied."**

- 1-Not satisfied at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Very satisfied

**32. Do you think online learning is a better fit for your child than a traditional brick-and-mortar school?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

**33. What do you like best about your child's online school?**

**34. What do you like least about your child's online school?**

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey! Your participation will help improve online schools.

# CDE Escuelas en Línea: Encuesta de Padres

El Departamento de Educación en Colorado está realizando una encuesta de padres cuyos hijos están matriculados en una escuela en línea. Su participación es completamente voluntaria. La encuesta no pregunta ninguna información que puede identificar Usted o su hijo. Sus respuestas serán completamente confidenciales y ayudaran a mejorar escuelas en línea. Gracias anticipadamente por su ayuda.

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre esta encuesta, favor de llamar a Christine Velez al (303) 315-2498 o por correo electrónico a Christine.Velez@ucdenver.edu

*Si Usted tiene más de un niño del jardín de infancia hasta el doceavo grado quienes están en una escuela en línea, favor de completar la encuesta basado en su hijo/hija MAYOR.*

## \*1. ¿Qué es el nombre de la escuela en línea de su hijo/hija?

## 2. ¿Cuánto tiempo ha asistido su hijo/hija a una escuela en línea?

- Recién empezó este año
- Este es su segundo año en una escuela en línea
- Este es su tercer año o más en una escuela en línea

## 3. ¿En qué grado esta su hijo/hija ahora?

## 4. ¿Que edad tiene su hijo/hija ahora?

## 5. ¿Su hijo/hija tiene algún impedimento en el aprendizaje?

- Sí
- No

**\*6. Favor de decirnos si su hijo NUNCA a asistido a una escuela ladrillo-y-mortero. Es decir, él/ella SIEMPRE ha participado en una escuela en línea o ha sido educado en la casa. Una escuela de ladrillo- y-mortero es cualquier escuela donde la maestra instruye los niños en persona en una aula regular.**

- Mi hijo/hija NUNCA a asistido a una escuela de ladrillo-y-mortero. SIEMPRE a participado en una escuela en línea o educado en casa
- En el pasado my hijo/hija a asistido a una escuela ladrillo-y-mortero

*Nos gustaría hacerle unas preguntas sobre las clases/escuela de su hijo/hija cuando estaba matriculada en una escuela "ladrillo y mortero".*

*Para las preguntas 7-11, favor de usar una escala del 1-5 donde 1 es "muy malo" y 5 es "muy bien."*

# CDE Escuelas en Línea: Encuesta de Padres

## Durante el año más reciente que su hijo estaba en una escuela ladrillo-y-mortero:

	1-Muy malo	2	3	4	5-Muy bien	No Aplicable
7. En total, ¿Cómo se estaba desempeñando en la escuela (calificaciones)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. ¿Cómo se estaba desarrollando socialmente?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. ¿Cómo se estaba desempeñando en sus clases de matemáticas?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. ¿Cómo se estaba desempeñando en sus clases de idioma y literatura?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. ¿Cómo se estaba desempeñando en sus clases de Ciencia?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**12. Cuando su hijo/hija estaba en una escuela ladrillo-y-mortero, ¿Qué tan motivado estaba para hacer sus trabajos escolares? Favor de usar una escala donde 1 es “nada de motivado” y 5 es “muy motivado”.**

- 1-Nada de motivado
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Muy motivado

**13. Cuando su hijo/hija estaba en una escuela ladrillo-y-mortero, ¿a qué nivel se podía mantener enfocado cuando estaba haciendo trabajos escolares? Favor de usar una escala donde 1 es “muy difícil mantenerse enfocado” y 5 es “muy fácil mantenerse enfocado”.**

- 1-Muy difícil
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Muy fácil

## CDE Escuelas en Línea: Encuesta de Padres

**14. Cuándo su hijo estaba en una escuela de ladrillo-y-mortero, ¿qué tan satisfecho estaba con la cantidad de comunicación que tenía Usted con los maestros de su hijo/hija? Favor de usar una escala donde 1 es “nada satisfecho” y 5 es “muy satisfecho.”**

- 1-Nada satisfecho
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Muy satisfecho

**15. En el año más reciente que su hijo/hija estaba en una escuela de ladrillo-y-mortero, ¿él/ella fallo alguna clase?**

- Sí
- No

**15a. Cuantas clases fallo su hijo/hija?**

**16. ¿Alguna vez su hijo fue suspendido o expulsado de la escuela ladrillo-y-mortero?**

- Sí
- No

**\*17. En su escuela más reciente de ladrillo-y-mortero, ¿su hijo/hija faltó clases más de 5-6 días en un semestre?**

- Sí
- No



## CDE Escuelas en Línea: Encuesta de Padres

### 17a. ¿Cuál es la razón principal que su hijo/hija faltó la escuela? Favor de marcar solo **UNA** respuesta.

- Enfermedad
- Problemas en casa
- Se sintió en peligro o tiranizado en la escuela
- Problemas con amigos
- Físicamente o emocionalmente discapacitado
- Responsabilidades de familia
- Problemas con transportación
- El trabajo
- Deportes
- Otro

Si es otra razón, favor de describir

Las próximas preguntas se tratan de porque su hijo/hija está participando en una escuela EN LINEA.

### 18. ¿Cómo se informó sobre la escuela en línea de su hijo/hija? Favor de marcar **TODOS** que apliquen.

- Internet
- Televisión/radio
- Volante
- En un evento que se llevó a cabo por la escuela en línea de su hijo/hija
- Una maestra o administrador en la escuela "ladrillo-y-mortero" de su hijo/hija
- Un amigo o pariente
- De algún otra manera

Si de alguna otra manera, favor de describir:

*Para las preguntas 19a-19r, favor de usar una escala del 1 al 5 donde 1 es "nada importante" y 5 es "muy importante".*

# CDE Escuelas en Línea: Encuesta de Padres

## 19. ¿Qué tan importante es cada una de las siguientes razones por la decisión de matricular a su hijo/hija en una escuela en línea?

	1-Nada importante	2	3	4	5-Muy importante
a. Su hijo/hija necesita clases que se mueven a un ritmo más lento que en las clases de ladrillo-y-mortero	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Su hijo/hija no se sentía cómodo o no sentía en armonía con su escuela de ladrillo-y-mortero	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Usted está preocupada sobre el ambiente en las escuelas ladrillo-y-mortero	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Su hijo/hija se estaba quedando atrás en sus clases en la escuela ladrillo-y-mortero y algo tenía que cambiar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. A Usted o a su hijo le gustaron mas las opciones de clases disponible en línea	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Su hijo quería clases que se movieran a un ritmo más rápido que las clases en escuelas ladrillo-y-mortero	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Su hijo se quiere graduar temprano y lo puede hacer más rápido en una escuela en línea	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. Su hijo/hija tiene una discapacidad físico o emocional que se le hace difícil aprender en su escuela ladrillo-y-mortero	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. Su hijo/hija tiene otras necesidades especiales	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j. Usted o su hijo/hija quiere cursos específicos que le preparan para la universidad y que no estaban disponible en su escuela ladrillo-y-mortero	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k. Su hijo tiene que completar créditos para clases que él/ella falló	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
l. Su hijo/hija tiene que completar créditos porque él/ella se trasladó de otro distrito	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
m. Su hijo/hija se estaba metiendo en problemas en su escuela de ladrillo-y-mortero	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
n. Usted vive en un lugar aislado y se le hace difícil llegar a la escuela ladrillo-y-mortero	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
o. Usted o su hijo/hija optó por una escuela en línea como una alternativa a educación en casa	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
p. Su hijo/hija necesita un horario flexible porque trabaja	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
q. Su hijo/hija necesita un horario flexible por las responsabilidades de familia	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
r. Su hijo/hija se está preparando para el GED	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### 19a. ¿Hay otras razones importantes por las cuales su hijo/hijo está en una escuela en línea? Si la respuesta es sí, ¿cuales son las razones?

# CDE Escuelas en Línea: Encuesta de Padres

## \* ¿Es su hijo/hija **NUEVO** a escuelas en línea?

- Sí
- No

Si su hijo/hija es un estudiante que *REGRESA* a una escuela en línea, le queremos hacer unas preguntas sobre las experiencias de él/ella el año pasado.

Para las preguntas 20-24, favor de usar una escala del 1 al 5 donde 1 es "muy malo" y 5 es "muy bien".

### En año pasado en la escuela en línea de su hijo/hija:

	1-Muy malo	2	3	4	5-Muy bien	No Aplicable
20. En total, ¿Qué tan bien hizo su hijo/hija en su escuela en línea?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. ¿Cómo diría que su hijo/hija hizo socialmente desde que empezó a participar en clases en línea?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. ¿Qué tal hizo su hijo/hija en sus clases de matemáticas en línea?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23. ¿Qué tal hizo su hijo/hija en sus clases de idioma y literatura en línea?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24. ¿Qué tal hizo su hijo/hija en sus clases de ciencias en línea?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## \* 25. ¿Su hijo falló en alguna de sus clases en línea?

- Sí
- No

### 25a. ¿Cuántas clases en línea falló su hijo/hija?

Favor de escribir el número de clases:

### 26. Favor de calificar el progreso total de su hijo/hija en el programa en línea, donde 1 es "avances muy pobres" y 5 es "avances muy buenos".

- 1-Muy pobres
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Muy buenos

## 27. ¿Su hijo/hija tiene **SUFICIENTE** acceso a los siguientes a través de su escuela en línea?

	Sí	No
a. El apoyo de la maestra para el trabajo escolar de su hijo/hija	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Tecnología (computadora, Internet, software)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Apoyo del Consejero de Orientación	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Interacción con compañeros de la escuela/otros estudiantes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Clases de Colocación Avanzada	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Una variedad de clases	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Actividades deportivas	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. Actividades de arte tal como el teatro o clases de música	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. Eventos sociales tal como el Prom y otros bailes, fiestas escolares, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j. Consejo estudiantil	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k.Clubs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
l.Excursiones	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 28. Favor de calificar el nivel de motivación de su hijo/hija para hacer su trabajo escolar en línea, donde 1 es “nada motivado” y 5 es “muy motivado”.

- 1-Nada motivado
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Muy motivado

## 29. Favor de calificar la habilidad de su hijo/hija en poder mantenerse enfocado cuando está haciendo su trabajo escolar en línea, donde 1 es “muy difícil mantenerse enfocado” y 5 es “muy fácil mantenerse enfocado”.

- 1-Muy difícil
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Muy fácil

## CDE Escuelas en Línea: Encuesta de Padres

**30. ¿Qué tan satisfecha está con la cantidad de comunicación que Usted tiene con la(s) maestra(s) de su hijo/hija? Favor de usar una escala del 1 al 5 donde 1 es “nada satisfecha” y 5 es “muy satisfecha”.**

- 1-Nada satisfecha
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Muy satisfecha

**31. En total, ¿Qué tan satisfecha esta con el programa en línea? Favor de usar una escala del 1 al 5 donde 1 es “nada satisfecha” y 5 es “muy satisfecha”.**

- 1-Nada satisfecha
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-Muy satisfecha

**32. ¿Piensa Usted que aprendizaje en línea es mejor para sus hijo/hija que en escuela tradicional de ladrillo-y-mortero?**

- Sí
- No
- No estoy segura

**33. ¿Qué es lo que MAS LE GUSTA de la escuela en línea de su hijo/hija?**

**34. ¿Qué es lo que MENOS LE GUSTA de la escuela en línea de su hijo/hija?**

Gracias por tomar el tiempo para completar la encuesta!  
Su participación ayudara a mejorar aprendizaje en línea.

## ONLINE SCHOOL STAFF INTERVIEWS

Q1. In your experience, what types of students choose your online school?

**Probes:**

- “Motivated” students
- Students with emotional and/or behavioral issues
- Students with learning disabilities/physical disabilities,
- Students who need a flexible schedule due to family, work or other demands.
- Students who need a slower paced learning situation
- Students who were failing classes in a “brick-and-mortar” environment and/or need credit recovery
- Transfer students
- Students who are isolated both geographically and socially

Q1A. Does the program seem to be equally successful for all types of students, or in your experience does it tend to work better for some types of students than for others?

**Probe:** In your experience, is the program more effective for younger or older students? Students in certain grades?

Q2. What is the process that parents go through to enroll their child? (e.g. application, timelines, directions for parents).

**Probes:** Does this seem to be an easy process for parents? Students?

If the process needs improvement, what can be done to improve this process?

Q3. How do students (and parents) communicate with teachers?

**Probes:**

- Can they communicate by phone? Email? Facebook? Twitter? Text messaging? Skype? Webinar?
- How often do students and teacher communicate?
- Is there a minimum amount of contact time that teachers are required to have with students?
- Who supports students with their classes/learning? Is this support sufficient?
- Do students receive counseling or other support? Is this support sufficient?

Q4. Please describe the materials and equipment you provide to students.

Q5. What are some of the challenges your school faces in meeting the needs of students? What strategies have you used to address those challenges? What strategies have been successful?

Q6. In your experience, are there consistent problems online students are having? How can these problems be solved?

Q7. What is working well?

Q8. In your opinion, what is still needed in Colorado with regard to online learning? What support or resources would help you improve your student performance outcomes?



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