

# *Essential Elements*

## for Web-Based Courses for High School Students

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SREB

The World Wide Web increasingly is being used to provide academic courses for high school students. Many regional, state and local projects are developing and offering Web-based courses. Schools' growing use of this technology raises many legal, policy, logistic and technical issues.

The Southern Regional Education Board's Educational Technology Cooperative has identified essential elements for Web-based courses for high school students. The *Essential Elements* prepare schools to assess a Web-based course before they commit to developing courses. The *Essential Elements* also give students and their parents information about courses before they participate. Web-based courses will meet students' needs across the SREB region, but only if these courses are designed carefully, supported appropriately and used effectively.

The *Essential Elements* are based in part on the *Principles of Good Practice*, quality guidelines for the SREB's *Southern Regional Electronic Campus*.

The following set of basic assumptions provides a framework for consideration of essential instructional and managerial elements in the development and use of Web-based courses. The subsequent sections are designed to help policy-makers and managers think about specific policy and related issues.

### **Basic assumptions:**

- Each course is provided by or through a school that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting body or is authorized to operate by the state where it originates.
- The course is developed based on the originating state's academic standards for students and meets an acceptable level of correlation between course content and academic standards in the state where it is being used.
- Prior to offering a new course, schools or state departments of education review it to ensure quality.
- Each electronically delivered course results in learning comparable in rigor and breadth to learning in a traditionally delivered course.
- Technical requirements are established to ensure that students have acceptable access to the course.

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- The school delivering a Web-based course establishes minimum technology competencies for students.
- The school or state department of education delivering the course provides necessary and relevant learning resources, including research information, periodicals and other information related to course content.
- Fair, adequate methods and procedures are used to measure students' mastery of content.
- Students receive timely and informative feedback about their progress; support is provided for those having difficulty.
- Teachers of the course possess appropriate academic credentials to teach it.
- Teachers of the course meet state eligibility requirements.
- Only teachers trained to deliver Web-based courses are instructors.
- Teachers are trained to use the course Web site and resources effectively to deliver instruction.
- Teachers receive technical support to ensure ease of use for faculty and students.

As stated above, the following sections identify specific policy issues that should be addressed as Web-based courses for high school students are developed and delivered.

## **Curriculum and instruction:**

- A complete course syllabus is available for review.
- The course contents are systematically designed and clearly written.
- Each course is field-tested and revised based on those findings. Documentation of findings is available upon request.
- The course engages students in learning activities based on a variety of learning styles and can be adapted to accommodate student disabilities.
- The course provides opportunities for students to engage in abstract-thinking and critical-reasoning activities that are critical to the course's learning objectives.
- Issues associated with the use of copyrighted materials are addressed.
- The school offering the course provides required and relevant learning resources needed to meet course goals.
- Resources that extend the scope of course content are identified and available to students.
- Interaction between the student and teacher and among students meets student goals and course goals.
- There is a plan for monitoring chat or other student-to-student interaction.
- There are state and/or local policies regarding the standard workload for teachers of Web-based courses.

## Management:

- Course approval and/or accreditation issues are addressed before a Web-based course is offered.
- The school where the student is enrolled has accepted the course for elective credit or core credit.
- Tuition and fees for the Web-based course are established.
- Procedures for fees and payment are established prior to student enrollment in a course.
- There is a plan for recourse if the Web-based course is not delivered as described.
- The contents and course objectives of a core course, which are based on the academic standards in the state offering the course, are reviewed and, if necessary, modified to conform with the academic standards of other states in which students will take the course.
- The academic calendar of the students and teacher is coordinated before the course begins.
- The teacher of a Web-based course and students taking the course receive technical assistance from the school offering the course and the school receiving it.
- Distribution of state full-time-equivalent funding for students enrolled in a Web-based course is determined before the course is offered.
- Student work is secure from access by others.
- Provisions are made for the technical and academic needs of charter-school students or home-school students who take a Web-based course.
- Teachers are compensated for the development of a Web-based course and materials.

## Evaluation and assessment:

- The course's instructional design includes student assessment.
- Procedures are established for proctoring and/or monitoring students during testing.
- Each course is evaluated over time by the state agency or other entity designated to monitor courses.
- Instructors can verify student participation and performance.

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*The Distance Learning Task Group of the SREB's Educational Technology Cooperative produced this document. For more information, please contact Bill Thomas, SREB director of educational technology, at [bthomas@sreb.org](mailto:bthomas@sreb.org).*

