

Are courses easy?

Surveys responding to parents' and teachers' concerns regarding the rigor of online courses indicate that the courses are *as demanding as or more demanding than* comparable face-to-face courses. As one parent whose daughter has taken an online course noted, "She has gone from being a regular high school girl to being a responsible, hard-working, independent learner like she will need to be next year in college."

Students who need help with questions or technical issues are assisted by the online teacher, school on-site facilitator or Help Desk.

Can a student take an online course for credit, and is there a charge for these courses?

Awarding of credit for online courses is determined by the local school. Payment for online courses varies. Some states and schools cover the charge for approved online courses.

Where can I go to learn more about online courses?

Online courses for middle and high school students are available from a variety of sources, including states, local school districts, colleges and universities, private companies and regional centers. Contact your state's department of education for information. Some state and local online course providers also are listed on the Web on SREB's K-20 Online Learning Initiatives page:

www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/onlinelearning/initiatives.asp

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What's an online course?

Do middle and high school students take online courses?

Should you care?

Yes! As students and schools across the nation increase their use of the Web to take courses by computer ("online"), the impact is only beginning to be understood. Clearly, it will be significant. Online courses can benefit any middle or high school student, but they are especially important for:

- students attending schools unable to provide certain academic courses;
- students who need an alternative to traditional education;
- students who want expanded course options; and
- students with physical disabilities or prolonged absences from school because of illness.

How does a student take an online course?

With an Internet-connected computer, a student can enroll and take courses on many different subjects. In a few quick steps, the student simply “signs-on” to the online course to access content, assignments and messages from the online teacher. Assignments are completed on the computer or “offline” (not on the computer). Exchanging information and ideas with the teacher and other students is done by e-mail, telephone, white boards, online chats and group discussion boards.

How do the student and teacher communicate?

Online courses may vary, but most provide a variety of ways for a student to learn the course content, including e-mailing the teacher and other online students. Most students work offline on activities such as special projects, reading and conducting experiments. Many classes also include some face-to-face meetings with the teacher and other students.

How are assessments conducted?

Testing is conducted online or at another designated place and time. The frequency and quality of the interaction between teacher and student often result in improved assessment of student learning.

How does a student find out about an online course?

Just as with any course, the best place to start is the school guidance counselor, teachers in the content area, the school librarian or a school administrator. These resource persons are most likely to know about available online courses, especially if their school district or state provides virtual (i.e. by computer) learning for students. Today over 60 percent of states have some form of a state virtual school.

What is it like to be an online learner?

“I wouldn’t have had the opportunity to take an Advanced Placement class my senior year because my school doesn’t offer AP courses.”

— 12th-grader

“I get to read, actually read! If I don’t get it, I can go back and read again and again until I get it.” — Ninth-grader

“My online course is cool. The online teacher is there when I need her, offering advice through e-mail and even over the phone.” — 12th-grader

“I like the flexibility that allows me to design my own schedule based on how much time I need in a given subject.” — 11th-grader

“It’s great having class with students from across the state. I really got to know them.” — 10th-grader

A 12th-grade student who had fallen behind in a traditional school: “It really allowed me to not only catch up, but now I’m actually even ahead. There’s no way I could’ve done this in my old school.”

“The course is not only teaching me English, but also useful computer skills, time management and discipline — lessons that will stay with me throughout college and life.” — 12th-grader

Are online courses successful?

Yes! More and more middle and high school students across the country are enrolled in online courses. This increase illustrates the success many students are experiencing. Reports indicate that most online learning courses are at least as successful as their face-to-face counterparts, and many have a higher completion rate.