Research and Practice in K-12 Online Learning: A Review of Open Access Literature

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Abstract

The literature related to online learning programs for K-12 students dates to the mid-1990s and builds upon a century of research and practice.
from K-12 distance education. While K-12 online learning programs have evolved and grown over the past decade, the amount of published research on virtual schooling practice and policy is limited. The current literature includes practitioner reports and experimental and quasi-experimental studies, both published and unpublished. This paper reviews open access literature in K-12 online learning and reports on a structured content analysis of the documents. Themes in the literature include steady growth and a focus on the benefits, challenges, and broad effectiveness of K-12 online learning. In addition, newly developed standards for K-12 online learning are emerging in descriptions of effective practices.

Author Biographies

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Dr. Cathy Cavanaugh is Associate Professor of Educational Technology in the School of Teaching and Learning at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Her work focuses on identifying applications of information and communication technology that enhance teaching and learning. Dr. Cavanaugh has worked with virtual schools, school districts, and education agencies in several states and countries.

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Dr. Tom Clark of TA Consulting has led or participated in many evaluations of online learning programs in K-12 and higher education. He has numerous publications in the field and co-edited Virtual Schools: Planning for Success (Teachers College Press, 2005).
Online learning migration: From social learning theory to social presence theory in the CMS environment. Keeping pace with k-12 online learning: A review of state-level policy and practice. Retrieved December 1, 2008 from: http://www.kpk12.com/downloads/KeepingPace_2008.pdf. Weiner, C. (2003). A Summary of Research on the Effectiveness of K-12 Online Learning. Written by. Susan Patrick and Allison Powell. The U.S. Department of Education released a meta-analysis and review of literature of 51 online learning studies in 2009. The overall results of the “meta-analysis found that, on average, students in online learning conditions performed better than those receiving face-to-face instruction” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. ix). The research reported that online teaching improves practices in both virtual and face-to-face settings, and 75% of teachers said that teaching online had a positive impact on their face-to-face teaching. Lowes examined how online teachers can serve as reform agents in the schools where they also teach face-to-face courses. This meta-analysis and review of empirical online learning research are part of a broader study of practices in online learning being conducted by SRI International for the Policy and Program Studies Service of the U.S. Department of Education. The goal of the study as a whole is to provide policy-makers, administrators and educators with research-based guidance about how to implement online learning for K–12 education and teacher preparation. Five of these studies involved K–12 learners. Key Findings. The main finding from the literature review was that. ! Few rigorous research studies of the effectiveness of online learning for K–12 students have been published.