Online Learning Key Terms and Definitions

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Digital learning: Any instructional practice in or out of school that uses digital technology to strengthen a student's learning experience and improve educational outcomes. The Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance (VLLA) use of the term encompasses online, blended, and related forms of learning that relies on technology. It includes a wide range of digital tools and practices, including instructional content, interactions, data and assessment systems, learning platforms, online courses, adaptive software, personal learning enabling technologies, and student data management systems to provide timely and rich data to guide personalized learning.

Online course: An online course is one where teacher-led education takes place over the Internet, with the teacher and student separated geographically, using an online instructional delivery system. It may be accessed from multiple settings (at home, in school and/or out of school buildings).

Supplemental online course: Supplemental courses are used to augment the class schedule of a student attending school on campus. Supplemental courses usually meet the definition for an online course, with the teacher and student separated geographically, using an online instructional delivery system. Students taking supplemental online courses usually take about 1 to 4 online courses in a school year for reasons ranging from course availability, recover of credits, acceleration (often Advanced Placement courses), medical issues,

Hybrid course: A hybrid course is one where the majority of the learning and instruction takes place online, with the student and teacher separated geographically, but still includes some traditional face-to-face "seat time." In hybrid online courses the online instructor remains the teacher of record even though the student spends time with additional educators.

Blended learning: A formal education program where students learn in part through online instruction, and in part at a brick-and-mortar location away from home. A student learns at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace; at least □in part in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home; and the modalities along each student's learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience" (The Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation). In most blended learning models, the teacher of record is located in the school building, and most of the learning and instruction takes place in the classroom. There are a number of variations for blended learning.

Blended learning models: There are a variety of instructional models that fall under the definition of blended learning; station rotation, lab rotation, flipped classroom, individual rotation, flex, a la carte, enriched virtual). For detailed descriptions of each model, please visit the Christensen Institute at https://www.christenseninstitute.org/blended-learning-definitions-and-models/.

State virtual schools: State virtual schools deliver online courses, instruction, professional development, technology infrastructure and other online learning services to schools and districts across their states. They are created by legislation or by a state-level agency, and receive state appropriation, grant funding and/or charge course fees to meet operational costs. State virtual schools may be administered by a state education agency, but may also be 501(c)(3) nonprofits, charter schools, or organizations contracted by the state to operate the online program. State virtual schools are not actually "schools" in the traditional sense. These online programs supply online courses and related services☐ to schools, but they do not grant diplomas and are not responsible for the assessment and reporting functions performed by schools, with only a few exceptions (re. Florida Virtual School, Virtual Learning Academy Charter School).

Virtual schools (also referred to as Cyber Schools): Virtual or cyber schools enroll students on a full-time online basis. Teachers and students are geographically remote from one another, and all or most of the instruction is provided online. Virtual schools generally do not maintain a physical facility, although some have small campuses or buildings for select activities. Virtual schools grant diplomas and are usually responsible for providing all of the education services and requirements as a physical school; re, special education services, administering and reporting state assessments, providing counseling, reporting state and federal data, etc. These schools may be virtual charter or non-charter schools.

Full-time online: Full-time refers to students that take their entire course load online.

Online programs: These are organizations that work directly with students and deliver online learning services, but are not "schools." Online programs may include state virtual schools, cyber schools, districts, consortia, regional education service center programs, and course choice initiatives and others.

C**ourse enrollment:** A course enrollment is a single student in a single semester long-course or equivalent term, and usually carries .5 credit. Although some online programs report course enrollments as a full credit basis, the vast majority of programs report course enrollments in half-credit increments.

Student enrollment: A student enrollment is defined as a single student, enrolled as a one year-long, full-time equivalent (FTE) student, usually with a unique identifier issued by the school.

O**riginal credit:** A single, credit-bearing course taken by a student for the first time. These may be core courses required for graduation or elective courses. Original credit courses are also referred to as initial credit or first-time courses.

Credit recovery: Credit recovery, or credit retrieval, refers to "a wide variety of educational strategies and programs that give high school students who have failed a class the opportunity

to redo coursework or retake a course through alternate means, and thereby avoid failure and earn academic credit." (Glossary of Educational Reform)

Student enrollment: A student enrollment is defined as one year-long, full-time equivalent (FTE) student—are used to count student numbers in fully online schools and blended schools.

Single-district programs are online programs that serve students who reside within the district providing the online courses. Single-district programs may in some cases serve a limited number of students from outside the home district.

Online teacher: A teacher-of-record, instructing a students learning experience in an online, virtual environment or networked environment in which teachers and learners are separated by time and space. Online teachers perform the same instructional and administrative tasks as classroom teachers, although some of the methodologies and instructional techniques vary based on the online environment. Online teachers use many of the same instructional guidelines defined by their school or program to ensure constant contact with students and to monitor student progress.

Mentor (aka. Lab Coordinator, Learning Coach, Para-professional, Facilitator): Serve as the liaison between the student, online instructor, parents, and administration providing a face-to-face component for online learners. Effective mentors work with the students every day to monitor progress, support them and build trusting relationships. The mentor role is often defined in various ways, and may be referred to by a variety job titles.

Asynchronous: Communication exchanges which occur in elapsed time between two or more people. examples are email, online discussion forums, message boards, blogs, podcasts, etc.

Synchronous: Online learning in which the participants interact at the same time and in the same space.

Teacher of record (TOR) is an educator who is responsible for a student's learning activities that are within a subject or course, and are aligned to performance measures, including assignment of the student's final grade in a course. (Center for Educational Leadership and Technology)

Franchise Model: Under a franchise model, a supplier provides a district (or school) with online curriculum, the learning management system, student information system, student support and training and mentoring for district teachers and administrators, while districts use their own teachers to build local online learning expertise. Franchises may employed by districts to provide supplemental and/or blended learning options for students.

The model, pioneered by Florida Virtual School and adapted by other statewide online learning programs across the US, may require Franchisees to adhere to the same standards and instructional guidelines employed by Franchise provider. Procedures like online teacher

response to student emails within 24 hours; grading papers and posting grades within 48 hours; the use of collaboration tools for synchronous interaction. Franchise providers amy also conduct audits annually of each franchise online teacher to ensure quality and may include an audit that reviews student-teacher communication to confirm timely response to email and grade testing; checks teacher feedback to ensure it is relevant and personal; at least one contact with parent of the online students every 30 days; in general, confirm that the online interaction throughout the course encourages a personal relationship between the student and teacher. Other audits can examine the history of a single student that completed a course with the same teacher, review the communications log, all student submissions, and reviews gradebook entries to ensure discussion based assess completed, assignment, final exam completed all to ensure.

Dual credit: Dual credit, sometimes referred to as dual enrollment, are in which a student earns credit from the postsecondary institution while, at the same time, accruing credit at the student's home school.

Competency-based learning: This approach allows students to advance upon mastery of course content. Competency- based education is based on competencies that include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students. Assessment is meaningful. Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs. Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge along with the development of important skills and dispositions. (iNACOL, 2013)

Learning pathways: Specific courses, academic programs, and learning experiences that an individual student completes as they progress in their education toward graduation and beyond. Learning pathways usually refers to educational options that extend beyond the standard core courses historically offered to students, particularly those focused on careers.

Course access: Course access refers to state programs and policies that allow students to take one or more online courses from a provider other than the student's home district of enrollment and have their funding flow to the provider.

Course completion: In general terms a course in completed when a student has finished all of the coursework associated with the curriculum assigned to the course, usually with a passing grade. The criteria for what defines a course completion vary dramatically from state-to-state, and even institution-to-institution. Most state virtual schools defined course completion based on a passing grade, most commonly defined as grades C, D, or 60% or higher. Florida Virtual School, which is funded on course completions, not enrollments, defines a completion as a student that successfully completes a virtual school course with a D or higher. Several state virtual schools require a grade of 70% or above for a completion. A few define course completion as any final grade issued, including an F and even Withdrawal. A small percentage of states accept a student completing 90–100% of a course as a completion and do not require that a grade to be issued. Another counts an online course as completed if the student was still in the course when the course was marked closed on the closing date.[1]

Learning management system: A learning management system (LMS) is a software application for the delivery, administration, documentation, tracking, and reporting of educational courses or training programs.[2] LMS help the online teacher deliver content to students, administer and analyze assessments, track student progress, and manage records. LMSs are focused on online learning course delivery, but are also used as a platform for fully online courses, as well as several hybrid forms of digital learning, such as blended learning strategies flipped classrooms, rotation models, and other uses on online content for students.

Student information system (SIS): A software tool for education organizations to manage the day-to-day operations for a school, particularly related to managing student data. SIS provide features to register students in courses, document grades, attendance, and transcripts, build student class schedules and other student-related data needed by a school. Most brick and mortar schools employ an SIS, but some SIS have been designed specifically for online learning programs. An SIS should not be confused with a learning management system where course materials, assignments and assessment tests can be published electronically.

Content Management System (CMS): A computer application that supports the creation and modification of digital content. A CMS facilitates collaboration in the workplace by integrating document management, digital asset management and records retention functionalities, and providing end users with role-based access to the organization's digital assets. It typically supports multiple users in a collaborative environment.[3]

Portal: A web-based application that unifies access to content, tools or services, usually with a single sign-on for the user. Resources are often customized to an individual user based on roles, enrollments, or associations, usually with a single sign-on for the user.

Education Management Organization (EMO): Education Management Organizations are companies or organizations that provide comprehensive management services for K–12 public schools on behalf of a school district or manage charter schools. Charter Management Organizations (CMO) operate in a similar model, but focus on providing management services to charter schools. Considering the number of full-time online students now in virtual charter schools (or cyber schools) these organizations play an important role in the online learning landscape. Some EMO/CMOs are for-profit companies, while other are nonprofit organizations.

Accessibility: The commitment to provide persons with disabilities the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use. The person with a disability must be able to obtain the information as fully, equally, and independently as a person without a disability.

Open Educational Resources (OER): Open Education Resources (commonly abbreviated as OER) are educational materials that are available in the public domain or through a license that allows for sharing with specific restrictions. OER is often licensed in a manner to encourage users to adapt (or "remix") and share the results with others. OER can be text, pictures, audio or video media, software, or other formats. OER can be in the form of single pieces of media or full modules, courses, or textbooks.

Computer-assisted Instruction (CAI): A program of instructional material presented by means of a computer. Most CAI provide learning objectives, learning resources, record keeping, progress tracking, and assessment of learner performance. Computer based tools and applications are used to assist the teacher or school administrator in the management of the learner and instructional process. :earning is usually self-directed and self-paced. Also referred to as computer-based training (CBT), CAI is generally accepted to have been created around 1960 with the development of the PLATO platform.

Self-paced learning: Allows students to learn at their own pace taking control of their learning path. The curriculum is constructed in such a way that the student may proceed without immediate response from the instructor. Students are able to proceed from one topic or segment to the next at their own speed. Self-paced courses do not follow a set schedule. Assignments and exams do not have start or due dates other than the official start and end date of the course. The course may provide a time management tool, such as a pacing guide and may have indicators for graded assignments, but not specific due dates.

Synchronous learning: A term used to describe forms of education, instruction, and learning that occur at the same time, but not in the same place.

Asynchronous learning: A term used to describe forms of education, instruction, and learning that not only occurs in different locations, but also at different times.

Creative Commons: Provides free, easy-to-use copyright licenses to make a simple and standardized way to give the public permission to share and use creative work–on conditions of the author.

Seat time: The amount of instructional time to earn a credit (Carnegie Unit), usually measured by attendance in a brick and mortar school.

Learning object: An electronic media resource (or digital file or collection of files) targeting a lesson objective, standard or a lesson concept, that can be used and reused for instructional purposes.

Note: A number of the key terms and definitions in this list were adapted from past Keeping Pace with K-12 Online and Blended Learning reports, published Evergreen Education Group

under a Creative Commons license. Thanks to Evergreen for its continued work in online and blended learning.

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[1] *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online and Blended Learning*, 2016.
[2] Ellis, Ryann K. (2009), *Field Guide to Learning Management*, ASTD Learning Circuits.
[3] TechTarget;
http://searchcontentmanagement.techtarget.com/definition/content-management-system-CMS
and Wikipedia; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Content_management_system.