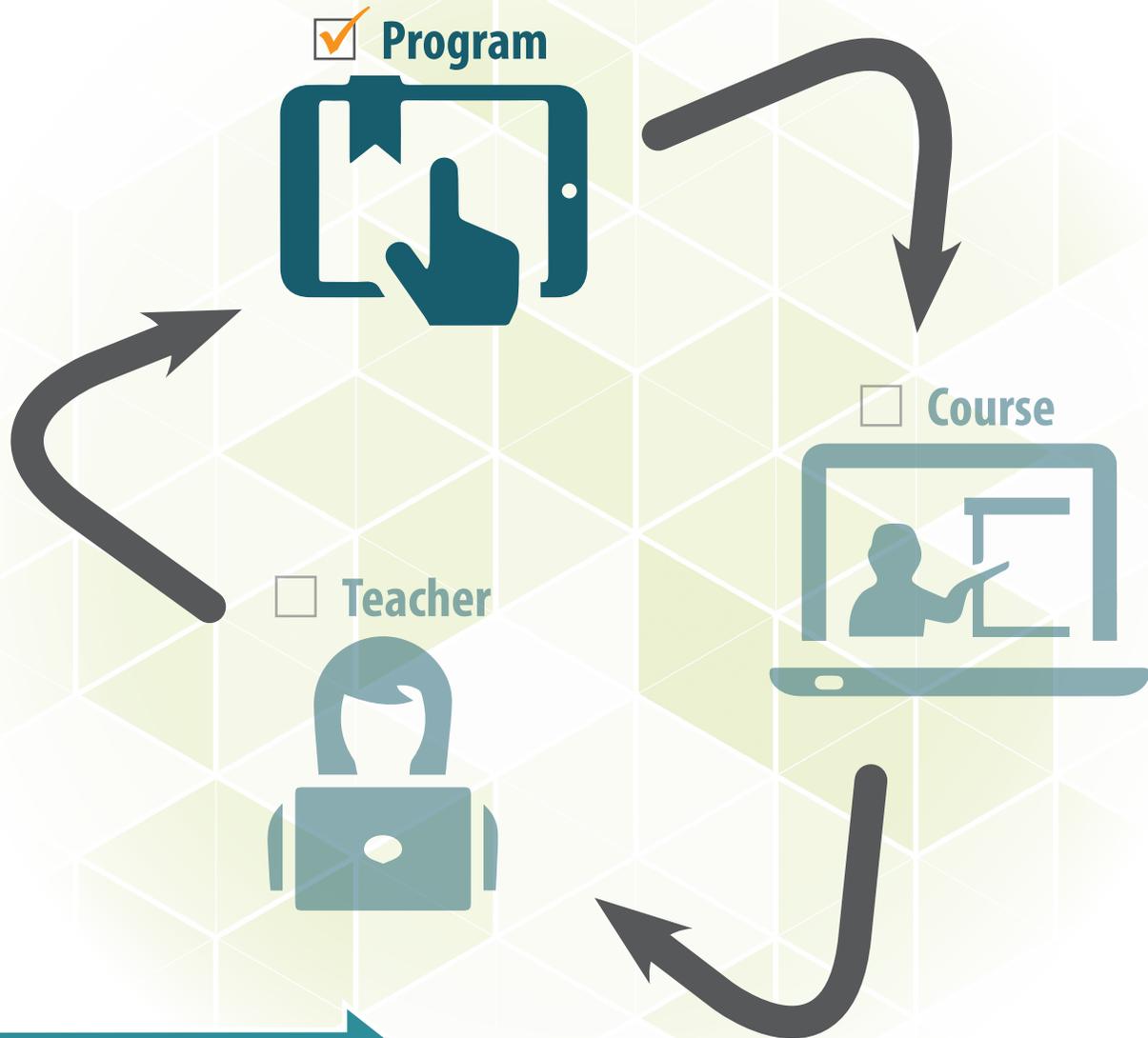


Meeting the Needs of Students with Disabilities in K-12 Online Learning:

An Analysis of the iNACOL Standards for Quality Online Programs

December 2016



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About Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute

In 2012, the Governor and Michigan Legislature passed legislation requiring *Michigan Virtual University*® (MVU®) to establish a center for online learning research and innovation, and through this center, directed MVU to work on a variety of projects. The center, known formally as *Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute*™ (MVLRI™), is a natural extension of the work of MVU. Established in 1998, MVU's mission is to advance K-12 education through digital learning, research, innovation, policy and partnerships. Toward that end, the core strategies of MVLRI are:

- Research – Expand the K-12 online and blended learning knowledge base through high quality, high impact research;
- Policy – Inform local, state, and national public education policy strategies that reinforce and support online and blended learning opportunities for the K-12 community;
- Innovation – Experiment with new technologies and online learning models to foster expanded learning opportunities for K-12 students; and
- Networks – Develop human and web-based applications and infrastructures for sharing information and implementing K-12 online and blended learning best practices.

MVU dedicates a small number of staff members to MVLRI projects as well as augments its capacity through a Fellows program drawing from state and national experts in K-12 online learning from K-12 schooling, higher education, and private industry. These experts work alongside MVU staff to provide research, evaluation, and development expertise and support.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the work of additional contributors to and reviewers of the reports:

Sandra Albert, Director of Exceptional Children Programs
Rowan-Salisbury Schools, Salisbury, NC

Eliz Colbert, Executive Director
North Carolina Virtual Public Schools

Mark Deschaine, Assistant Professor, Project Director of the Lifespan Autism Initiative
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Sarah Newman, Supervisor of Special Needs
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Suggested citation: Pace, J., Rice, M., Mellard, D., & Carter, Jr., R. A. (2016). *Meeting the needs of students with disabilities in K-12 online learning: An analysis of the iNACOL program standards*. Lansing, MI: Michigan Virtual University. Retrieved from <http://media.mivu.org/institute/pdf/MeetingNeeds2.pdf>

Program Standards¹

This is the second in a series of four reports. Report one develops the research questions, a review of the literature, and the methodology. This report includes a summary of the need for this research and a summary of the methodology but focuses primarily on the findings specific to the iNACOL Program Standards.

Students and their parents may choose to enroll in online learning programs as supplemental support, a credit recovery option, or because they need the flexibility of a fully online program (Gemin, Pape, Vashaw, & Watson, 2015). Although students, including those with disabilities, may enroll in an online environment because they perceive that in some way it will meet their educational needs, that does not mean those needs will automatically be met (Barbour, Archambault, & DiPietro, 2013; Borup & Stevens, in press). Consequences of not meeting those needs for students with disabilities include high non-completion rates and poor achievement (Deshler, Rice, & Greer, 2014; Rice, East, & Mellard, 2015).

To provide some guidance on quality online programs, Pape and Wicks (2009) developed the *National Standards for Quality Online Programs* through the International Association of K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL). While many of the elements of these standards may be applied easily to students with disabilities, more recent research has suggested ways in which online programs can be more effective in helping students with disabilities remain in these programs and be successful. Of particular importance are recommendations that programs do the following:

Welcome students with disabilities, even those with more severe disabilities and behavioral concerns, into the online learning environment (Bernstein, 2013);

Solicit feedback from parents of students with and without disabilities, and separate their feedback for comparison (Beck, Egalite, & Maranto, 2014);

- Plan to spend necessary funds to accommodate disability and provide related services as part of regular budgeting procedures and accounting processes (Molnar, et. al. 2013; Rice, East, & Mellard, 2015);
- Collect data about students with disabilities individually and as a group for analysis and evaluation purposes (Burdette, Franklin, East, Mellard, 2015; Franklin, Rice, East, & Mellard, 2015; Tindle, East, Mellard, 2015);

¹ This is the second report in a series of reports offering suggestions for revisions to iNACOL Quality Online Program Standards. The first report is an overview of the entire project. It can be accessed at <http://media.mivu.org/institute/pdf/MeetingNeeds1.pdf>. The third report has revision suggestions for the National Standards for Quality Online Courses. It is available at <http://media.mivu.org/institute/pdf/MeetingNeeds3.pdf>. The fourth report addresses the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching, available at <http://media.mivu.org/institute/pdf/MeetingNeeds4.pdf>.

- Participate in the preparation, hiring, support, and retention of teachers who can provide general accommodations to students with disabilities and who can provide specialized services (Rice, East, & Mellard, 2015; Rice & Carter, 2015); and
- Collaborate with vendors and support in-house program designers in making curriculum that is appropriate for students with various exceptionalities (Franklin, East, & Mellard, 2015; Greer, Rice, & Deshler, 2014).

To bring issues of disability service to the attention of online programs and define the responsibilities of these programs, researchers at the University of Kansas undertook a review process to incorporate newly emerging understanding into *iNACOL's National Standards for Quality Online Programs* about how programs can serve students with disabilities well. The team working on this review thoroughly reviewed existing program standards, current research, and disability legislation. Team members created recommendations if existing standards could benefit from inclusion of additional material and/or revision. An invited sample of experts rated the recommendations via anonymous survey and a teleconference.²

During the review process, members of the research team sought to identify individuals who could comment on both online education and students with disabilities. Members of the team used the ratings from the Qualtrics-based review to guide the teleconference: standards that scored low on one or more dimensions were focal points of the conversation.

Thus, following the above stages of standards review and revision, final versions of proposed revisions to the *iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Programs* emerged. For any given standard, these proposed revisions are composed of either a revision recommendation to each existing standard, a recommendation for an additional standard, or sometimes both. Recommendations are supported with citations from research or policy/law, as well as a short sentence explaining how the citation supports the recommendation. For example, recommendations were made to include standards on early assessment and intervention as research has shown improved student outcomes following these procedures.

These suggestions for revision have several important potential implications for improving the learning experiences of students with disabilities in online learning settings. These implications center on practice, research, and policy.

Practice Implications

Panelists completing the survey and participating in the telephone discussion indicated that the most difficult thing for programs to do is to ensure that they welcome students with disabilities into their program and that they plan for the necessary resources to support them. As it currently stands, many students with disabilities are either counseled out of online learning or admitted with

² The complete procedure is described in *Meeting the Needs of Students with Disabilities in K-12 Online Learning: An Introduction to the Analysis of the iNACOL Program, Course, and Teacher Standards*, available for free download at <http://media.mivu.org/institute/pdf/MeetingNeeds1.pdf>.

the understanding that support is limited to what is available to every student; parents may also be downplaying or denying student disability status because they think it will help their child “fit” in the online environment (Basham, Stahl, Ortiz, Rice, & Smith, 2015). There needs to be a shift where everyone involved in online course delivery says, “These students are entitled to be here, and we will learn what we need to help them be successful.”

Whereas many programs are not currently collecting data about the specific disabilities, this more sophisticated data collection is possible as they strive to adhere to the standards. Many of these revisions cannot be optimally implemented unless online learning providers gather more and more specific data about students with disabilities by category, marker characteristics, engagement, and outcomes. This new level of discrete data collection will support better research regarding learning outcomes for students with disabilities who are learning online.

Research Implications

The review of the existing Program Standards indicated that there was room for considerably more language dedicated to programmatic needs of students with disabilities. We have suggested such language, and these suggestions follow this section. Future research that looks at how these suggestions are implemented and their impact will be helpful in determining the next steps in the ongoing effort to provide the highest quality education to students with disabilities who learn online.

Policy Implications

The current suggestions to the existing Program Standards draw heavily from existing policy and law. During review, it was noted that specific policy documents pertaining to online learning in general are lacking. Policy that speaks directly to online learning and specifically to students with disabilities who learn online is needed to help maximize the availability of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for these students.

Data Analysis Documents

The remainder of this document is comprised of a list of the original program standards, the suggestions determined by professional consensus, and the rationale for changes or addition based on research. The list appears as Appendix A and contains the suggested changes to standards and accompanying justifications. This document also includes a list of the ratings, the range of the ratings, and the average rating of each of the proposed revised standards. These ratings appear in Appendix B.

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Appendix A

Suggested Changes to Program Standards and Accompanying Justifications

A: Mission statement

Current Standard

A mission statement of a quality online program clearly conveys its purpose and goals. It serves as the basis for the program's day-to-day operations, as well as a guide for its strategic plans for the future. Communication between and buy-in from stakeholders is a critical component of a mission statement.

Recommended Additional Standard

Stipulates a climate of non-discrimination for students, parents, and employees based on race, ethnicity, gender, sex, and/or disability status.

Justification

Per the zero reject principle of IDEA, students with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate education (FAPE; IDEA, 2004).

A-1

Current Standard

States the purpose of the organization. Is clear and concise in articulating who the organization is, what it does, and whom it serves.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

A-2

Current Standard

Indicates that online learning is the focus of the organization.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

A-3

Current Standard

Demonstrates a commitment to measurable quality and accountability.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

A-4

Current Standard

Reflects involvement of key stakeholders.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

A-5

Current Standard

Is made available to the public.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

A-6

Current Standard

Is reviewed periodically by program leadership.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

B: Governance

Current Standard

Governance is typically provided by a Board of Directors, an Advisory Board or a School Board. In a quality online program, governance and leadership work hand-in-hand, developing the operational policies for the program and its leadership and staff.

Recommended Additional Standard

Members are included who have expertise in, experience with, and interest in students with disabilities.

Justification

Students with disabilities are at risk for being excluded from online schools. Educators who understand more about disabilities and what students encounter may be better positioned to advocate for their inclusion in all types of online settings (Bernstein, 2013).

B-1

Current Standard

Members are knowledgeable about K-12 online learning and/or receive appropriate training after joining the governing board.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

B-2

Current Standard

Supports the organization by securing necessary resources.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

B-3

Current Standard

Fulfills the role defined for it in the by-laws of the institution.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

B-4

Current Standard

Collaborates with program leadership to implement policies and procedures that are in compliance with state educational statutes and/or regional accrediting agencies.

Recommended Revision to Standard

Collaborates with program leadership to implement policies and procedures that are in compliance with federal policies, state educational statutes, and regional accrediting agencies.

Justification

IDEA stipulates specific policies and procedures that should be followed in providing services (IDEA, 2004).

B-5

Current Standard

The legal status of the online program is clearly defined with no ambiguities in ownership, control, or responsibility.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

C: Leadership

Current Standard

The leadership of a quality online program is accountable to the program's governance body, and is responsible for setting and meeting the operational and strategic goals in support of the program's mission and vision statements.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

C-1

Current Standard

Is responsible for meeting the organization's annual goals and communicating these goals to its constituents.

Recommended Additional Standard

Plan for expenses related to accommodations and modifications for students served under disability plans (e.g., IEPs, 504 plans).

Justification

The cost to provide FAPE to students with disabilities should be considered during strategic planning (IDEA, 2004).

C-2

Current Standard

Maintains a disciplined knowledge of its future with projections of income, expense, enrollment, and trends in its educational and business environment.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

C-3

Current Standard

Provides a productive collaborative environment for learning and work, and the leadership necessary to plan both day-to-day operations and the long-term future of the online program.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

C-4

Current Standard

Verifies that measures are in place to ensure quality, integrity and validity of information.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

D: Planning

Current Standard

A quality online program makes planning, managed by the leadership and staff of the organization a regular part of the program. There are several types of planning activities, including strategic planning, long-range and operational planning, which defines annual goals. Effective planning is not a one-time activity, but instead should provide opportunities for reflection on how to improve the organization's performance.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

D-1

Current Standard

Is developed that addresses 3-5 years of actions and has been approved by the program's leadership and governance.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

D-2

Current Standard

Is updated on a regular basis (at least every 3-5 years) and includes historical data, baseline information, trend data, and projections, allowing data-driven decision-making.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

D-3

Current Standard

Addresses the requirements for resources that effectively and efficiently serve their students and faculty, including curriculum, technology, support, professional development, and fiscal viability.

Recommended Revision to Standard

Addresses the requirements for resources that effectively and efficiently serve their students and faculty, including curriculum, technology, support (including services for students with disabilities), professional development, and fiscal viability.

Justification

IDEA requires that students have access to the general education curriculum to the greatest extent possible (IDEA, 2004).

D-4

Current Standard

Are aligned with the strategic plan.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

D-5

Current Standard

Are updated annually based on past year's accomplishments.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

D-6

Current Standard

Are shared and supported throughout the organization.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

E: Organizational Staffing

Current Standard

A quality online program recognizes appropriate levels of staffing are critical to the success of an online program. Staff should be well trained in order to successfully meet their performance goals, and are provided with appropriate levels of support, resources, feedback and management.

Recommended Additional Standard

Sufficient staff is hired or provided with preparation and training to provide a meaningful education for all students, including students with disabilities.

Justification

IDEA requires that schools hire highly qualified special education teachers to provide FAPE for students in special education (IDEA, 2004).

E-1

Current Standard

Sufficient professional, administrative and support staff are provided to carry out the mission and annual organizational goals.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

E-2

Current Standard

Ongoing training and support are provided to the staff to carry out the mission of the program.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

E-3

Current Standard

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities are evident to create a collegial team to assure effective delivery of quality education.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

E-4

Current Standard

Evaluations of staff and faculty occur on a regularly scheduled basis.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

F: Organizational Commitment

Current Standard

In a quality online program governance, leadership and staff are responsible for creating an organization that demonstrates a commitment to attaining the program's goals and mission statement. Everyone within the organization understands the mission statement and works to achieve it.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

F-1

Current Standard

Activities and accomplishments of the organization are aligned to the mission statement.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

F-2

Current Standard

Programs that function under the authority of another educational organization have a demonstrated commitment from the parent organization to support the implementation and ongoing operation of this program.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

F-3

Current Standard

Sustainability of the program is articulated through strategic and operational planning and implemented through ongoing operations (e.g. commitment to sustainable funding, maintaining quality staff, and compliance with applicable educational statutes).

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

F-4

Current Standard

Is accredited by a recognized accrediting body.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

G: Financial and Material Resources

Current Standard

A quality online program has adequate financial and material resources to accomplish the mission of the organization. These resources are appropriately planned for and expended using sound business practices.

Recommended Additional Standard

Program leaders are aware of state, local, and federal funds for supporting students with disabilities and leaders use these funds appropriately.

Justification

Federal funds are provided to states to help ensure students with disabilities have access to FAPE (IDEA, 2004).

G-1

Current Standard

Are available to assure a quality educational experience in alignment with the organization's mission statement.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

G-2

Current Standard

Are managed in a responsible manner according to prescribed budget and accounting principles.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

G-3

Current Standard

Are allocated in support of mission statement that demonstrates sustainability over time.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

H: Equity and Access

Current Standard

A quality online program's policies and practice support students' ability to access the program. Accommodations are available to meet a variety of student needs.

Recommended Additional Standard

Policies in a quality online program stipulate non-discouragement and non-rejection and are inviting to students with special needs.

Justification

Students with disabilities are at risk for being excluded from online schools. Educators with understanding about disabilities may be better positioned to advocate for inclusion in all types of online settings (Bernstein, 2013).

H-1

Current Standard

Policies clearly state eligibility requirements for the program

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

H-2

Current Standard

Policies and practices are in place that provide accommodations for students with disabilities.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

H-3

Current Standard

Ensures that students have equitable access to the program consistent with its mission and purposes.

Recommended Revision to Standard

Ensures that students have inclusive, equitable access to the program consistent with its mission and purposes.

I: Integrity and Accountability

Current Standard

In a quality online program, leadership is transparent in its management of the program, providing regular and timely information on progress towards attainment of goals, alignment with policies and standards, and achievement of student learning outcomes.

Recommended Additional Standard

The online program collects data about a variety of learner outcomes, including outcomes for students with disabilities, and regularly reports that information to stakeholders.

Justification

Monitoring student progress towards IEP goals is necessary to ensure they are receiving FAPE; aggregating this data at school (or higher) levels is useful in demonstrating that the system is providing FAPE (IDEA, 2004).

I-1

Current Standard

The online program discloses accurate information relating to its mission, accreditation, courses and programs, services, policies, fees, recruitment processes and incentives, and other factors considered important to prospective and current students and stakeholders.

Recommended Additional Standard

The online program has provisions for sharing data about students with disabilities with stakeholders for the purpose of decision-making and goal monitoring.

Justification

IDEA stipulates that students with disabilities must have goals that start with present levels of achievement and move students towards increasing competence (IDEA, 2004).

I-2

Current Standard

The program results in learning appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the course, program, or diploma completion requirements.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

J: Curriculum and Course Design

Current Standard

A quality online program will have a well thought-out approach to its curriculum and course design whether it develops its own courses and/or licenses curriculum from other educational providers.

Recommended Revision to Standard

A quality online program will prioritize curriculum that is accessible through Section 508 and leverages the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, whether it develops its own courses and/or licenses them from other providers.

Justification

Considering the principles of UDL and 508 at the design stage will help ensure appropriate access to the technology mediated instruction for all students (CAST, 2011).

J-1

Current Standard

Has clearly stated and attainable educational goals.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

J-2

Current Standard

Is clear and coherent in its organization.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

J-3

Current Standard

Utilizes quality instructional materials and appropriate technology that enable and enrich student learning.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

J-4

Current Standard

Demonstrates rigorous course content.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

J-5

Current Standard

Provides for high-degree of interaction between teacher, learners, parents, and among learners themselves.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

J-6

Current Standard

Embeds critical thinking, problem solving, analysis, integration, and synthesis abilities in learning activities.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

J-7

Current Standard

Meets requirements of appropriate state or national standards, including applicable end of course assessments.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

J-8

Current Standard

Meets requirements of accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

Recommended Revision to Standard

A quality online program focuses on providing opportunities for students with disabilities to learn as well as their peers without disabilities.

Justification

Students are entitled to access technology that grants them benefits equitable to other students (Section 508).

J-9

Current Standard

Meets requirements of copyright and fair use.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

J-10

Current Standard

Is designed to accommodate different learning styles.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

J-11

Current Standard

Is designed with consideration for time and place limitations of students.

Recommended Revision to Standard

Is designed with consideration for time and place constraints and supports access, usage, and responses.

K: Instruction

Current Standard

A quality online program takes a comprehensive and integrated approach to ensuring excellent online teaching for its students. This process begins with promising practices but is equally committed to continuous improvement and adaptation to student learning needs through professional development.

Recommended Additional Standard

A quality online program monitors courses to ensure adherence to national and/or state curriculum standards, as well as evidence-based practices.

Justification

Students with disabilities benefit from evidence-based practices such as immediate feedback, rapid pacing, scaffolding, or modeling (Bulgren, Graner, & Deshler, 2013; IDEA, 2004; Swanson, 1999).

K-1

Current Standard

Is grounded in the program's mission, beliefs, and expectations for student learning.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

K-2

Current Standard

Is supported by research and best practice.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

K-3

Current Standard

Is continually refined based on assessment of stakeholders' needs.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

K-4

Current Standard

Is adaptable to best serve different student learning styles.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

K-5

Current Standard

Is sensitive to the cultural differences of students.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

K-6

Current Standard

Includes frequent teacher-to-student interaction, teacher-to-parent interaction, and fosters frequent student-to-student interaction.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

K-7

Current Standard

Is sensitive to time and place limitations of students.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

K-8

Current Standard

Faculty hold the required state certifications.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

K-9

Current Standard

Faculty are trained in and demonstrate competency in online instructional methodologies and learning technologies.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

K-10

Current Standard

Includes a process to monitor that the work and assessments are completed by the students registered for the course.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

L: Assessment of Student Performance

Current Standard

A quality online learning program values student academic performance and takes a comprehensive, integrated approach to measuring student achievement. This includes use of multiple assessment measures and strategies that align closely to both program and learner objectives, with timely, relevant feedback to all stakeholders.

Recommended Additional Standard

Uses assessment data to evaluate learner-initiated or IEP goals; it also uses assessment as part of Child Find procedures as outlined in IDEA for identifying students with disabilities as early as

possible. Finally, it employs formal assessments that are valid and reliable for special needs populations, in addition to informal assessments.

Justification

Early identification and intervention results in improved outcomes for students with disabilities. It is important to remember, however, that some measurement instruments (such as 'universal' screeners) may not be able to assess students with disabilities adequately. It is important to be aware of such limitations when choosing assessments in order to ensure that such assessments are valid for all of the students who take it (Catts, Petscher, Schatschneider, Bridges & Mendoza, 2009; IDEA, 2004).

L-1

Current Standard

Enables students to monitor their own learning progress.

Recommended Revision to Standard

Enables students to monitor their own learning progress and incorporates charting and other appropriate visual displays of data.

Justification

Students with disabilities who engage in self-determination in K-12 have better learning and transition outcomes than those who do not; learners benefit from the opportunity to engage in project based learning where they can set their own goals for learning (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenburg, & Little, 2013; English & Kitsantas, 2013).

L-2

Current Standard

Enables teachers to adapt their instruction to meet learner needs.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

L-3

Current Standard

Uses multiple methods to assess student performance.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

L-4

Current Standard

Assesses a variety of types of student performance.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

L-5

Current Standard

Uses formative assessments to inform instructional practice.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

L-6

Current Standard

Informs ongoing course design and revisions.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

L-7

Current Standard

Measures student attainment of the course's educational goals.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

L-8

Current Standard

Provides for timely and frequent feedback about student progress.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

M: Faculty

Current Standard

A quality online program supports the faculty by providing opportunities for them to develop their professional skills through mentoring, professional development, and technical assistance.

Recommended Additional Standard

A quality online program provides additional support for teachers with disabilities; it also encourages formal and informal faculty collaboration around students and collects and reviews teacher attrition data.

Justification

IDEA and Section 504 require the cooperation of various educators to set, fund, implement, and review goals. Further, instruction for students with disabilities should be the primary goal of schools as they develop special education programs (IDEA, 2004; Kauffman & Badar, 2014).

M-1

Current Standard

Provides and encourages participation in induction and mentoring programs.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

M-2

Current Standard

Provides regular feedback regarding teacher performance.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

M-3

Current Standard

Provides a wide variety of professional development opportunities.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

M-4

Current Standard

Provides timely, effective technical support.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

N: Students

Current Standard

A quality online program has student support services to address the various needs of students at different levels within the organization. The levels of support are appropriate and adequate for a student's success.

Recommended Additional Standard

A quality online program makes and monitors plans for students as they transition both into and out of the online environment.

Justification

IDEA requires that students receive assistance when moving into and out of different types of placements and learning settings; it also requires transition support for moving from K-12 into further education or work settings (IDEA, 2004).

N-1

Current Standard

Provides an orientation to online learning technologies and successful online student practices.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

N-2

Current Standard

Provides academic and administrative services to address their academic and developmental needs.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

N-3

Current Standard

Provides support services for individual needs.

Recommended Revision to Standard

Provides support services including access to and information about related services for individual needs.

Justification

IDEA requires disclosure about services that meet student needs and requires schools to locate and fund these services (IDEA, 2004).

N-4

Current Standard

Provides access to learning and assessment content, instruction, technologies and resources.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

N-5

Current Standard

Establishes standards for teacher-to-student communication.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

N-6

Current Standard

Provides timely and meaningful assessment feedback.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

N-7

Current Standard

Provides timely, effective technical support.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

O: Guidance services

Current Standard

A quality online program has guidance services to support students and parents to ensure success of the online program. Depending on the program, these services are either directly provided by the program or a service provider, or in the case of supplemental programs, these services may be provided by the local school.

Recommended Revision to Standard

A quality online program has guidance services to support students and parents to ensure their success in the online program, including behavioral support. Depending on the program, these services are either directly provided by the program or service provider, or in the case of supplemental programs, these services may be provided in collaboration with the brick-and-mortar school.

Justification

IDEA stipulates that when a child's behavior interferes with their ability to learn, appropriate strategies, such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) should be considered (IDEA, 2004). PBIS is an effective strategy for reducing behavior problems (Carr et al., 1999).

O-1

Current Standard

Ensures academic advising is provided for students to meet requirements of the program and/or school.

Recommended Additional Standard

Provides guidance for struggling learners and their parents, including information about referrals to and evaluations for special education.

Justification

IDEA stipulates a Child Find process where students can be identified and assessed for disabilities in educational settings. Further, parents are to be involved in this process (IDEA, 2004).

O-2

Current Standard

Provides staff training in the unique student needs of online learning.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

O-3

Current Standard

Provides tools and/or information to assist students in determining the appropriateness of specific courses for their academic needs.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

O-4

Current Standard

Understands the network of services available to support online learning.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

P: Organizational support

Current Standard

A quality online program has organizational support to oversee the instructional learning environment as it is conveyed through technology. Some organizational support services may be distributed between the program and other entities, depending on the physical location where the students are taking their online courses.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

P-1

Current Standard

Provides an online learning environment that is appropriately maintained, secure and is a productive and safe work environment for students and staff.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

P-2

Current Standard

Provides a work environment consisting of the resources, tools, and organizational policies that enables staff to implement the program's mission, beliefs and objectives.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

Q: Parents/ Guardians

Current Standard

In a quality online program, parents and guardians play an integral part in their students' educational life. They work as a team with faculty, administrators, guidance services, and organizational support to ensure a quality educational experience for their students.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

Q-1

Current Standard

Are provided information about the program, successful online student practices and supportive learning environments.

Recommended Additional Standard

Parents are informed about their roles in student learning and offered strategic support for those roles.

Justification

IDEA requires disclosure to parents regarding student strengths and progress; Borup, et. al's (2013) work suggests that parent roles in online schools are extended and that little support for these new roles exists (IDEA, 2004; Borup, Graham, & Davies, 2013).

Q-2

Current Standard

Receive timely responses from faculty and staff.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

Q-3

Current Standard

Receive critical information about student progress and are encouraged to communicate with faculty and administrators to best support the online learning student.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

R: Program evaluation

Current Standard

A quality online program recognizes the value of program evaluation. Program evaluation is both internal and external and informs all processes that effect teaching and learning. Internal evaluations often are more informal in nature and may provide immediate feedback on a targeted area of inquiry. External program evaluations typically look at the entire program from an objective perspective that will bring additional credibility to the results.

Recommended Revision to Standard

A quality online program recognizes the value of comprehensive, ongoing program evaluation. Program evaluation is both internal and external and informs all processes that affect teaching and learning, including academic and non-academic processes. Internal evaluations often are more informal in nature and may provide immediate feedback on a targeted area of inquiry. External program evaluations typically look at the entire program from an objective perspective that will bring additional credibility to the results.

Recommended Additional Standard

Assesses the persistence and attrition of subgroups, and conducts regular access audits regarding intake, graduation, and progress towards IEP goals.

Justification

IDEA requires that students have performance goals; these goals can be both academic and/or social and should be monitored using data (IDEA, 2004).

R-1

Current Standard

Conducts ongoing internal evaluations that include regularly collecting and analyzing data based on national, state, and/or program metrics.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

R-2

Current Standard

Conducts ongoing internal evaluations that include using clearly articulated measures to evaluate its learners.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

R-3

Current Standard

Conducts ongoing internal evaluations that include determining program success by measuring student achievement and satisfaction based on valid and reliable assessment techniques.

Recommended Additional Standard

A quality online program uses assessments with adequate floors and ceilings (range of easy and difficult items) for special needs populations served by the program.

Justification

Assessments which may be valid for the general population may not be valid for students with special needs who may require extended floors (Catts, Petscher, Schatschneider, Bridges & Mendoza, 2009).

R-4

Current Standard

Conducts ongoing internal evaluations that include ensuring students participate in state or national standardized testing, as appropriate and evaluating results against state or national data.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

R-5

Current Standard

Conducts ongoing internal evaluations that include consistently evaluating faculty to assure instructional quality, using clear, consistent policies, measures and procedures.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

R-6

Current Standard

Conducts ongoing internal evaluations that include reviewing and evaluating courses to ensure quality, consistency with the curriculum, currency, and advancement of the student learning outcomes.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

R-7

Current Standard

Conducts periodic external evaluations that include validating internal evaluation process and results.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

R-8

Current Standard

Conducts periodic external evaluations that include independently assessing progress towards goals, mission and strategic plan of program.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

R-9

Current Standard

Conducts periodic external evaluations that include informing an improvement plan for the online program.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

R-10

Current Standard

Communicates evaluation results to program stakeholders.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

S: Program improvement

Current Standard

A quality online program establishes a culture of continual program improvement. Improvement planning focuses on using program evaluations, research, and promising practices to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness. It fosters continuous improvement across all aspects of the organization and ensures the program is focused on accomplishing its mission and vision.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

S-1

Current Standard

Uses strategic, long-range and operational planning and evaluation to continuously improve its educational programs and services.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

S-2

Current Standard

Uses data effectively to drive instructional and management decision-making.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

S-3

Current Standard

Advancement of the program's vision and mission.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

S-4

Current Standard

Student achievement.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

S-5

Current Standard

Internal and external evaluation.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

S-6

Current Standard

Current research in the relevant areas.

Recommended Revision to Standard

A quality online program seeks out and incorporates rigorous research in relevant areas.

Justification

Implementing evidence-based practices for students with disabilities requires different levels and types of vigilance than for other populations (Cook & Odom, 2013).

S-7

Current Standard

Promising practices.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

S-8

Current Standard

Beta testing and peer review.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

S-9

Current Standard

Satisfaction surveys by students, parents, teachers and schools as appropriate.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

S-10

Current Standard

Evaluation of curriculum and instruction as it relates to student achievement.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

S-11

Current Standard

Regular online teacher performance evaluations.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

S-12

Current Standard

Reviewing and updating policies and procedures.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

S-13

Current Standard

Reviewing appropriateness, effectiveness and quality of teaching and learning technologies.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

S-14

Current Standard

Regular online course reviews.

No suggestions for modifications for this standard

Appendix B

Ratings Resulting from Online Survey: Program Standards

Standard (at time of review)	Rating Dimension	Range	Average Rating
Stipulates a climate of non-discrimination for students, parents, and employees based on race, ethnicity, gender, sex, and/or disability status.	Relevance	4-5	4.75
	Specificity	2-4	3.25
	Competency	None	4
	Difficulty	2-5	4
Members are included who have expertise, experience with, and interest in students with disabilities.	Relevance	None	5
	Specificity	2-4	3
	Competency	2-5	3.75
	Difficulty	2-5	3.75
Collaborates with program leadership to implement policies and procedures that are in compliance with federal policies, state educational statutes, and regional accrediting agencies.	Relevance	4-5	4.75
	Specificity	3-4	3.75
	Competency	1-5	3.5
	Difficulty	2-5	3.5
Plan for expenses related to accommodations and modifications for students served under disability plans (e.g., IEPs, 504 plans).	Relevance	None	5
	Specificity	3-4	3.75
	Competency	3-5	4.25
	Difficulty	2-5	3.25
Addresses the requirements for resources that effectively and efficiently serve their students and faculty, including curriculum, technology, support (including services for students with disabilities), professional development, and fiscal viability.	Relevance	4-5	4.75
	Specificity	3-4	3.75
	Competency	3-5	4
	Difficulty	2-5	3

Standard (at time of review)	Rating Dimension	Range	Average Rating
Sufficient staff is hired or provided with preparation and training to provide a meaningful education for all students, including students with disabilities.	Relevance	4-5	4.75
	Specificity	2-4	3.25
	Competency	3-5	4
	Difficulty	2-5	3
Program leaders are aware of state, local, and federal funds for supporting students with disabilities and leaders use these funds appropriately.	Relevance	None	5
	Specificity	None	4
	Competency	1-4	3.25
	Difficulty	2-4	3
Policies stipulate non-discouragement and non-rejection and are inviting to students with special needs.	Relevance	4-5	4.5
	Specificity	1-3	2.25
	Competency	1-4	2.25
	Difficulty	3-4	3.25
Ensures that students have inclusive, equitable access to the program consistent with its mission and purposes.	Relevance	None	5
	Specificity	2-4	3
	Competency	1-5	2.75
	Difficulty	2-5	3.25
The online program collects data about a variety of learner outcomes, including outcomes for students with disabilities, and regularly reports that information to stakeholders.	Relevance	3-5	4.25
	Specificity	3-4	3.75
	Competency	2-5	3.75
	Difficulty	2-5	4
The online program has provisions for sharing data about students with disabilities with stakeholders for the purpose of decision-making and goal monitoring.	Relevance	4-5	4.5
	Specificity	3-4	3.75
	Competency	2-5	3.25

Standard (at time of review)	Rating Dimension	Range	Average Rating
(Continued)	Difficulty	2-5	3.5
A quality online program will have a well-thought-out approach to curriculum and course design that includes attention to Section 508 and Universal Design for Learning guidelines, whether it develops its own courses and/or licenses them from other providers and the program is capable of responding to learner-initiated goals.	Relevance	None	5
	Specificity	2-4	3.33
	Competency	1-4	2.33
	Difficulty	1-4	2.33
Grants equitable access to students with disabilities which affords them the opportunity to learn as well as their peers without disabilities.	Relevance	None	5
	Specificity	1-4	3
	Competency	1-4	2.33
	Difficulty	1-4	2.33
Is designed with consideration for time and place constraints and supports access, usage, and responses.	Relevance	4-5	4.5
	Specificity	2-4	2.75
	Competency	2-4	2.75
	Difficulty	2-5	3
Instruction in the online program balances rigor with scaffolding and other supports, along with the adjustment of expectations based on learner needs and learner goals, both formal (e.g., IEP) and informal.	Relevance	3-5	4.5
	Specificity	1-4	2.5
	Competency	2-4	2.75
	Difficulty	2-4	2.75
Uses assessment data to evaluate learner-initiated or IEP goals; It also uses assessment as part of Child Find procedures for identifying students with disabilities as early as possible. Finally, it employs assessments which are valid and reliable for special needs populations, in addition to informal assessment.	Relevance	None	5
	Specificity	3-4	3.75
	Competency	2-5	3.5
	Difficulty	None	3

Standard (at time of review)	Rating Dimension	Range	Average Rating
Enables students to monitor their own learning progress and incorporates charting and other appropriate visual displays of data.	Relevance	3-5	4.5
	Specificity	2-4	3.25
	Competency	1-5	3
	Difficulty	2-5	3.5
A quality online program provides additional support for teachers with disabilities; It also encourages formal and informal faculty collaboration around students and collects and reviews teacher attrition data.	Relevance	None	5
	Specificity	2-4	3.33
	Competency	2-5	3.67
	Difficulty	2-4	3
A quality online program makes and monitors plans for students as they transition both into and out of the online environment.	Relevance	4-5	4.75
	Specificity	2-4	3.25
	Competency	1-4	3
	Difficulty	1-4	3
Provides support services including access to and information about related services for individual needs.	Relevance	2-5	4.25
	Specificity	3-4	3.5
	Competency	2-5	3
	Difficulty	2-4	3.25
A quality online program has guidance services to support students and parents to ensure their success in the online program, including behavioral support. Depending on the program, these services are either directly provided by the program or service provider, or in the case of supplemental programs, these services may be provided in collaboration with the brick-and-mortar school.	Relevance	3-5	4.5
	Specificity	2-4	3
	Competency	2-4	2.75
	Difficulty	2-3	2.67
Provides guidance for struggling learners and their parents, including information about referrals to and evaluations for special education.	Relevance	3-5	4.5
	Specificity	1-4	2.75

Standard (at time of review)	Rating Dimension	Range	Average Rating
(Continued)	Competency	1-5	2.75
	Difficulty	2-5	3
Parents are informed about their roles in student learning and offered strategic support for those roles.	Relevance	4-5	4.75
	Specificity	2-4	3.25
	Competency	2-5	3.67
	Difficulty	2-5	3.75
A quality online program recognizes the value of comprehensive, on-going program evaluation. Program evaluation is both internal and external and informs all processes that effect teaching and learning. Internal evaluations often are more informal in nature and may provide immediate feedback on a targeted area of inquiry. External program evaluations typically look at the entire program from an objective perspective that will bring additional credibility to the results.	Relevance	4-5	4.75
	Specificity	3-4	3.75
	Competency	1-4	3
	Difficulty	1-3	2.5
Assesses the persistence and attrition of subgroups, and conducts regular access audits regarding intake, graduation, and progress towards IEP goals.	Relevance	4-5	4.5
	Specificity	2-4	3.5
	Competency	1-4	3
	Difficulty	1-4	2.75
Uses assessment techniques with adequate floors and ceilings for special needs populations served by the program.	Relevance	3-5	4.5
	Specificity	1-3	2.25
	Competency	2-4	2.75
	Difficulty	1-3	2.33
Rigorous research in relevant areas.	Relevance	4-5	4.75
	Specificity	1-4	2.75
	Competency	1-4	2.5
	Difficulty	2-3	2.75

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