

Going Virtual!

Unique Needs and Challenges of K-12 Online Teachers



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October 2008



GOING VIRTUAL!

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Results from Phase Two of the Going Virtual! Study Series

Research

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The findings in this report represent Phase II of the *Going Virtual!* research series. In this report, we posed the question, “*What are the unique needs and challenges of K-12 online teachers?*” The first phase of the *Going Virtual!* research series, conducted in 2007, addressed the need to investigate the national status of professional development for K-12 online teachers.

We conducted a national survey during fall 2008, and had 884 total respondents representing online teachers from virtual schools, supplemental online programs, and brick and mortar programs offering online courses. The investigators used an interpretive research design to begin identification of the unique needs and challenges of K-12 online teachers, as both 1) aligned to an emerging synthesis of professional standards for K-12 online teachers, and 2) as described by the teachers in their own words. This methodology provides very practical information for policymakers seeking to establish national and state standards for K-12 online teachers, and for trainers designing professional development programs. It also allows for the identification and creation of constructs of understanding not currently existing in the literature that researchers can study at a later date using more structured research approaches.

Summary of Findings

Experienced workforce:

- Ninety-nine percent of respondents are credentialed teachers.
- The overall workforce in online education consists of relatively experienced teachers. Although 27% of respondents (n=239) were new to *online* teaching this year, only 2% were brand new teachers. Fifty-five percent of teachers have between six to fifteen years of total teaching experience, with 18% reporting 16 or more years of teaching experience.
- Over half of the teachers reported their highest degree as a master’s degree or better (55%).

Professional development opportunities & preferences:

- 72% have participated in ongoing training sessions in online teaching.
- 46% have completed over 45 hours of professional development in online teaching.
- The two least preferred delivery methods across all respondents (least preferred and somewhat preferred combined) are: 1) *fully face-to-face instruction* (62%), and 2) *fully online, non-facilitated* (56%).
- The two most preferred delivery methods reported across all respondents (preferred and most preferred combined) are: 1) *ongoing training* (69%), and 2) *fully online, facilitated* (68%).

Critical professional development needs:

- Professional development needs rated as **very important** (rating of 4 on scale of 1-4) included *use of communication technologies* (74%), *time management strategies* (62%), *risks of academic dishonesty to learners* (60%), and *student internet safety* (60%).

Other professional development needs:

We asked online teachers to identify themselves by 1) model of program, including virtual schools, supplemental programs, and brick and mortar online programs, and 2) years of teaching experience. Results below reflect comparisons among these groups:

- **Technology tools:** Professional development in *Web 2.0 technologies* is reported as less important by virtual school teachers (46%), and is rated higher by brick and mortar online teachers (85%).
- **Facilitation:** Highly rated facilitation topics included *enable student autonomy, independence, and responsibility for lesson mastery* (over 90%), *time management strategies* (88-94%), and *alternative interventions to address varied learning needs* (81-92%).
- **Online content development:** More online teachers in brick and mortar online programs are required to develop content (67%) when compared to teachers in supplemental programs (44%) or virtual schools (37%). Over 90% of respondents reported *Maintaining accuracy and currency of course content* as important to very important.
- **Digital etiquette:** 100% of online teachers in brick and mortar programs *rated risks of academic dishonesty to learners* as important to very important.
- **Assessment:** Two professional development topics in the survey, *peer review* (58% or lower) and *student self-evaluation* (79% or lower), received the lowest consistent ratings of all professional development needs in the survey.
- **Networking/community building:** The importance of professional development in *networking and community building* had the lowest ratings among all *categories* in the survey.
- **Leadership:** Ninety-one percent of virtual school teachers rated the professional development need of *management tasks* as important to very important.
- **Special needs:** Virtual school teachers reported higher needs in *modify, customize, and/or personalize activities* (90%), *intervention and/or enrichment* (91%), and in *team teaching* (70%). Only 33% of supplemental and brick and mortar teachers reported *team teaching* as an important training topic.

Needs and challenges expressed by respondents

- Open ended responses mainly reflected issues with *time management* (n = 71), as well as *students taking responsibility for learning* (n = 61). Some participants indicated issues with *communication* (n = 54), and their *ability to learn and use technologies* (n = 54).

GOING VIRTUAL! RESEARCH SERIES

In 2007, we began the Going Virtual! research series in response to the need for empirical data to better understand the professional development needs of K-12 online teachers (Dawley, 2007; NEA, 2006; Rice, 2006; Rice & Dawley, 2007). The complete series consists of three phases of data collection and analysis:

- **Phase 1: The Status of Professional Development for K-12 Online Teachers, 2007**
Report available at <http://edtech.boisestate.edu/goingvirtual/goingvirtual1.pdf>
- **Phase 2: Identifying the Unique Needs and Challenges of K-12 Online Teachers, 2008**
- **Phase 3: Effective Professional Development of K-12 Online Teachers, 2009**

In last year's report, we focused on the *status of professional development* of K-12 online teachers across the U.S. from the perspective of teachers, administrators and trainers. This work established baseline data on: 1) who was delivering professional development, 2) who was receiving professional development, 3) when and how professional development was being delivered, and 4) the content and sequence of professional development. Phase 1 results included:

- **Amount of PD:** More than 90% of teachers reported that training had been provided or made available to them, and this percent was fairly consistent regardless of the model or program.
- **When PD Occurs:** The highest teacher-reported period when PD occurred was during the first year (61%). Forty percent (40%) of teachers reported receiving PD each year after the first year. Sixty two percent of teachers report receiving no training prior to teaching online. Supplemental programs reported the highest percentage of training prior to teaching online (38%).
- **Format of PD:** Training sessions are delivered in a variety of formats, with online training the most popular 48%, hybrid 31%, and face-to-face 9%. 12% reported that face-to-face was the *only* form of PD they had received.
- **PD offerings** ranged on a continuum from “we don't have a training program” to “over 30 professional development courses.”
- **Peer mentoring** is a commonly reported form of PD (68% teachers, 82% administrators, 85% trainers). Virtual school programs reported the highest use of peer mentoring (78%), while consortium models reported the lowest use of peer mentoring (60%).
- **Individualization of PD** based on prior experience was reported most often by charter school programs (28%), and reported least often by district wide models (5%).
- **Guidelines:** Administrators reported relying most heavily on state guidelines (30%), as well as self-developed guidelines (28%) to guide development of PD.

This year's report identifies the *unique needs and challenges* of K-12 online teachers as expressed by the teachers themselves and takes into account both 1) the context of the program or school in which the teacher works, and 2) the amount of experience the teacher has in online teaching. This serves two purposes. First, it extends our current knowledge about professional development for K-12 online teachers by identifying what knowledge and skills K-12 online teachers feel they need. Second, it establishes a foundation for future empirical studies examining the effectiveness of professional development for K-12 online teachers.

BACKGROUND

Past trends indicate, and current forecasts project, continued growth in K-12 online virtual schools and programs. Forty-four states currently offer significant online education opportunities for K-12 students through either state supplemental programs, full-time online programs, or both. As one example, one-third of supplemental programs reported increased enrollment growth of more than 50% from fall 2007 to fall 2008. Although many full time virtual schools report no change during this time period, one-third reported growth over 5% to 50% with one-fifth reporting growth of over 50%. Indications are that this growth is influenced by the increase in the number of new full-time schools, not necessarily by increased enrollments in existing schools (Watson, Gemin, & Ryan, 2008).

Research trends in K-12 online education to date have emphasized broad-based program level evaluations, parent/student satisfaction surveys, and state audits for policy recommendations (Bangert & Rice, in press). Although broad-based evaluations and satisfaction surveys are necessary, the results from these studies do not specifically address pedagogical issues that contribute to effective online learning environments. Recommendations suggest that “Standards for course development and delivery must be exacting and measurable, and they must be observed” (National Educational Association, 2006, p. 10). Developing common measures by which to judge teaching quality has been challenging, in part, because of the wide variation in online school and program models. To support effective training of K-12 online teachers, the research base needs identification of best practices in K-12 online teaching and teacher education, especially as they play out in a variety of online program models and for varying levels of online teaching experience.

State and professional organizations continue to make recommendations for quality online teaching through the release of standards and guidelines:

- National Education Association (NEA): *Guide to Teaching Online Courses* (2006).
- North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL): *NACOL National Standards for Quality Online Teaching* (2008).
- Southern Regional Education Board (SREB): *Standards for Quality Online Teaching* (2006a).
- Southern Regional Education Board (SREB): *Online Teaching Evaluation Tool* (2006b).
- International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE): *National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers*. 2nd Ed. (2008)

Although these recommendations address the pedagogical skills necessary for ensuring quality online instruction, there is little empirical evidence about their effectiveness in K-12 online learning environments. In the summer of 2008, a subcommittee of the NACOL Research Committee was given the task of synthesizing the various standards from leading American national, regional, local, and Canadian organizations and programs in K-12 online education in the summer of 2008. The survey items in this report were mapped to these synthesized standards to better understand the professional development topics teachers need to know and their relative importance from the viewpoint of online teachers themselves.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

In this study, the investigators used an interpretive research design to begin identification of the unique needs and challenges of K-12 online teachers, as both 1) aligned to an emerging synthesis of professional standards for K-12 online teachers, and 2) as described by the teachers in their own words. This methodology provides very practical information for policymakers seeking to establish national and state standards for K-12 online teachers, and for trainers designing professional development programs. It also allows for the identification and creation of categories of understanding not currently existing in the research base that can later be studied through more structured research approaches.

A non-random purposive sample of 884 K-12 online teachers from public schools, virtual programs, and organizations across the U.S. agreed to participate in a survey delivered via the web. Seven hundred ninety one (89.5%) teachers completed all items on the survey. The respondents represent a cross section of teachers, from over 50 different virtual schools and 10 state-led or sponsored online programs representing more than 30 states. See Appendix A for a complete list of participant school and program affiliations, as well as a detailed breakdown of school and program locations.

The primary research question addressed: “What are the unique needs and challenges of K-12 online teachers across the country?” Guiding questions for the study included:

1. What are the demographics of K-12 online teachers?
2. What opportunities for professional development have been provided, and are preferred, by K-12 online teachers?
3. How does the importance of professional development needs vary across models of K-12 online schools and programs?
4. How does the importance of professional development needs vary across years of experience of K-12 online teachers?
5. What are the unique needs and challenges of K-12 online teachers as expressed by the teachers themselves?

Participants were enlisted through a variety of means. A link to the survey was posted twice on the discussion forum for the North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL). The NACOL clearinghouse was searched and individual emails were sent to online K-12 school and program administrators from over 160 virtual schools and programs across the country.

The survey was structured into four sections: 1) School and model affiliation, 2) Demographics (i.e. education level, teaching experience), 3) Professional development needs, and 4) Professional development opportunities (i.e. how much, preferred delivery method). The third section of the survey, professional development needs, was mapped to a set of synthesized national and regional standards.

DEMOGRAPHICS

School or Program Model Affiliation

Research associated with K-12 online teaching must consider the influence on the teacher of contextual factors associated with a particular school or program affiliation. Although boundaries can be blurred, there are important distinctions between virtual schools, supplemental programs and “brick and mortar” online programs, and thus their design and purpose can influence the professional development needs of their teachers.

Virtual schools typically host full-time students and serve as the crediting institution. They generally hire full-time teachers. Teachers may work from home or be required to meet in a central facility. Eighty-two percent of respondents reported teaching in virtual schools.

Supplemental online programs are those in which students attend online part-time and earn credit from their originating institution. They generally hire teachers part-time, and often these teachers also work in brick and mortar schools. Eleven percent of respondents reported teaching in supplemental programs.

Brick and mortar online programs include those in which online courses are housed within traditional educational environments, and use teachers from their existing faculty to teach an online course or two. In all cases, teachers may or may not be required to develop their own curriculum, courses may be fully facilitated or self-paced, and the program or school may have varying or set enrollment dates. Six percent of respondents reported teaching in brick and mortar online programs.

SCHOOL OR PROGRAM MODELS REPRESENTED

	Response Count	Response Percent
Virtual School (students attend full time and move through grades)	727	82%
Supplemental Online Program (students attend part-time and/or receive credit from another institution)	99	11%
Brick and Mortar Program (brick and mortar school offering online courses)	54	6%
*Total Respondents	880	100%

*Note: Not all respondents answered all questions.

Experience and Education of Survey Respondents

Although 27% of respondents were new to online teaching this year, the overall workforce in online education are relatively experienced teachers. Only 2% were brand new teachers. Fifty-five percent of teachers have between six to fifteen years of total teaching experience, with 18% reporting 16 or more years of teaching experience. The majority of respondents have been online teachers from one to five years (60%).

ONLINE AND TOTAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

	Online Teaching Experience	Total Teaching Experience
0 (just hired)	27%	2%
1 – 5 years	60%	24%
6 – 10 years	11%	35%
10 – 15 years	1%	20%
16 – 20 years		9%
20+ years		9%

Note: Online Teaching Experience n=864, Total Teaching Experience n=863.

In addition to experience, over half of the teachers reported their highest degree as a master’s degree or better (52%). Additionally, 44 respondents indicated they were working on an advanced degree or had additional hours beyond their indicated degree. Two respondents indicated they had a second degree. Ninety-nine percent of respondents are credentialed teachers.

HIGHEST DEGREE

	Response Percent
Bachelor’s	45%
Master’s	52%
Doctorate	3%
Specialist	1%

Note: n=855

TEACHING CREDENTIALS

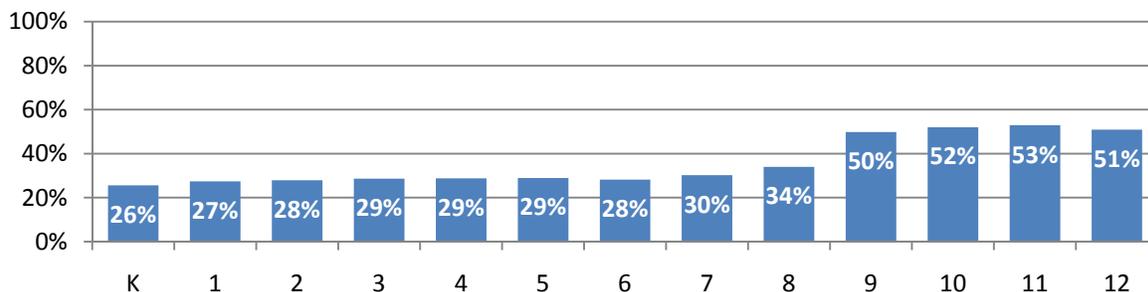
	Response Percent
Elementary	49%
Secondary	62%
Special Endorsement (Reading, Special Education, Early Childhood)	24%
No Credential	1%

Note: Percentages will not calculate to 100 because of multiple certifications (n=852). Other Special Endorsements included: Administration (7), Gifted (5), Pupil Personnel Services (6), Intervention Specialist (1), National Board Certified Teacher (5), PE (1), music (2), art (1), family and consumer sciences (1), technology (1), Spanish (3), business (1), Geoscience (1), CLAD (1), SEI endorsement (1), supplementary (1), K-12 (2).

Grade Levels and Subject Areas Served by Survey Respondents

Respondents represent all grade levels across K-12 with the majority teaching at the high school level. When examining responses to subject areas taught, the majority of teachers reported teaching general elementary subjects. In addition, the number of teachers who indicated they teach History, English, Mathematics, and Science was fairly evenly divided.

GRADE LEVELS SERVED BY TEACHERS



SUBJECT AREAS TAUGHT

	Response Percent
General Elementary	32%
English/ Composition	22%
Mathematics	22%
Science	19%
History/ Social Studies	18%
PE/Health	8%
Special Education	8%
Arts/Music	8%
Foreign Languages	7%
AP	5%
Business	3%
Technology / Computer Science	3%
Economics	3%
Multidisciplinary/Integrated	1%
Dual Credit	1%

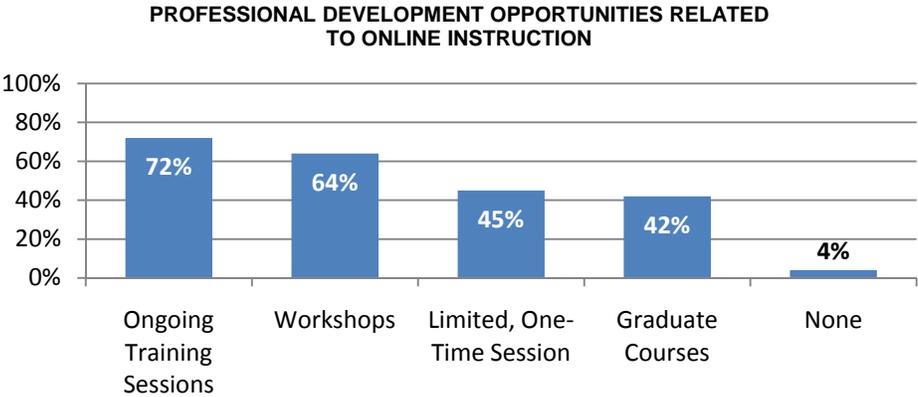
Note: Percentages will not calculate to 100 because of multiple subject areas taught (n=829). Other responses included: Gifted (5), ESOL/ESL (2), Early Learning & Childcare (1), Technology Integration (2), Reading (1), Journalism (3), Religion (2), Advisory/Homeroom (7), Administration (5), Counselor (10), Library (2), Study Skills (2), Psychology (1), Speech (3), Driver's Education (1), Career Planning (8) and Substitute Teacher (1).

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

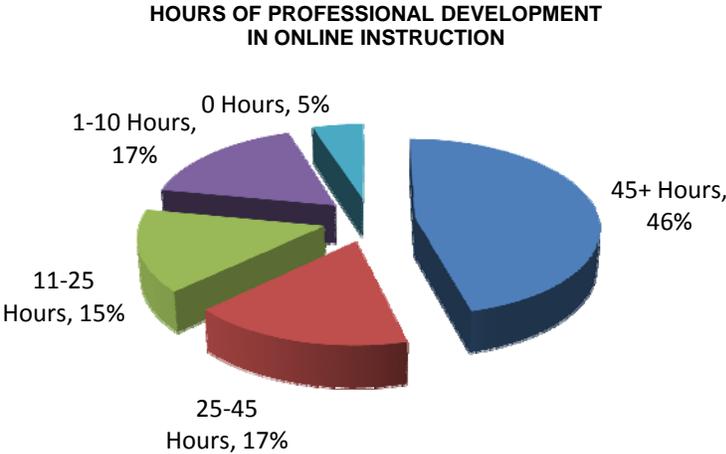
Professional Development Related to Online Instruction

Teachers were asked to indicate the types of professional development activities in which they participated related to online instruction. *Ongoing training session* received the highest number of responses as shown in the chart below.

Teachers reported pursuing many different options for professional development. In addition to the opportunities noted above, respondents also reported participating in conferences, weekly team meetings, product development, national teacher training, self-taught on the web or with books, webinars, professional organization activities and completing advanced study programs.



Forty six percent of respondents reported spending over 45 hours in professional development. Participant comments suggest many teachers are engaging in specialized certificates and advanced degrees specific to online teaching, and future iterations of this question should allow for capturing that data.



Preferred Professional Development Delivery Methods

“Social Networking has really helped me build my knowledge base.”
– survey respondent

The two least preferred delivery methods across all respondents (least preferred and somewhat preferred combined) are: 1) *fully face-to-face instruction* (62%), and 2) *fully online, non-facilitated* (56%). The two most preferred delivery methods reported across all respondents (preferred and most preferred combined) are: 1) *ongoing training* (69%), and 2) *fully online, facilitated* (68%). These preferences are consistent with emerging recommendations and standards for best practice in training K-12 online teachers.

Of the 20 participant comments, several reflected common themes regarding professional development delivery methods. First, six teachers reported enjoying a variety of delivery methods, varying those depending on the topic, the content, and their stage of learning. Second, three teachers reported a desire for social networking and collaboration with other professionals. Two teachers mentioned the use of training videos, one in support of task-specific on-demand video, and the other opposed to the use of videos with a preference for training she can do at her own pace.

PREFERRED DELIVERY METHODS

	Least Preferred	Somewhat Preferred	Preferred	Most Preferred
Fully online, facilitated	6%	26%	39%	29%
Fully online, non-facilitated	25%	31%	27%	17%
Fully face-to-face	32%	30%	23%	15%
Hybrid or Blended (a mix of online and face-to-face)	13%	28%	31%	28%
Graduate courses	17%	26%	30%	27%
Workshops	9%	27%	43%	21%
Ongoing training	6%	25%	47%	22%
Limited, one-time session	21%	32%	34%	13%
Peer coaching/mentoring	14%	26%	38%	22%

Note: n=776

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Teachers were asked to rate the importance of professional development topics taking into consideration their own unique school context. The topics in this section of the survey were divided into eight categories based on a synthesis of national and regional standards, as discussed earlier in the Background section of this report:

- Technology Skills
- Facilitation
- Online Content Development
- Digital Etiquette
- Assessment
- Networking/Community Building
- Leadership
- Special Needs

This section of the report is divided into two sections. The first discusses those items rated as “very important” by online teachers and the second examines, in detail, all items in the “important” to “very important” range. Furthermore, the data in these sections has been sorted and presented by 1) program model, and 2) years of online teaching experience.

Highest-Rated Professional Development Needs (rated “very important”)

Professional development needs rated overall as very important included *use of communication technologies* (74%), *time management strategies* (62%), and *risks of academic dishonesty to learners* (60%), and *student internet safety* (60%). The tables below show topics rated as very important by over 50% of respondents as sorted by online program model and online teaching experience respectively:

CATEGORIES & TOPICS RATED AS VERY IMPORTANT (SORTED BY MODEL)

Category	Topics	Virtual Schools	Supplemental Programs	Brick & Mortar Programs
Technology Skills	Application software (word processing, spreadsheets, etc.)	61%		57%
	LMS and/or CMS and appropriate uses	55%		
	Use of communication technologies (i.e. email, discussion, video conferencing, and instant messaging tools)	75%	66%	64%
Facilitation	Student-centered instructional strategies (i.e. authentic learning experiences, inquiry-based activities, structured but flexible learning environments, collaborative learning)	53%		59%
	Alternative interventions to address varied learning needs	58%		
	Time management strategies (i.e. timely and consistent feedback, provide course materials in a timely manner)	64%	53%	62%
	Establish a safe environment to promote participation (voice and tone)			51%
	Use best practices to promote and monitor effective discussions			55%
	Enable student autonomy, independence, and responsibility for lesson mastery	55%	50%	57%
	Classroom management strategies (i.e. high expectations, clear communication protocols, inappropriate behavior criteria, intervention plan for unsuccessful learners)			51%

CATEGORIES & TOPICS RATED AS VERY IMPORTANT (SORTED BY MODEL)

Category	Topics	Virtual Schools	Supplemental Programs	Brick & Mortar Programs
Online Content Development	Provide stated and measurable objectives, course goals, grading criteria, course organization and expectations in course syllabus		51%	62%
	Convey lesson goals and objectives in a student friendly way	50%	51%	58%
	Maintain accuracy and currency of course content	51%	56%	65%
	Incorporate Internet resources into course content			53%
	Incorporate Internet resources into course content			55%
	Design subject-specific online content			56%
	Use multiple forms of media to design course content			50%
	Design student-centered instructional content for a variety of learning styles	52%		50%
	Design course content to facilitate interaction and discussion		52%	57%
	Course content complies with intellectual property rights and fair use standards			52%
Digital Etiquette	Digital etiquette and responsible social interactions related to the use of technology and information	51%		51%
	Student Internet Safety (i.e. protection of online identity, cyberbullying, etc.)	62%		65%
	Processes for dealing with inappropriate use of electronic information			56%
Assessment	Risks of academic dishonesty to learners	60%		73%
	The relationship between and among assessments, assignments and learning goals	57%	50%	60%
Leadership	Authentic assessments			52%
	Management tasks (track student enrollments, communication logs, attendance records, etc.)	55%		51%
Special Needs	Modify, customize, and/or personalize activities to address diverse learning styles, working strategies and abilities (i.e. provide multiple paths to learning objectives, differentiate instruction, strategies for non	54%		
	Intervention and/or enrichment activities	53%		

CATEGORIES & TOPICS RATED AS VERY IMPORTANT (SORTED BY YEARS OF ONLINE EXPERIENCE)

Category	Topics	0 Years (Just Hired)	1 – 5 Years	6+ Years
Technology Skills	Application software (word processing, spreadsheets, etc.)	59%	58%	57%
	LMS and/or CMS and appropriate uses	61%		
	The use of communication technologies (i.e. email, discussion, video conferencing, and instant messaging tools)	76%	74%	63%
Facilitation	Troubleshooting skills	52%		
	Student-centered instructional strategies (i.e. authentic learning experiences, inquiry-based activities, structured but flexible learning environments, collaborative learning)	55%		60%
	Alternative interventions to address varied learning needs	56%	54%	53%
	Time management strategies (i.e. timely and consistent feedback, provide course materials in a timely manner)	61%	63%	64%

CATEGORIES & TOPICS RATED AS VERY IMPORTANT (SORTED BY YEARS OF ONLINE EXPERIENCE)

Category	Topics	0 Years (Just Hired)	1 – 5 Years	6+ Years
Facilitation	Use best practices to promote and monitor effective discussions	51%		
	Enable student autonomy, independence, and responsibility for lesson mastery	61%	52%	50%
Online Content Development	Provide stated and measurable objectives, course goals, grading criteria, course organization and expectations in course syllabus		53%	
	Convey lesson goals and objectives in a student friendly way	50%		56%
	Maintain accuracy and currency of course content	51%	51%	59%
Digital Etiquette	Design student-centered instructional content for a variety of learning styles	50%	50%	58%
	Digital etiquette and responsible social interactions related to the use of technology and information	56%	50%	
	Student Internet Safety (i.e. protection of online identity, cyberbullying, etc.)	68%	57%	60%
	Risks of academic dishonesty to learners	60%	59%	58%
	How technology may affect student testing	51%		
Assessment	Student rights to privacy	57%	59%	53%
	The relationship between and among assessments, assignments and learning goals	57%	56%	64%
	Using student data to inform instruction	58%		
	Authentic assessments	54%		52%
Leadership	Formative/ongoing assessment	51%		
	Management tasks (track student enrollments, communication logs, attendance records, etc.)	54%	54%	
Special Needs	Modify, customize, and/or personalize activities to address diverse learning styles, working strategies and abilities (i.e. provide multiple paths to learning objectives, differentiate instruction, strategies for non-native English speakers)	51%		56%

Professional Development Needs (combined rating of “important” and “very important”)

Technology Skills

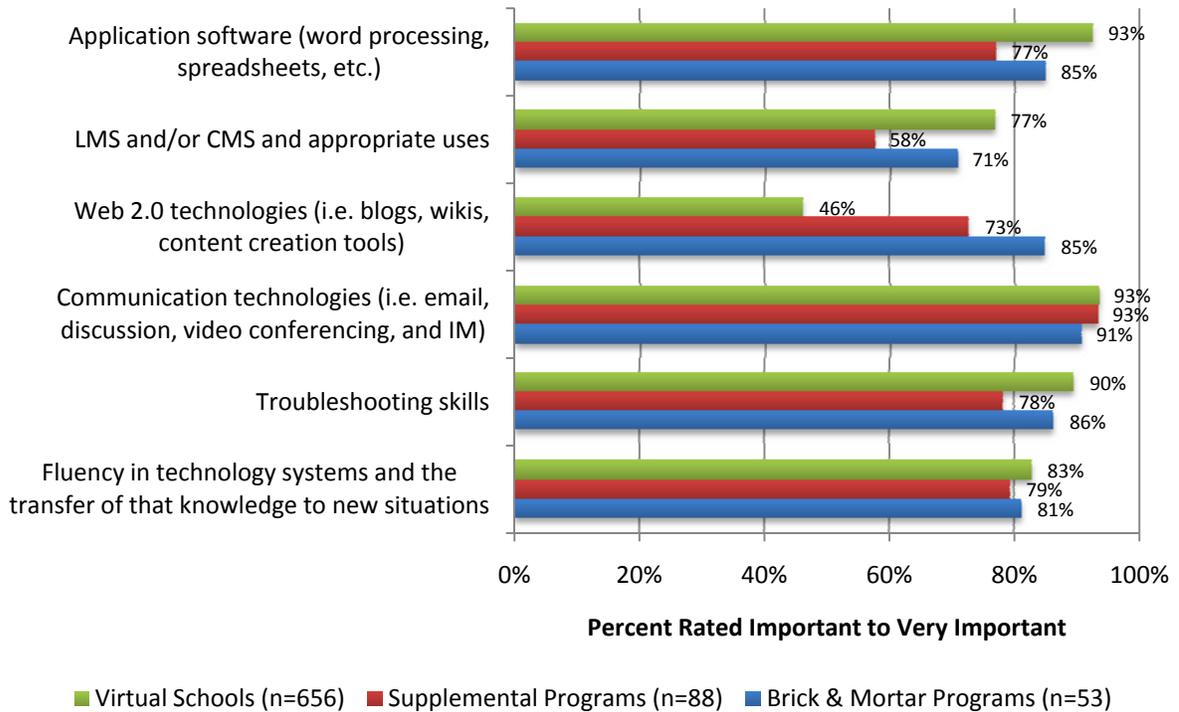
*“Having an extensive background in technology helps for a smoother transition to virtual education.”
– survey respondent*

In this category, the *use of communication technologies* was the top item rated important to very important by the most number of respondents (over 90%), with no major differences in needs when comparing models or years experience. *Application software* (77-93%) and *troubleshooting skills* (78-90%) were also highly rated important to very important needs in professional development.

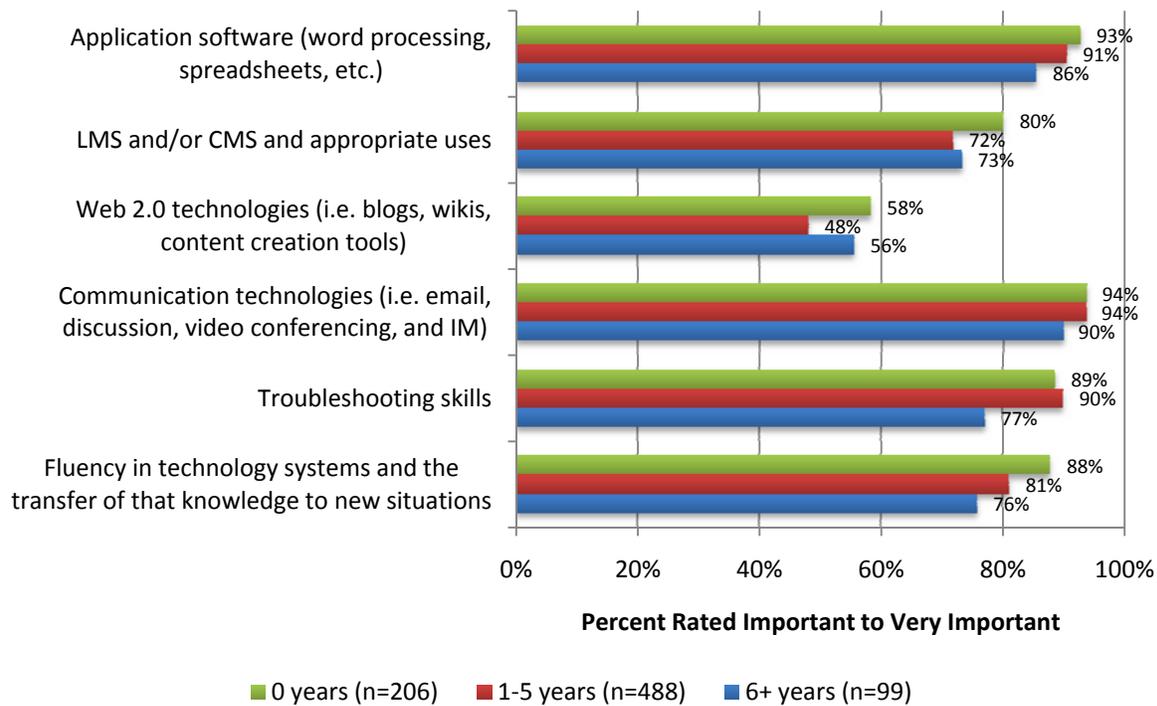
Differences by type of online program: Virtual school teachers rate *application software* significantly higher than teachers in other program models (93%). *Web 2.0 technologies* are less important for virtual school teachers (46%), and are rated higher by teachers in brick and mortar online programs (85%).

Differences by years of online teaching experience: Throughout the data set, we identified a trend of ratings of importance going down as a teacher gains years of experience. This trend is evident in the technology skills category, with a major exception in *web 2.0 technologies* for teachers with 1-5 years experience (48%). Note the importance of training in *communication technologies* stayed high across the range of experience (90-94%).

TECHNOLOGY SKILLS (SORTED BY MODEL)



TECHNOLOGY SKILLS (SORTED BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE)



Facilitation

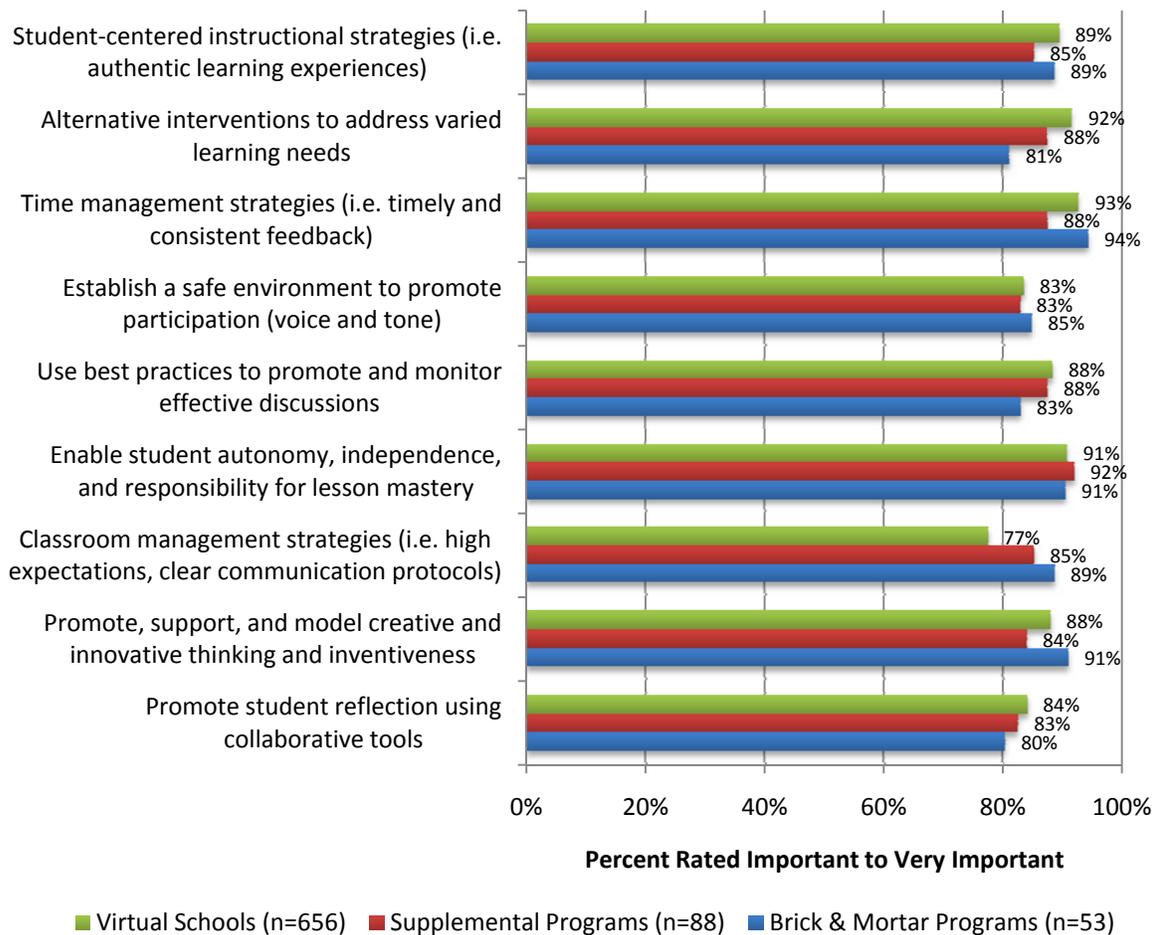
“Students’ time management skills are a concern It is hard for some students to stay on pace.”
 – survey respondent

In the category of facilitation, over 80% of respondents rated all topics as important to very important, with the exception of *classroom management strategies* by virtual school teachers (77%). Highly rated facilitation topics included *enable student autonomy, independence, and responsibility for lesson mastery* (over 90%), *time management strategies* (88-94%), and *alternative interventions to address varied learning needs* (81-92%).

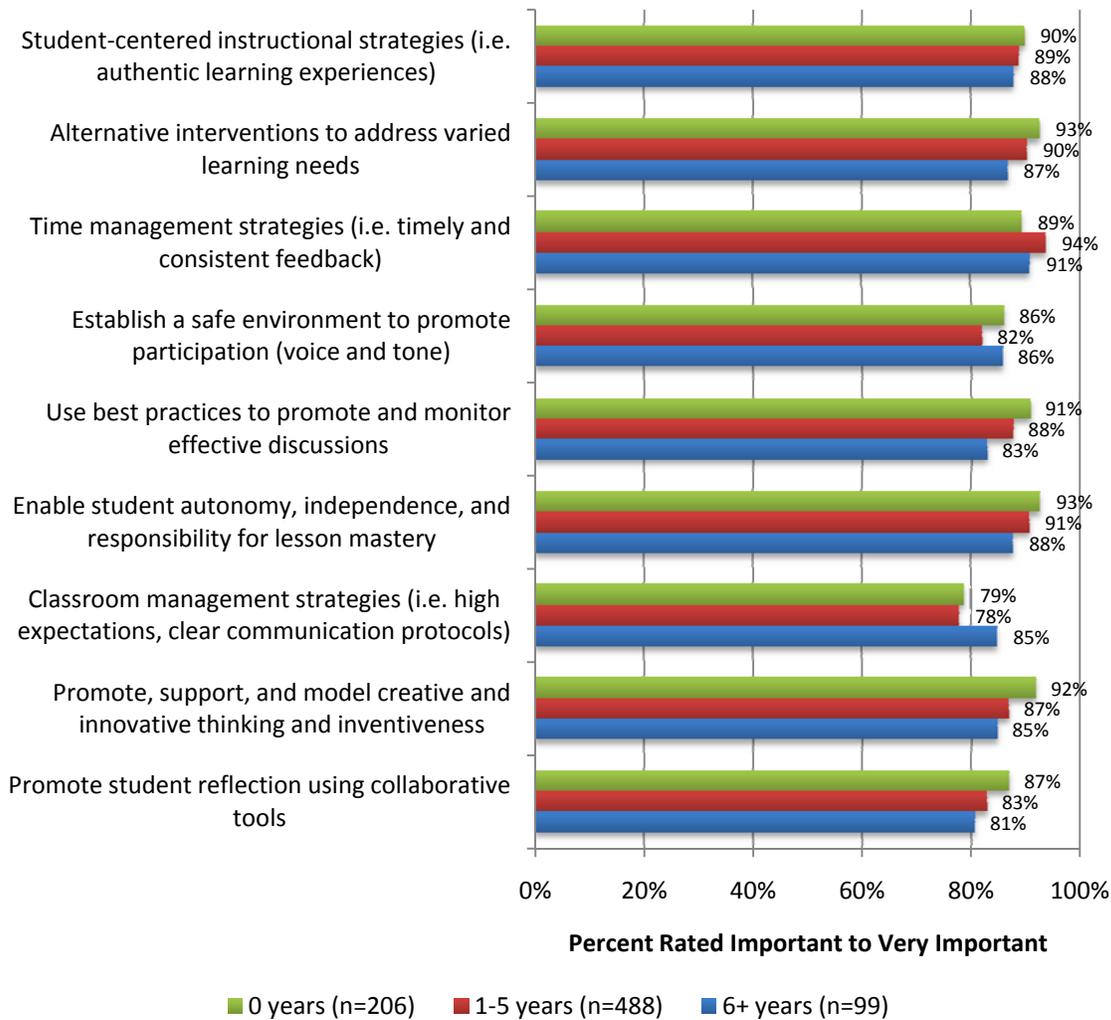
Differences by type of online program: Teachers in virtual schools rated the need for training in *classroom management strategies* lower (77%), as compared to supplemental (85%) and brick and mortar online teachers (89%). *Alternative interventions to address varied learning needs* also showed a distinct difference between program models, with 81% of brick and mortar online teachers, and 92% of virtual school teachers, rating it as important to very important.

Differences by years of online teaching experience: In the area of facilitation, we noted that experienced teachers atypically reported a higher importance on the topic of *classroom management strategies* (85%) when compared to less experienced teachers (78% and 79%). Beginning teachers placed a higher importance on *promote, support, and model creative and innovative thinking and inventiveness* (92%), and *promote student reflection using collaborative tools* (87%).

FACILITATION (SORTED BY MODEL)



FACILITATION (SORTED BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE)



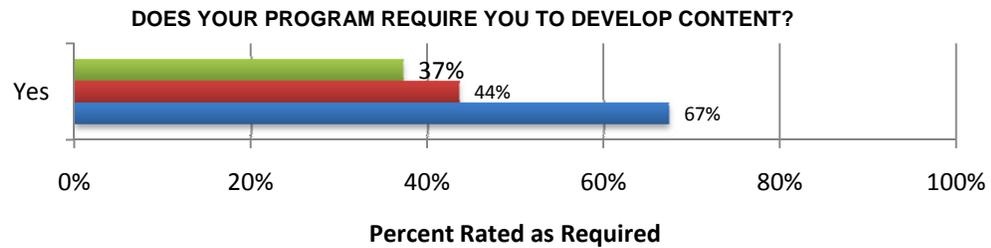
Online Content Development

“Building good online courses takes a lot of time and energy so it is not optimal to over commit teachers so as to handicap their ability to pursue excellence.”
 – survey respondent

Some teachers may require more or less knowledge of content development, depending on the specific requirements of their program or school model. Some online programs hire instructional designers who are responsible for designing online curriculum and content, thus the teacher has less responsibility in this area, and their role mainly becomes one of facilitating learning through communication and feedback.

Does your program require you to develop content? Respondents were first asked to indicate whether content development was required by their school or program before rating the importance of the topics within this category. More teachers in *brick and mortar online*

programs are required to develop content (67%) when compared to teachers in *supplemental programs* (44%) or *virtual school* (37%).



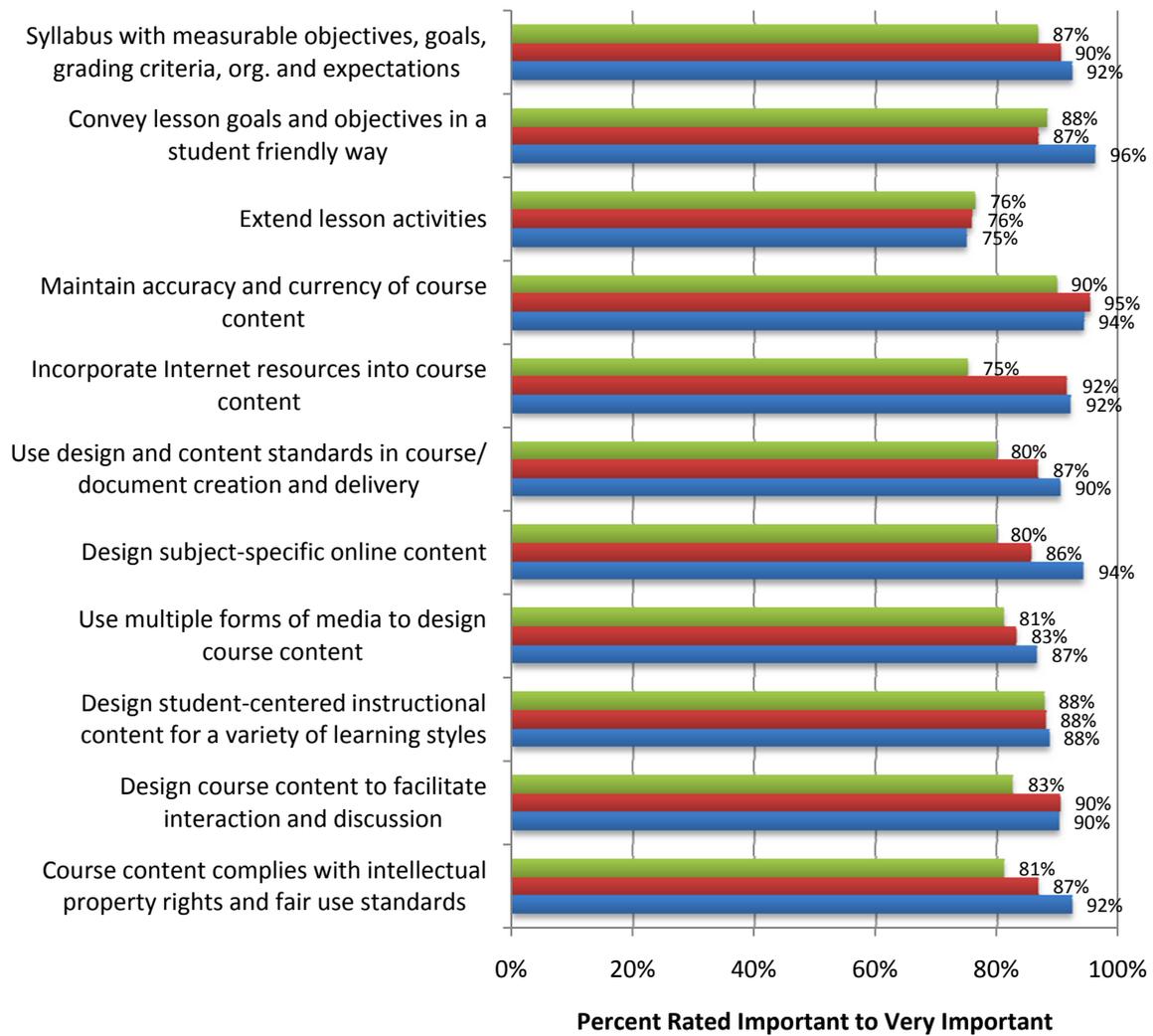
■ Virtual Schools (n=634) ■ Supplemental Programs (n=85) ■ Brick and Mortar Programs (n=49)

Overall, there was strong and consistent agreement on all topics (in the mid 80s to 90% range), with the exception of extend lesson activities (mid-70th percentile), and particularly on the need to *maintain accuracy and currency of course content* (90-95%).

Differences by type of online program: Brick and mortar online teachers reported higher needs in *convey lesson goals and objectives in a student friendly way* (96%), *design subject-specific online content* (94%), and *course content complies with intellectual property rights and fair use standards* (92%). Virtual school teachers had a notable difference in their importance rating of *incorporate internet resources into course content* (75%) when compared to supplemental (92%) and brick and mortar online teachers (92%).

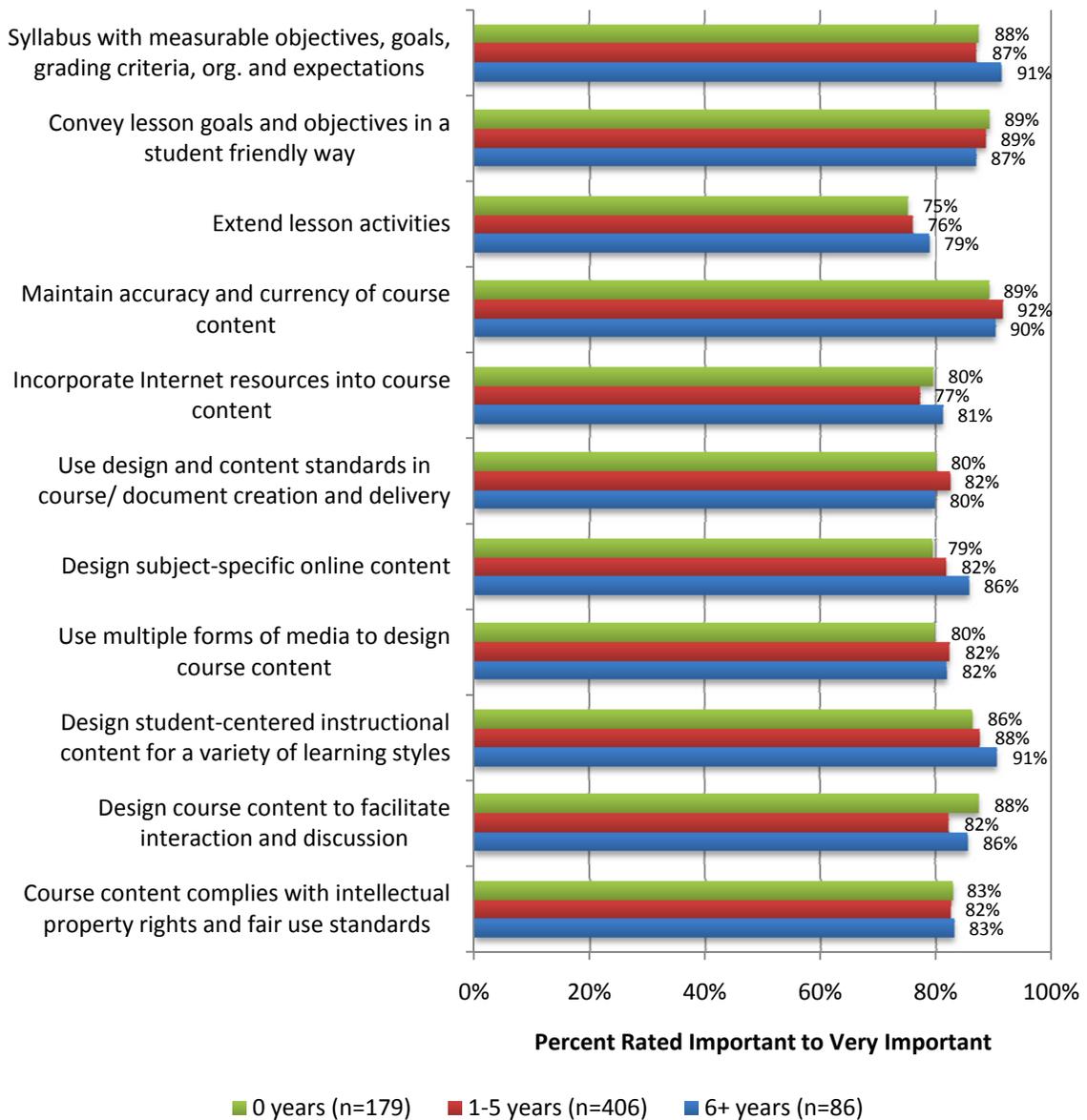
Differences by years of online teaching experience: There was little distinction on the level of importance when sorting data by year of teaching experience.

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT (SORTED BY MODEL)



■ Virtual Schools (n=539) ■ Supplemental Programs (n=83) ■ Brick & Mortar Programs (n=52)

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT (SORTED BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE)



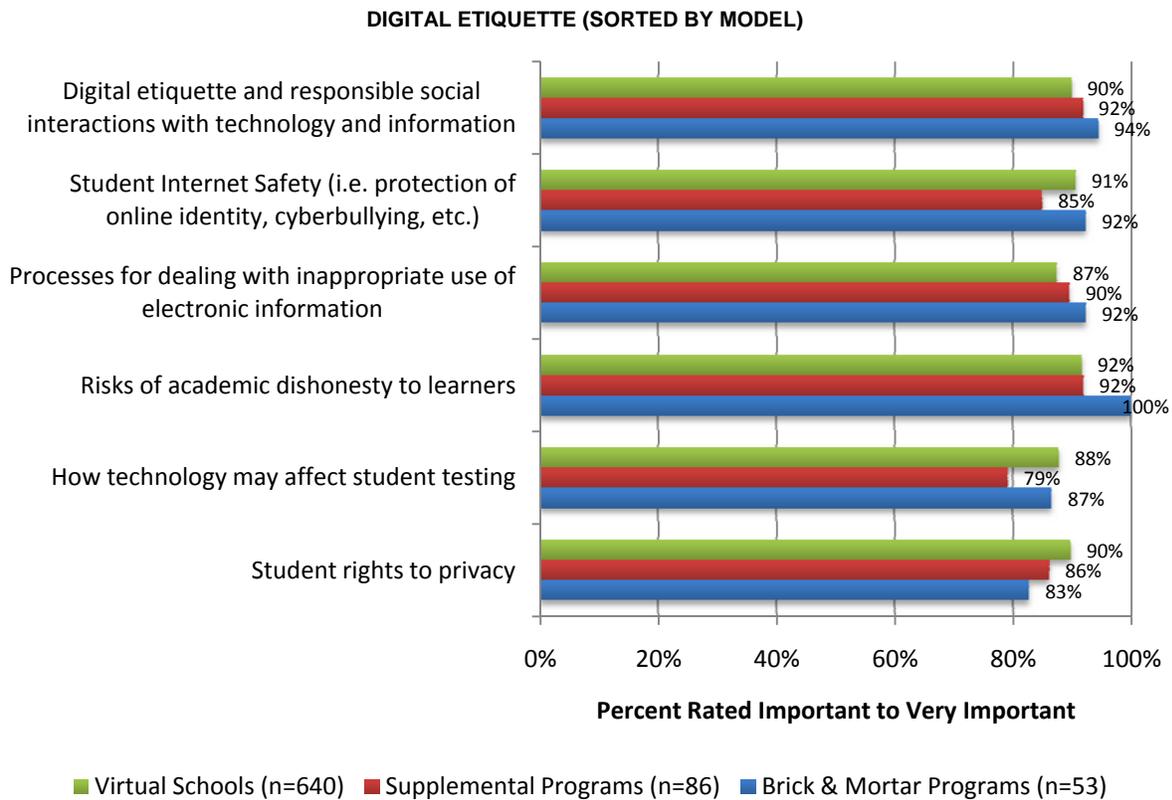
Digital Etiquette

“The biggest challenge is the integrity of testing. There is no way to assure that the test submitted by a student is a test that they completed, independent of any unauthorized help.”
 – survey respondent

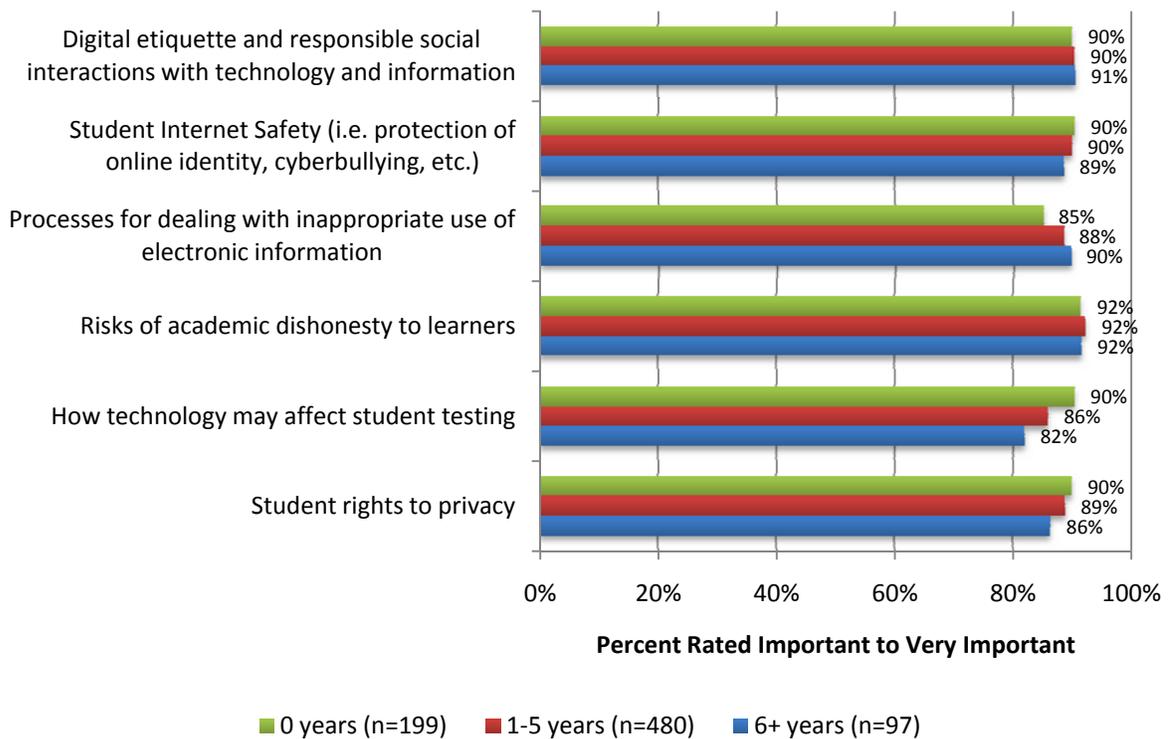
The importance of training in digital etiquette was articulated by all teachers, and had the overall highest ratings among all categories in the survey. *Risks of academic dishonesty to learners* was rated at or over 92% by all respondent sub-groups. *Digital etiquette and responsible social interactions with technology and information* was also rated at or above 90% by all respondent sub-groups.

Differences by type of online program: In the entire survey, brick and mortar online teachers were the only subgroup to indicate a 100% important-to-very important response, and in this case, it was on the topic of *risks of academic dishonesty to learners*. Virtual school and supplemental program teachers also felt very strongly about this topic (92% respectively). Supplemental program teachers had a lower response rate (79%), when compared to virtual (88%) and brick and mortar online (87%).

Differences by years of online teaching experience: The importance of digital etiquette topics were rated equally consistent across years of experience, with the exception of how technology may affect student testing (82% by 6+ years experience teachers).



DIGITAL ETIQUETTE (SORTED BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE)



Assessment

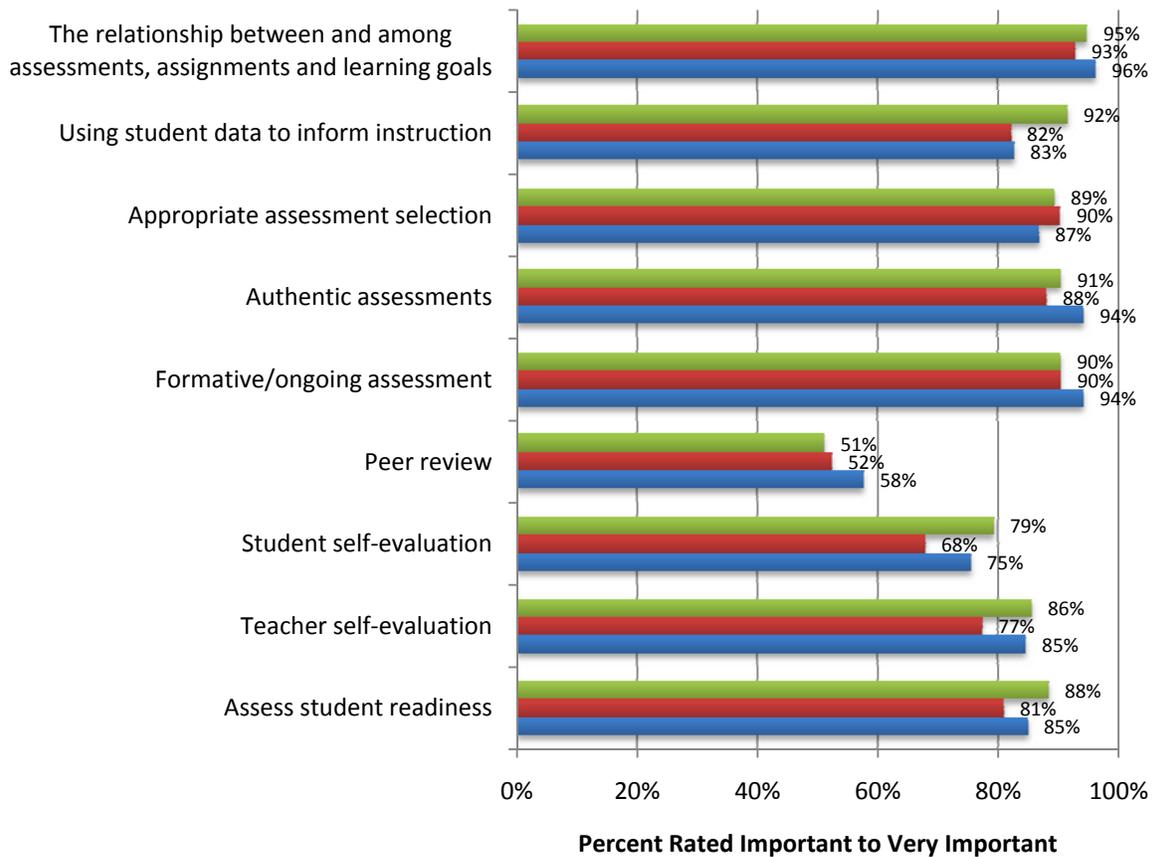
“The learning that takes place in an online environment is different than inside of a regular brick-and-mortar classroom. The standards are still in place and students are still learning the standards. However, how they learn and how they are assessed is different.” – survey respondent

Topics in the category of assessment showed the greatest range of responses in the survey. Note two topics in the survey, *peer review* (58% or lower) and *student self-evaluation* (79% or lower), received the lowest consistent ratings of all items in the survey.

Differences by type of online program: The importance of assessment topics were rated fairly consistent across type of online program, with the exception of virtual school teachers reporting 79% on student self-evaluation, as compared to 68% of supplemental teachers.

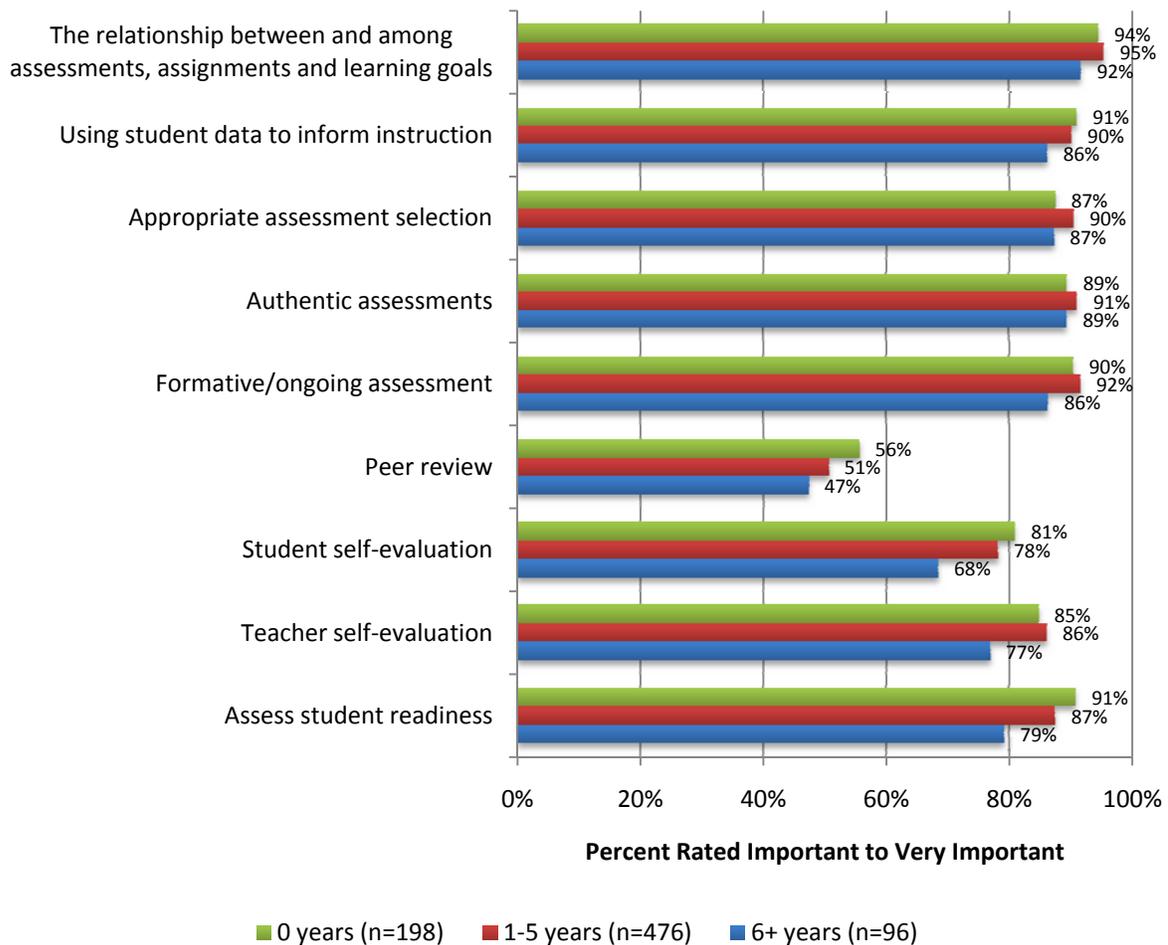
Differences by years of online teaching experience: No major differences were noted when comparing new online teachers to those with 1-5 years of experience. However, teachers with 6+ years of experience had a response rate that was at least 10% lower than their peers in the topics of *student self-evaluation*, *teacher self-evaluation*, and *assess student readiness*.

ASSESSMENT (SORTED BY MODEL)



■ Virtual Schools (n=637) ■ Supplemental Programs (n=84) ■ Brick & Mortar Programs (n=53)

ASSESSMENT TOPICS (SORTED BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE)



Networking/Community Building

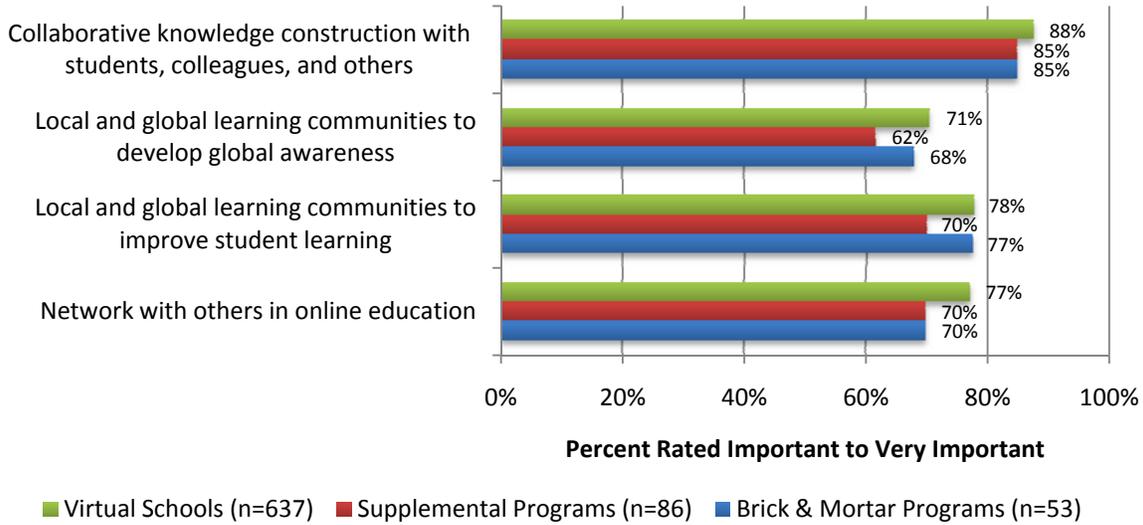
“The main challenge is building a community of learners. Our school encourages students to participate in outing opportunities and virtual classroom (Elluminate) teaching/social sessions.”
 - survey respondent

The importance of training in networking and community building had the lowest ratings among all categories in the survey. The highest rated topic was *collaborative knowledge construction with students, colleagues, and others* (85-88%).

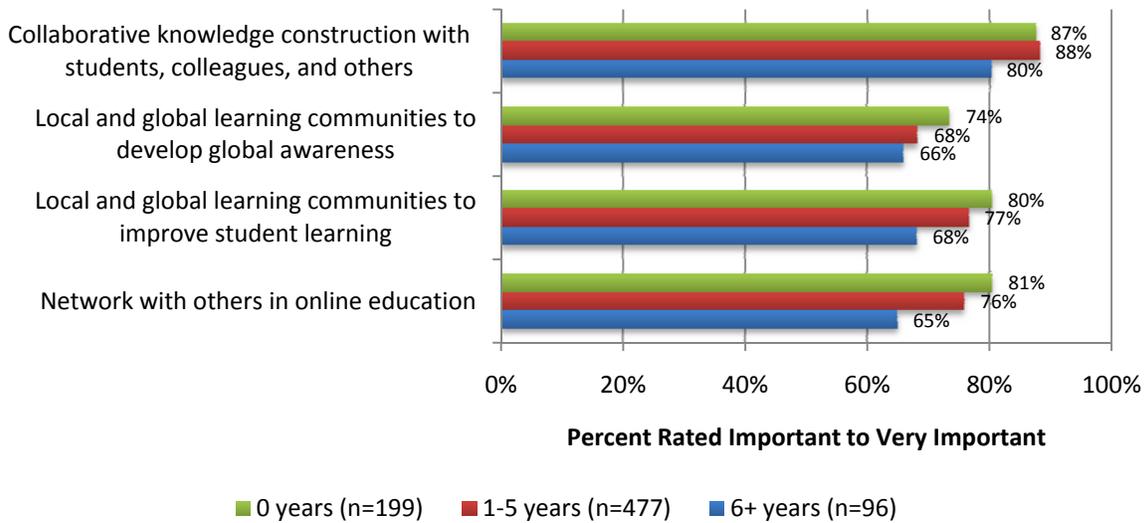
Differences by type of online program model: Supplemental program teachers showed the lowest response in this category on the topic of *local and global learning communities to develop global awareness* (62%).

Differences by years of online teaching experience: Teachers with 6+ years experience consistently rated each topic lower than their peers, with three out of four topics being rated in the 60th percentile.

NETWORKING/COMMUNITY BUILDING (SORTED BY MODEL)



NETWORKING/COMMUNITY BUILDING (SORTED BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE)



Leadership

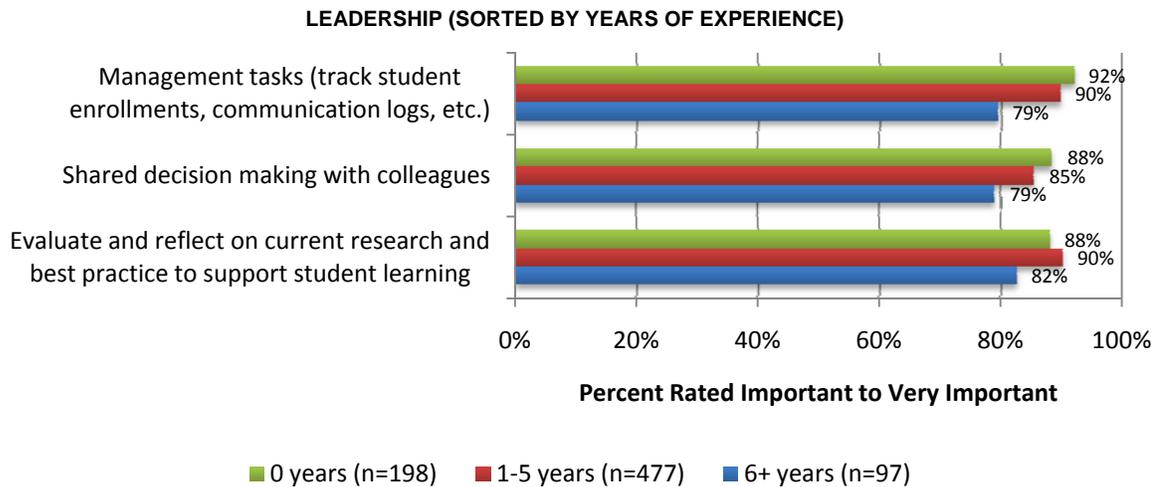
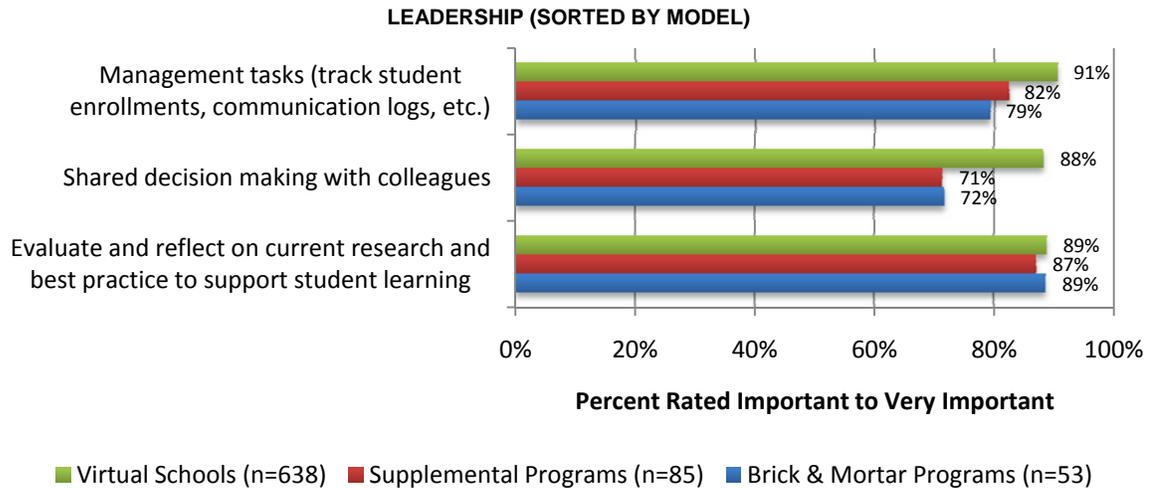
“Online teaching is still on the cutting edge developing policy. Additional challenges relate to gaps in contracts, conflicting calendars, administrators and community members who still do not understand the time committment.” – 2008 survey respondent

Responses in the category of leadership ranged in the 80th percentile, with the exception of *shared decision making with colleagues*.

Differences by type of online program model: Teachers in virtual schools had the highest reported needs in this category (88% and above). A large difference of 16-17% was noted on

shared decision making with colleagues when comparing virtual schools (88%) to supplemental (71%) and brick and mortar online programs (72%).

Differences by years of online teaching experience: Teachers with 6+ years teaching experience rated these topics consistently lower (79=82%) when compared to their peers.



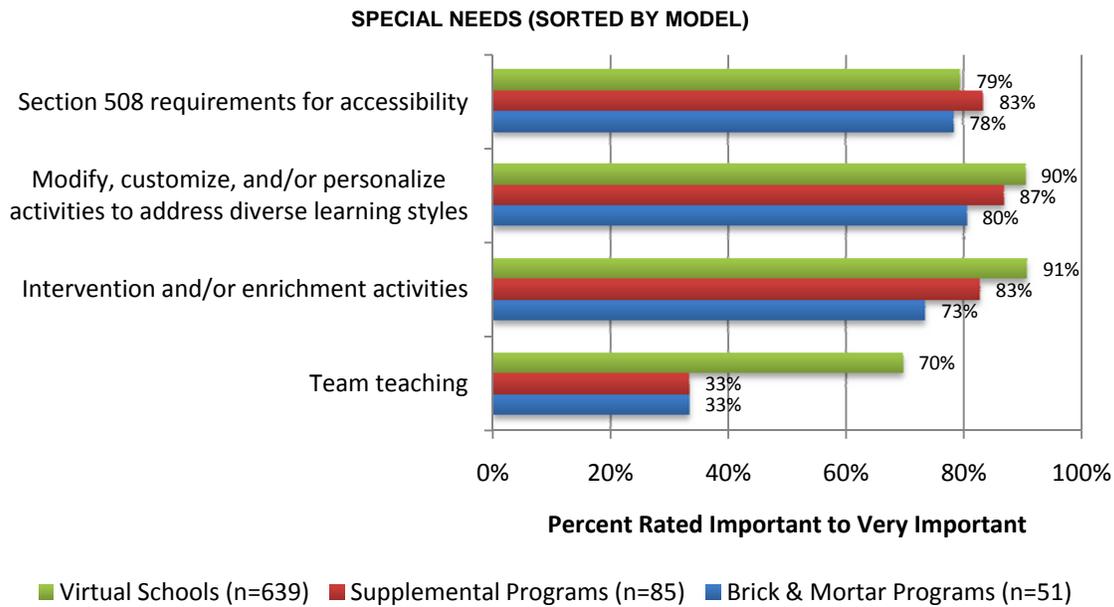
Special Needs

“I feel like I would like help in meeting the needs of my students with learning disabilities or special needs. Since I do not have special education certification, it can be challenging.”
 – survey respondent

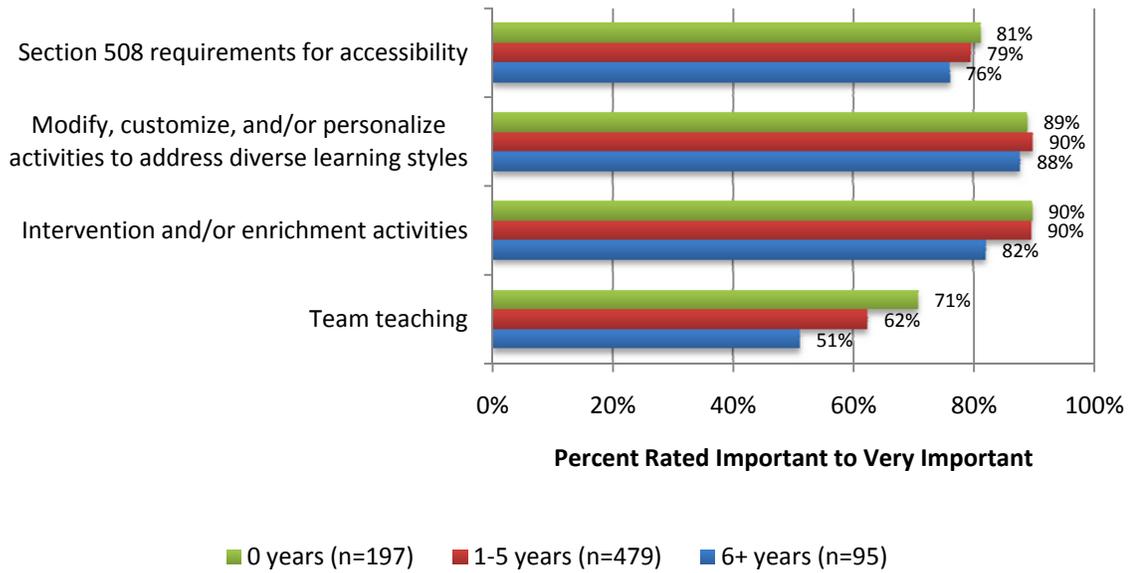
Respondents had a range of responses from 73% to 91% for all topics in the special needs category, with the exception of *team teaching*, which showed a significant difference (33% to 70%, depending on program model).

Differences by type of online program: Virtual school teachers reported higher needs in *modify, customize, and/or personalize activities* (90%), *intervention and/or enrichment* (91%), and in *team teaching* (70%). Only 33% of supplemental and brick and mortar teachers reported *team teaching* as an important training topic.

Differences by years of online teaching experience: Responses were fairly consistent across topics, with the exception of *team teaching*, new teachers reporting 71% importance, teachers with 1-5 years reporting 62% importance, and teachers with 6+ years reporting 51% importance.



SPECIAL NEEDS (SORTED BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE)



NEEDS AND CHALLENGES EXPRESSED BY RESPONDENTS

Respondents were able to make additional comments regarding the needs and challenges they face as online teachers. A total of 536 open response comments were collected. Researchers coded open-coded comments using keywords which were grouped into themes.

Responses suggested there is a wide range of challenges for online educators and mainly reflected issues with *time management* (n = 71), as well as *students taking responsibility for learning* (n = 61). Some participants indicated issues with *communication* (n = 54), and their *ability to learn and use technologies* (n = 54).

THEMES, KEYWORDS AND COUNTS OF PARTICPANT OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS

Themes	Keywords	Virtual School (n=727)	Supple- mental Programs (n=99)	Brick & Mortar Programs (n=54)	0 Years (n=233)	1-5 Years (n=523)	6+ Years (n=108)
Time management	Time management, lack of time, never finished, finding enough hours in the day, time	46	11	14	20	40	11
Student responsibility	Trust, not prepared for independent learning, expectations, reading instructions, accountability, lack of student motivation, participation, readiness, accountability	37	9	15	11	43	7
Technology	Current technology, equal access, availability, technical problems, keeping up with current/new technologies, technical support, troubleshooting, learning curve	37	13	4	20	28	6
Communication	Need immediate answers, clear communication, misunderstanding, timely, urgency, effective	20	4	10	12	19	3
Parental support	Parent accountability, support from coach, support from parents, support system for students, relying on parents, assist parents/coaches	47	4	2	10	36	7
Teacher/ student ratio	Course load, too many preps, too many students, large # of students	32	0	2	6	20	8
Isolation	Interaction, loneliness, getting to know, feeling connected, community, team, isolated, face-to-face	43	1	2	21	22	3
Copyright / plagiarism	Copyright, plagiarism, cheating	6	1	0	0	7	0
Workload	Redundancy, increasing tasks, data collection, clerical duties, overwhelming expectations from administration, excess amount of paperwork	39	2	1	8	29	5

THEMES, KEYWORDS AND COUNTS OF PARTICIPANT OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS

Themes	Keywords	Virtual School (n=727)	Supplemental Programs (n=99)	Brick & Mortar Programs (n=54)	0 Years (n=233)	1-5 Years (n=523)	6+ Years (n=108)
Special needs	Accommodations, SPED, remedial classes, modifications, struggling learners, unable to meet the needs of all learners or support all learners	22	1	0	3	16	4
Professional development issues	Collaboration, funding opportunities, face to face interactions, mentoring	18	0	4	8	15	0
Credibility	Stigma, legitimate form of teaching, credibility	6	0	1	1	5	1
Best practice	Teaching strategies, best practices, classroom strategies, intervention strategies	11	0	1	1	9	2
Administrative support	Ignore teacher input, understand complexities of online teaching, lack of administrative support / understanding, feedback	11	0	3	1	10	3
Organization	Organizational skills	5	0	0	5	0	0
Compensation	Low pay, compensation, poverty, underpaid, abusive	10	1	0	1	8	2
Curriculum issues	Intuitive interface, stale, errors, poor curriculum	7	3	2	3	5	4
Accurate assessment	Identify needs of learners, verification of learning, mastery, monitor progress	7	0	1	2	5	1

Needs and Challenges: By Model of Program

The top four needs and challenges when sorted by program model are noted below, along with representative comments of respondents:

Virtual School

- Parental support (n=47)
 - “It is difficult to have an impact with some families. These families resist the intrusion of a qualified teacher even when having difficulties.” (1-5 years)
 - “Parents who do not fully buy in are a huge hurdle; it is hard to engage a student if the learning coach is not up-to-speed on how an online school works.” (1-5 years)
 - “Parental involvement is always an issue in distance education.” (6-10 years)
- Time management (n=46)
 - “The biggest challenge is all the things that keep us from actually teaching—there is so little time left to do what we are truly hired to do. Somehow, the job description of the virtual teacher has been extended to include testing coordinator, attendance clerk, data entry, recreation planner, and more, and honestly leaves no time for actual teaching...I think there is hope, and huge potential, though, so I look forward to changes in the future.” (1-5 years)
 - “Time. We are given a job to do and as the field grows, it seems that the upper management doesn't see when teachers have too much on their plates. I see teachers

online at 2 and 3 in the morning regularly as I am on myself. To the teachers, it appears that the upper management has lost sight of how many different things have been added to our jobs." (6-10 years)

- Isolation (n=43)
 - "Not having a face-to-face relationship with guidance counselors or site coordinators limits my effectiveness in trying to reach out to those who are responsible for a student of mine I've never met who is struggling." (1-5 years)
 - "Not feeling connected to other teachers or to my administration." (1-5 years)
- Workload (n=39)
 - "There is not enough time in the day to get everything done. Teaching online is a very demanding job, much more difficult than a brick and mortar, but in many ways more satisfying." (1-5 years)
 - "...there are too many non-teaching duties that can impede the effectiveness of actually teaching the subject materials. I feel like I could do a better job teaching if I did not have to monitor a homeroom, put class lists together for the office, monitor attendance, etc." (0 years)
 - "The vast number of students (240) makes it a struggle for me to stay on top of personalized communication with them all." (0 years)
 - "The work seems never to be done. It is like "peeling an onion." You could go on and on....but you have to pace yourself. Stop and rest." (0 years)

Supplemental Program

- Technology (n=13)
 - "There is much to learn about the specifics of the technology used. It takes quite a bit of training." (0 years)
 - "Staying current with all the new technology and opportunities to teach online." (1-5 years)
 - "Another difficulty is the fact that the students are working on all different types of platforms. Things that work on Windows do not work on Macs. Media is especially problematic. One video or audio needs Real player to work, another uses Quicktime or Windows Media player. I know the tech departments in the 14 different schools I have students in, as well as the Tech coordinator for my school are constantly needing to add programs to the computers to accommodate the needs of the students." (0 years)
 - "Varying technology in schools is akin to a class where each student speaks a different language. The asynchronous nature of most online classes requires time for participants to adjust." (0 years)
- Time management (n=11)
 - "Time management is a definite need – especially for new online teachers as they may not realize the time commitment required to be effective as an online teacher." (6-10 years)
 - "Time. There is never enough." (1-5 years)
 - "Efficiency is extremely important. The software should require the fewest number of screens be opened and the smoothest ways to input grades and give feedback to

- Student responsibility (n=9)
 - “Helping students to understand the importance of reading (not scanning) directions carefully, getting work completed on time, and being actively involved in class discussions and their online learning community by logging in frequently.” (6-10 years)
 - “I spend a great deal of time making sure that students are not copying and pasting from our online content or other websites.” (1-5 years)
 - “Communicating expectations to students and getting them to understand the importance of reading instructions carefully.” (0 years)

Brick and Mortar Online Program

- Student responsibility (n=15)
 - “Students not prepared for the challenges of independent learning, planning of their time.” (1-5 years)
 - “Motivating students who have given up on school.” (0 years)
 - “Students not using time wisely.” (6-10 years)
- Time management (n=14)
 - “Time continues to be a challenge; I spend more time working with my online class than with my f-2-f classes, and it’s taxing—often physically.” (6-10 years)
 - “Time management is one of the biggest challenges.” (1-5 years)
 - “There is greater urgency in returning assignments in the online classroom. In the brick and mortar classroom, I would collect writing assignments and return them in a timely fashion, but not in 24 hours as are the expectations in online learning.” (1-5 years)
- Communication (n=10)
 - “More time is needed than in a face to face class for communicating with students. I find the majority of my time is spent on communication and collecting the assignments and grading with relevant feedback for the students.” (0 years)

Needs and Challenges: By Years of Online Teaching Experience

“I am so new to this, I need help with everything! At this point, I wish there were more communities for online learning teachers. In a traditional class, I would be able to walk down the hall and ask the math teacher what to do in a certain situation. Here, I feel pretty much alone. I’m the only online teacher I know and I feel pretty intimidated to post on forums.”

“Do not know what you mean by LMS, CMS or Section 508.”

0 Years Online Teaching Experience

- Isolation (n=21)
 - “Loneliness.”
 - “It is difficult to see what the students see on their computers. A remote desktop application would be helpful.”

- "Isolation is likely the biggest issue."
- Technology (n=20)
 - "Varying technology in schools is akin to a class where each student speaks a different language. The asynchronous nature of most online classes requires time for participants to adjust."
 - "Having web tools and resources up and running to be able to best assist our students. Also, if we have computer problems, there needs to be a manner in which we can have our computer fixed ASAP, and a temporary computer to use in the mean time. The exchange needs to be as seamless as possible."
 - "The technical troubles that we all face at times are discouraging yet part of the job."
 - "There is much to learn about the specifics of the technology used. It takes quite a bit of training."
- Time management (n=20)
 - "Serious time management and organizational skills needed."
 - "Not enough time in the day for all the task we have to do."
 - "Managing the large amount of students, preps, and other teacher duties."

1-5 Years Online Teaching Experience

- Student responsibility (n=43)
 - "Getting at risk students to attend. "
 - "Students' time management skills are a concern It is hard for some students to stay on pace Learning coaches do not always supervise their children's attendance and academic progress Not all students take responsibility for their own learning by going every lesson to master content. "
 - "Students that are enrolled in a class and do not participate enough to allow for a fair assessment of their abilities. "
- Time management (n=40)
 - "Time to learn the curriculum better. Too much work to do and not enough time to finish it to the top quality they deserve. "
 - "I would like to decrease my workload by delegating data entry activities to a support person. "
 - "Time Management, how do you coordinate monthly contact with 60+ learning coaches, teach multiple elluminates per week and keep up with daily requested reports without working 70 hours per week? "
- Parental support (n=36)
 - "Parents fulfilling their part in meeting needs of students that are struggling or working below grade level. "
 - "Limitations on how much I can directly influence instruction by the parent at home. "
 - "I would like training for parents in regards to how to use the systems as well as their responsibilities for checking student progress. "
 - "Supporting parents as learning coaches. Teaching good teaching practices to parents. "

6+ Years Online Teaching Experience

- Time management (n=11)
 - “Finding time to complete all the different tasks. I think there are a lot of important things that need to happen. Among the important tasks I think regular communication with students is very important and this can be very time consuming. I think it is also important to find a way to keep up with the constantly changing technologies so that they can be incorporated into instructional practice. It takes time to learn and use them, but in order to even do this teachers need a way of keeping up to date with what is new. “
 - “It is hard for upper management to know how much time the jobs provided to them are taking and therefore think something that is just five minutes per student isn't a big deal. A couple of years ago, I knew each of my families well, saw them at outings could remember things about them just from their name but now we are so disconnected because there are too many tasks to complete and I must rush my time with them in order to get what needs to be done complete during the business day. I felt that I gave my students better quality two years ago, then I do today and our state test results show this too. “

- Student/teacher ratio (n=8)
 - “The biggest challenge is the student to teacher ratio. It is very difficult to individualize the students' needs when there are so many students in a class. When this is done adequately, it consumes many, many hours of the teacher's time, to the point where it robs him or her of their own personal/family time. “
 - “Number of students is also challenging. “

- Student responsibility (n=7)
 - “Student motivation and failure to read details and instructions. “
 - “Students not using time wisely. “
 - “Getting students to attend the virtual classroom for learning. This is not an environment where students are delivered to a school building and have no where else to go but class. It can be challenging and time consuming to get them into the virtual classroom. “

- Parental support (n=7)
 - “Support of parents a community approach. “
 - “Parent engagement and support in the online environment. “
 - “Parental involvement is always an issue in distance education. I feel as though parents should also have an interest in monitoring progress of their child, regardless of academic setting, but especially when the students are not physically accountable to someone in the f2f setting. Parents should also have some technology skills or at least be willing to learn the basics that are needed to be involved at some level. “

Benefits of Online Teaching

Although our survey focused on the needs and challenges of K-12 online teachers, many teachers were compelled to share the benefits they've experienced teaching online. Some of these comments are represented below:

- “Everything is great! “
- “The benefits of online teaching outweigh the negatives. Students can achieve higher level learning with us than compared to a brick and mortar school if the student's team gives 100%, meaning the teacher, learning coach, and the student.”
- “I find online teaching an amazing opportunity. It seems so surreal. “
- “I love that every student-teacher interaction is one-on-one and that there is time for depth. “
- “Appreciation for the time and expertise involved from others. “
- “I feel online work is the best way to meet the needs of students who are in small schools that cannot offer appropriate programs due to their lack of size. “
- “Collaboration online between colleagues is so beneficial and should be highly encouraged in any online environment. “
- “Online learning environments definitely provide a inherently strong context for deep learning, with progressive drilling down into greater levels of inquiry. “
- “Any effective online educational tool must have solid support backing up its teaching and administrative staff. I can't say enough good things about [my program]; these people know how to provide help in so many ways. I always feel supported. “

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APPENDIX A

Participant School and Organization Affiliations

State Sponsored Programs/Schools

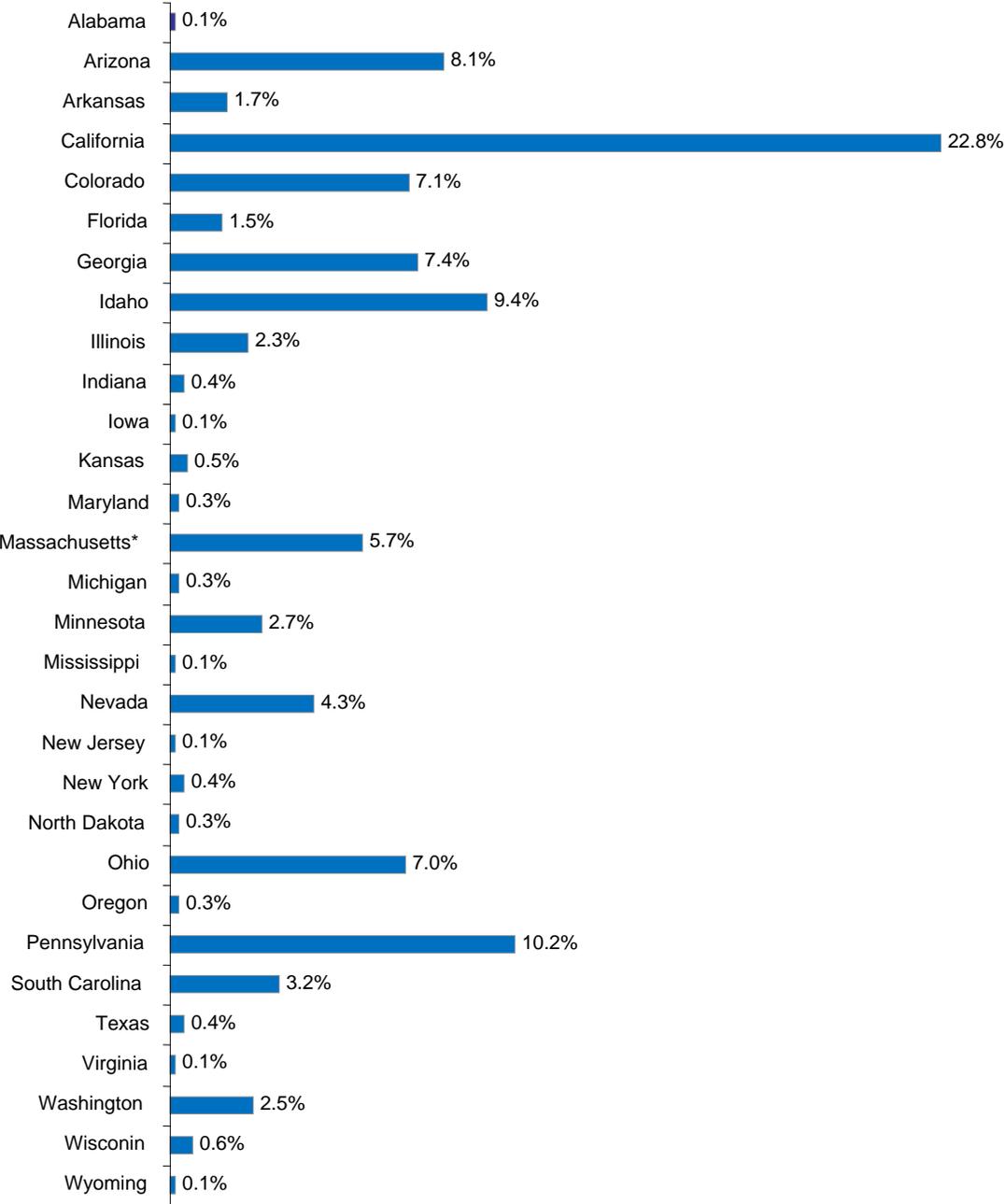
AccelerateU
Alabama Online High School
Arkansas Virtual School (ARVS)
Florida Virtual School
Georgia Virtual School
Idaho Digital Learning Academy
Illinois Virtual High School
Michigan Virtual School
Mississippi Virtual Public School
White Oak ISD

Other Online Schools/Programs

Advanced Academics
Agora Cyber Charter School
Akron Digital Academy - OHDELA
Appleton e-School
Arizona Connections Academy
Arizona Virtual Academy
Arkansas Virtual Academy
Baltimore County Public School's e-Learning Initiative
Butler Tech Online
California Virtual Academy (CAVA)
California Virtual High School
Capistrano Connections Academy
CCS Web Academy - Ohdela
Colorado Connections Academy
Colorado Virtual Academy
Commonwealth Connections Academy Charter School
Denver Connections Academy
EdVisions Off Campus High School - Minnesota Charter School
eHigh School
eSchool - OHDELA
Evergreen Internet Academy
Florida Virtual Academy
Georgia Virtual Academy
Gwinnett County Online Campus
Hoosier Academies
Idaho Virtual Academy
Idaho Virtual High School
Indiana Virtual Academy
INSPIRE Connections Academy

Kirkwood HSDL (High School Distance Learning)
Lawrence Virtual Secondary Program
Minnesota Virtual Academy
MTS Minnesota Connections Academy
Nevada Connections Academy
Nevada Virtual High School
New Jersey Virtual School
North Dakota Division of Independent Study
Odyssey Charter School
Ohio Connections Academy
Ohio Virtual Academy
Oregon Virtual Academy
Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School
Richland School District Two
Virtual High School
Salem-Keizer's SK Online
Sevenstar Academy
South Carolina Connections Academy
South Carolina Virtual Charter School
Texas Virtual Academy at Southwest
Virtual High School
Washington Virtual Academies
Wisconsin Virtual Academy
Wyoming e Academy of Virtual Education
York County - VA

Location of Participating Schools (n=775)



Note: * Virtual High School, Inc. is a consortium headquartered in Massachusetts, but is a national and international service provider.