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# Administrator and Teacher Perceptions of the Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Courses in Urban/Suburban New Jersey Public High Schools

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ADMINISTRATOR AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF  
THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE COURSES  
IN URBAN/SUBURBAN NEW JERSEY  
PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

BY

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of the Degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate educators' perceptions toward the use of online coursework as an alternative method for the delivery of instruction in urban/suburban New Jersey public high schools. Teachers and administrators addressed academic, social and financial issues regarding the incorporation of e-learning into the high school environment.

The following are guiding questions used in this investigation: What are the advantages and disadvantages of online programs for high school students? How does online coursework help students achieve greater academic success? How do student-teacher relationships online compare to traditional classrooms? How does online instruction impact the social component of a student's high school experience? How does teacher preparation impact e-learning? How cost effective is online coursework?

The participants were four district administrators and two teacher focus groups from New Jersey public high schools using online courses. Administrators perceive that advantages outweigh the disadvantages of coursework online. They applaud the benefits of college preparation, course availability, student motivation and fiscal prudence, but caution that proper student selection is paramount. The need to identify learners best suited for e-learning is

supported by Blaylock and Newman's (2005) description of the successful e-learner and virtual schools' attempts to discourage less motivated students.

Teachers perceive more advantages than disadvantages but express concern about the transition from traditional teaching to e-learning. College preparation and additional course offerings are online advantages and teachers identify a specific student profile needed for success online. Participants see e-learning as cost effective instruction and Mupinga (2005) agrees that distance learning offers creative cost effective solutions for educational opportunities.

Recommendations include: a study of high school students' academic achievement online, a study of the experiences and academic achievement of students in a traditional AP class vs. an AP course online, replication of this study to gather data from a student perspective, and investigation of parents' perceptions of online coursework at the high school level.

Districts should offer high school students and faculty the opportunity to work online. Teacher education programs should provide coursework to prepare future teachers as online instructors and require a practicum experience in this venue.

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## DEDICATION

Educational administration, at first, pulled me along like Dorothy's tornado. I soon took the cooperative learning model to heart and became dependent on the generosity and collaborative nature of administrators close to me. Two valued members of my cooperating team were ever supportive, intelligent, professional and fun.

This dissertation is dedicated to my friends and colleagues, Gina Rosamilia and Marie Cirasella who encourage me to be the eternal student and to continue jumping into new arenas. Each has at one time said, "Here's what I think you should do. Take this course, pursue this idea or go in that direction." Without that impetus I would not have gone.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background Information

In a manner much like letting the genie out of the bottle, online high school coursework is positioned to be a major contender in the way secondary instruction is delivered. High school administrators and teachers however, perceive advantages and disadvantages to online courses in urban/suburban New Jersey public high schools. Although educators have supported online course work as an effective method for learning, issues remain with respect to instruction design, pedagogical techniques, social dynamics, financial constraints, and the impact of virtual courses on teacher delivery and student learning. The growth of online learning has been fast paced in some locations, creating the need to address practices and policy as the use of this technology accelerates. Congruently, online courses are not available through all New Jersey public high schools. Educators are examining the delivery of online courses to determine what works, what does not work and what adaptations are needed. Where

successes exist, can we expand on the concept? Where e-learning has faltered, we need to adjust accordingly.

Early ventures in e-learning technology can be traced to 1996 when the Concord Consortium in Massachusetts and the Hudson Public School District created the Virtual High School (VHS) project with the support of a U.S. Department of Education grant. Today, VHS is a non-profit cooperative of over 200 high schools in 20 states that offers 137 courses online (Berman & Pape, 2001). In 1997, the Florida Legislature funded the Florida Virtual School (FLVS) as a statewide initiative to create a virtual high school pilot program. FLVS, offers a full online curriculum and serves as a course provider for districts in Florida and other states (Clark, 2001). States including Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, West Virginia, and Wisconsin have implemented or are in the process of developing online high school courses (Russo, 2001). A growing number of public schools and school districts offer online courses to supplement their own educational needs. They usually employ state certified teachers who may teach a combination of virtual and traditional classes. A list of virtual schools is maintained online at <http://www.dlnr.org/virtual.html>.

With a wide variety of virtual high school courses available, district administrators must assess which courses meet their local and state mandates, judge the quality of the content, and decide whether to exercise e-learning options. According to Saul Rockman, a San Francisco-based expert on the educational use of technology, computer skills are among the easiest for young people to acquire (as cited in Keller, 2006). It is more difficult, however, to give instruction in the capacity to problem solve and communicate effectively, and these skills can be taught with or without the computer. Educators should cautiously promote student computer proficiency as a skill that enhances student success in the workplace. The world of technology, with its considerable price tag, should offer a much more desirable outcome for computer use at the high school level than merely students' comfort with navigation and skill at word processing. Computers and e-learning technologies should bring considerable payback in student achievement on all levels with measured outcomes. The Abecedarian Covenant (Achilles, 1999) is intended to measure the effects of small class size on student performance but may be applicable to e-learning outcomes as well. It contains four general areas of student

achievement, useful in the analysis of online students' performance. If the purpose of school is to best meet student needs and help students achieve academic success and develop social and citizenship skills, then e-learning should be held to these standards as well.

Are school districts keeping up with student needs and their unique contemporary issues? Some students work well with technology and would opt for the advantage of taking courses online. Where e-learning exists and quality online offerings are available, students have the option and the flexibility to take advantage of what works best for their individual needs, preferences, and schedules. District administrators are developing online courses or contracting with virtual schools to enhance learning options, to ease scheduling conflicts, to offer differentiation of instruction, and to scout out possible financial benefits that may develop in the e-learning format.

Is all this possible without falling prey to the bandwagon effect? The latest trend or innovative idea thrown into the classroom without review of statistical data or academic purpose can be a disastrous waste of time and money. The decision to provide online courses rests with educational administrators, and participating students



and teachers need to adapt to the format and reap the benefits.

### Statement of the Problem

High school administrators and teachers perceive advantages and disadvantages to online courses in urban/suburban New Jersey public high schools. Although the e-learning explosion is more rampant at the university level, the concept at the high school level is still in its infancy, but growing fast. About 25% of K-12 public schools offer some form of virtual instruction, according to the National Education Technology Plan (as cited in Wood, 2005) released by the U.S. Department of Education in January 2005. Within the next decade, the report predicts, almost every state and school will follow. How does online coursework influence student achievement and social development?

Educational leaders have fostered a dichotomy of opinion on instructional change in the area of online education. As with other initiatives, educators can be both slow to change and quick to adopt newly conceived educational initiatives. After laboring to find the most

effective methods for instructing students, teachers and administrators have conceded that no one instructional delivery system works 100% of the time, and it is in diversity that we find successful instruction. This drives the researcher to look at the pluses and minuses of online coursework in suburban/urban New Jersey public high schools as perceived by certificated staff.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate educators' perceptions toward the use of online coursework as an alternative method for the delivery of instruction in urban/suburban New Jersey public high schools. This is a qualitative assessment of the perceptions of school administrators and teachers toward the use of virtual coursework at the high school level. The intent of the project was to garner information from teachers and administrators working in high schools that offer online coursework in order to examine issues surrounding the incorporation of e-learning as a component of the high school experience. Online education is expanding rapidly. Teachers and administrators must address a variety of

issues regarding the initiation of e-learning into the high school environment and its eventual adoption into the permanent landscape.

The concept of virtual schooling has both merits and demerits, and the rush to assimilate this practice into education should not ignore the drawbacks. According to a recent report of the National Association of State Boards of Education, "E-learning will improve American education in valuable ways and should be universally implemented as soon as possible" (NASBE, 2001, p.6). However, adequate training for teachers and ongoing professional development should factor into the successful use of online coursework. In addition, some teachers and students might not fit the mold of those who work successfully online, as the square peg does not fit into a round hole.

It is important that district leaders understand the advantages and disadvantages of online courses as perceived by school administrators and teachers in order to promote this form of customized learning for individual students and to advance student achievement. The growing use of e-learning in high schools is bolstered by an expanding number of students identified as potential benefactors. A report issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Education

(2001) listed the target population of cyber-school as those:

1. At risk of failure in a traditional setting
2. Pregnant or teen mothers
3. Working
4. School phobic
5. Homebound due to suspension or expulsion
6. Home schooled by parents
7. Victimized by peers
8. Seeking to accelerate their course work
9. Gifted and seeking to enrich coursework
10. Seeking college credit in high school
11. Enrolled to take courses not offered by local district
12. Students with special needs post high school through age 21

There are other advantages (and disadvantages) observed in the e-learning community that should be important to the educational administrators and school leaders who must decide whether this method for the delivery of instruction will offer a feasible and valuable alternative to instructional delivery.

Cost factors have been considered as both beneficial and detrimental depending on an individual's perspective. The cost of an online course includes the course content, teacher support, and technology infrastructure such as registration, course delivery, help desk, and administrative functions. Cost factors could deter favorable implementation of this technology in light of district budgetary restraints and newly renovated facilities that have recently added traditional classroom space. However, some cost factors would offer potential cost savings. Julie Young, the director of the Florida Virtual High School observes, "With deepening budget cuts, brick and mortar schools will make every effort to find creative and cost effective solutions to continue providing the same quality of educational opportunities for their students. Distance learning is one of these solutions" (as cited in Mupinga, 2005, p.106). Low enrollment classes such as Latin and chemistry could be taken online to save districts the cost of a full-time teacher or the need to hire part-time teachers in difficult to fill areas of certification. Students in low-achieving schools would have access to quality online courses not otherwise available in their local school district.

Ultimately, e-learning will likely become commonplace, but the educational community should see that it is put to use in the most productive way. Staff perceptions of the use of this technology can influence the success of the initiative. The level of staff and student preparation for Web-based instruction will influence the outcome of virtual coursework. Do online courses promote academic achievement and ultimately contribute to students' ability to achieve academic success and develop into adults that can make a positive contribution to society?

#### Research/Guiding Questions

Administrators and teachers need to understand the benefits and drawbacks of online coursework in the culture of a traditional high school. How do high school administrators and teachers perceive the advantages and disadvantages of online coursework in urban/suburban New Jersey public high schools?

The following are guiding questions used to investigate and assess the perceptions of educators regarding the use of online courses as an alternative to the delivery of instruction in a traditional high school setting:

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of online programs for high school students?
2. How does online coursework help students achieve greater academic success?
3. How do student-teacher relationships online compare to traditional classrooms?
4. How does online instruction impact the social component of a student's high school experience?
5. How does teacher preparation impact e-learning?
6. How cost effective is online coursework?

Interviews with school administrators and teacher focus groups were conducted to solicit perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of virtual coursework for high school students and the feasibility of successful incorporation into a student's high school experience in urban/suburban New Jersey public high schools.

#### Significance of the Study

The rapid expansion of educational technologies and new instructional opportunities has promoted the acceptance of technology as a means of educating students; however, public education remains tied to the organizational paradigms of early America (Sack, 2003). There is a promise in the concept of virtual learning that does not

ring true for all educators. While many tout the success of online learning, there is some resistance to virtual education that must be addressed in order to move forward with the possibilities.

According to Blomeyer (2002), investments in computers, Internet access, professional development in technology, and content development have allowed elementary and secondary teachers and students to experience the benefits of these new learning technologies. In a March 2000, survey the most frequently reported tuition for virtual high school courses was \$300 per semester, but prices varied greatly (Clark, 2001). Estimates for the development of materials for coursework range from 50 to 150 person-hours to one hour of instruction (Blomeyer, 2002). This describes an investment in technology that is both costly and labor intensive. Since computers will play an increasing instructional role in high school programs, the perceptions of teachers and administrators toward this tool may guide its development and effective implementation to the benefit of students. The possibility that virtual schools can create equity in an unequal system fuels the need to pursue the potential in this expanding field.



### Limitations of the Study

This study is qualitative in nature and limited by its scope and design. Its purpose is to investigate the use of online coursework as an alternative method for the delivery of instruction. The data was obtained through interviews with administrators and focus groups of teachers in districts that use online courses to deliver instruction. It is assumed that participants gave honest and accurate responses. The selection and subjectivity or bias of the respondents and the interpretation and presentation of the data will produce potential limitations.

### Delimitations of the Study

The results are limited to a small number of school administrators and teachers in urban/suburban New Jersey public school districts that use online courses at the high school level. The research is restricted to their perceptions of online coursework.

### Definitions

*Distance education:* educational situation in which the instructor and students are separated by time, location, or both (Blomeyer, 2002)

*Distance learning:* the desired outcome of distance education (Blomeyer, 2002)

*Online course:* the majority (80% or more) of the instruction is delivered through the Internet and accessible by a computer 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (Davidson, 2005)

*Virtual school:* an educational organization that offers K-12 courses through the Internet or Web-based methods (Blomeyer, 2002)

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### The Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Programs for High School Students

Is the e-learning experience right for everyone?

Michigan education officials are promoting legislation that includes a substantial "online experience" as part of their high school graduation requirement says Jeremy M. Hughes (Keller, 2006). According to state officials, districts could opt to put their own courses online, advocate teachers' use of substantial online experiences such as electronic bulletin boards or threaded e-discussions, or use the Michigan Virtual High School, part of the Michigan Virtual University (MVU), which now focuses mainly on secondary education.

While resolving the practical issues involved in the movement toward e-learning, key players should remain cognizant of policy issues and the ultimate goal of student achievement. The framework must be one that is not only research based, but research validated in the sense that it has evolved principles that have been repeated, verified, and are not just the latest research fad (McCombs & Vakili,

2005). Although there is much agreement that e-learning will become an important component in the future of education, the design of educational systems is key. McCombs & Vakili (2005) describe the challenge we face in designing a system where technology is in service to, values, and supports diverse learners and the learning context.

Jamey Fitzpatrick, President of MVU, is in agreement with the commitment to computers in education and comments that computer use should be connected to valuable learning experiences. He said, "Michigan is providing leadership, but we don't want to see it evolving into a trip to the computer lab with everyone using a search engine to find something" (Keller, 2006, p.17). Saul Rockman, however, does not support policy to mandate student participation in e-learning (as cited in Keller). Rockman on the educational use of computers says, "The notion of having an independent experience is with something of value on the computer associated with school is not a bad idea, but insisting that everyone have it may not be the best strategy" (Keller, 2006, p.17).

The idea of putting an e-learning policy in place has generated much discussion. Susette Jaquette, the coordinator of online learning for the Ann Arbor, Michigan

Schools sees that district enrollment for online coursework is doubling and advocates for policy that would force other wise slow-moving districts to keep up with students. Jaquette says, "The kids are going to force us to do it so we might as well do it now" (as cited in Keller, 2006, p. 17). While admitting that student preference is responsible for the fast-paced growth of online courses, Jaquette explains that most students would do better with a combination of regular classes and online work rather than pure online coursework.

State legislation has been active in Indiana (H.B. 1240), mandating a review of state-wide testing in order to produce a system that is less expensive, time efficient, and comprehensive, with the capability to assess student writing and compatible with a move to online testing (Christie, 2006). Additional legislation addresses students on a high school fast-track-to-college program (H.B. 1347) and student participation in school flex programs which allow students with attendance or academic issues to meet alternative attendance requirements and avoid dropping out of school (Christie). These new directions mesh easily with the concept of coursework online and provide new solutions to students with insufficient credits or those interested in accelerated

learning programs. State institutions of higher education in collaboration with school districts (or school corporations as they are called in Indiana) offer students the opportunity to earn college credits while working toward their high school diplomas.

Although the opinions of those close to the issue remain diverse, computer-based education is becoming more prevalent in secondary education and has the potential to solve some of the problems facing our schools. Numerous factors such as geographical location, small school size, large school size, socioeconomic factors, budget restraints, and substandard teachers can prevent students from the same preparation for college or career demands as those in well-funded districts. Computer-based instruction may allow equality where educational inequities presently exist.

Blaylock and Newman (2005) reported a strong growth in computer usage among racial minorities, lower income families, and rural populations in recent years, but nevertheless cite limitations in the growth of virtual schools that should be considered in the race to expand e-learning. Inequities in the access to technology continue to create differences in virtual school opportunities for students.

Another limitation in the virtual experience identifies learner characteristics that are best suited for online learning. Blaylock and Newman (2005) describe the successful online learner as independent, self-motivated and self-monitoring. While the traditional classroom teacher will monitor and adjust for the individual learner, many virtual schools are attempting to discourage the less motivated learner or changing the pace of course completions. The Florida Virtual School has had to replace its self-paced model with one that is much more structured in order to address timely course completion issues (Blaylock & Newman, 2005). These limitations do not diminish the authors' belief in the benefits of online instruction, and they predict that very soon some or all of the courses taken by high school students will be Internet-based, and the obstacles that exist will be overcome.

The abundance of content in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world (McCombs & Vakili, 2005) makes it a poor foundation on which to build an educational system. Rather, the purpose of education should focus on assisting learners to communicate with others, finding accurate and relevant information for the specific task, and developing partnerships with teachers and peers in diverse learning communities beyond the school walls.

## Online Coursework and Student Academic Success

Differentiated instruction addresses the specific needs of the individual learner. As educators better understand student learning, most would agree that all students do not learn in the same way or at the same pace. Online instruction is an opportunity for students to work at their own pace and process information in a personal way, thus providing a very individualized approach to instruction. Students have the needed time to think about a question or an issue that results in a more reflective response. One course offered jointly by the University of Oregon and the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) on a graduate level, gives each student the opportunity to work on individual goals, creating highly individualized lessons and activities (Schrum, 1995). This concept brought to the level of secondary education may encourage more time on task and project-based learning as instruction and student motivation become more intertwined.

Traditional instruction tends to promote passive learning and instructional methods designed for listeners.



Left over from decades past, the industrial model school was a result of the age of mass-production. In contrast, online courses require students to actively participate and individually complete their online assignments. The manipulation of keyboards and the exploration of Websites that lead to authentic assessments, create an active learning environment for many students who are tactile and visual learners. Students can get up and move around during the lesson, simulating their future work environment.

It is not enough to rely on the perceived value of online instruction, but student achievement data is limited. An evaluation of the Illinois Virtual High School (IVHS) by external consultants Clark, Lewis, Oyer and Schreiber in 2002 (as cited in Blaylock & Newman, 2005) did not offer student achievement data, although 75% of students surveyed felt they had achieved the stated goals of their courses, and instructors felt the IVHS courses prepared students for college work and lifelong learning. In October 2000, the Center for the Study of Teaching and Learning evaluated the FLVS during the 1999-2000 school year. FLVS students posted higher AP scores than the national average in biology, computer science, and English (Blaylock & Newman, 2005) and qualifying scores exceeded

the national average by nearly 9%. When the U.S. Department of Education released its revised National Educational Technology Plan, the emphasis was on support for a high quality curriculum and improved student academic achievement (Blomeyer, 2002).

### Student-teacher Relationships Online Versus the Traditional Classroom

There is a concern among some educational administrators that teachers, well intended as they are, too often revert back to teaching in the traditional ways in which they were taught. If the teacher's role is changing with the infusion of technology, there may be increased incentive to reevaluate traditional teaching methods and more teachers encouraged to change their methods. While some adults see the computer lab as an impersonal machine-oriented venue for the delivery of instruction, others advocate that schools should strive to be student-centered and interactive learning environments with the assistance of technology.

A 15-year-old boy participating in an online discussion on the impact of the Internet on teenage life in America said, "The Internet is an AWESOME thing. Who

would have thought that within the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a supertool could be created, a tool that allows us to talk to people in other states without the long distance charges, a tool that allows us to purchase products without having to go to the store, a tool that gets information about almost any topic without having to go to the library?" (as cited in Blaylock & Newman, 2005).

This example of student motivation might be reason enough to shed our tendency to cling to the traditional classroom experience. Although our comfort level often rests with the familiar, change can be good. "Many students respond to this learning environment in a way they don't in a classroom," explains Linda Pittenger, director of the Division of Virtual Learning at Kentucky Virtual High School. "We have identified gifted students online that were not identified in the classroom" (as cited in Wood, 2005, p.36). Students do not necessarily feel isolated at the computer. For some, the anonymity is empowering, and their ability to speak out is not impeded by social pressures of the traditional classroom.

In the discussion of e-learning relationships, we are moving from dialogue about the use of computers and their inability to encourage learning communities to cautioning

that students deprived of computer technology will miss educational opportunities to expand their horizons with learners beyond the school walls. Intermediate steps may assist the transition and better define the best approach to student learning, and even virtual school advocates have stated that online learning will not entirely replace the traditional classroom.

Oblender (2004) has given a name to the blended use of virtual and traditional instruction calling this hybrid of virtual instruction the "virditional" model, a combination of 65% virtual and 35% traditional instruction. We understand that all students do not learn in the same way or at the same pace. Combining the motivation students have for computer instruction, the belief that project-based learning affords opportunities that encompass varied learning styles and intelligences, changes the traditional student-teacher relationships.

Although computers and other digital technologies will play an increasing role in K-12 education, e-learning may work best when it is combined with some face-to-face classroom experience (Blomeyer, 2002). The hybrid approach as defined by Mupinga (2005) is face-to-face coursework by instructors who have physical proximity to the students, augmented with assignments, readings and tests that are

completed online. With this approach, students attend traditional schools and incorporate the Internet into their subject experience, decreasing the likelihood of getting lost in cyberspace or becoming an online drop out.

E-learning and the Social Component of a Student's  
High School Experience

Addressing the social implications of online learning, Schrum (1995) looked at online social interactions, which appear to foster social communities and concluded,

First, the world of electronic communication assumes and demands that people take initiative for their own learning and growth. ...Second, a case has been made that online communication creates an open and democratic social order, one not dependent on previously established hierarchical system. Experience suggests there must be a personal and compelling reason for the adoption and implementation of any innovation. (p.4)

The social ramifications of online learning can be argued from both sides of the coin. While some students find e-learning isolating, others see an increased access to their peers. Students have reported that online teachers feel more like private tutors, and the immediacy

of feedback on projects and tests combined with the physical separation experienced in the online environment can give students a sense of freedom or liberation that they may not experience in the traditional classroom. The freedom of expression students find while sitting at the keyboard is not necessarily experienced in the typical classroom environment. "I know my online students better than my classroom students," says Mary Mac Neil, a teacher at Pope John XXIII High School who teaches contemporary Irish literature through VHS. "We discuss themes and characters, and in those discussions, students often tell me personal anecdotes. They are more comfortable online and confide in me more than they would a teacher they see every day" (as cited in Wood, 2005, p.36).

In spite of these positive experiences, Julie Young, president and CEO of Florida's Virtual School (FLVS) predicts that "Online learning will never replace the classroom," (as cited in Wood, 2005, p.37), and most experts agree. "Schools play a tremendous role in socialization and in the community," says University of Washington's College of Education professor Allen D. Glenn (as cited in Wood, 2005, p.37). "Even the kids don't always want to stay home."

### Teacher Preparation for E-learning Coursework

Student enthusiasm for e-learning should be coupled with teachers interested and motivated to pursue online instruction. Once identified, teachers should receive appropriate release time and the support needed to develop their coursework or to implement professionally developed software in order to assure high quality learning outcomes. Davis and Roblyer (2005) quote Blomyer's observation that "(there is a) persistent opinion that people who have never taught in this medium can jump in and teach a class... A good classroom teacher is not necessarily a good online teacher." (p.400) These authors refer to Cyr's areas of competence specific to the online instructor:

1. Course planning and organization that capitalize on distance learning strengths and minimize constraints
2. Verbal and nonverbal presentation skills specific to distance learning situations
3. Collaborative work with others to produce effective courses
4. Ability to use questioning strategies
5. Ability to involve and coordinate student activities among several sites. (p. 401)

Although some instructors have been apprehensive about the assignment to teach online, the areas cited are suspiciously similar to those practices important in the traditional classroom. Perhaps the issue is not with expectations for teaching online, but with the changing instructional environment. For years, instruction both K-12 and post-secondary has been face-to-face and often reliant on the lecture format. This established pattern of behavior may be more of a deterrent than any specific skill needed in the successful use of online technology.

Natriello (2005) addresses major obstacles for faculty participation in distance learning as lack of time, the need for technology skills, and the need for assistance and technical support. Presently, online learning often reflects the regular classroom model for teacher behavior and student-teacher interaction and change is slow.

One of the greatest challenges to implementing a virtual high school is training high school teachers who have experienced only traditional face-to-face teaching (Jancek, 2001), because the role of the traditional teacher changes drastically in concert with the role of virtual learning and technology applications. Jancek states that teachers must be comfortable with technology, able to



communicate and effectively work with colleagues and able to function as a facilitator in the classroom. Time to plan and structure curriculum are key factors for success.

These skills and accommodations, however, are arguably those needed for success in the regular classroom, and perhaps we have finally unveiled the impetus for assuring that student-centered learning is the focus, whatever the instructional format. It would be ironic to discover that the best virtual instructors are positive role models for traditional classroom teachers and that professional development designed for e-learning instruction is just as well suited to the traditional classroom.

Meshing two sides of the school culture coin, Kilian (1999) explains that a new kind of school, the Interactive school, is evolving within the structure of the Standard school. Computers are the catalyst for change, but they are far from critical to the establishment of a new kind of school. The Interactive school is a "constructivist" model concerned with what students have learned and how they have demonstrated that learning. The Standard school is more likely a teacher-centered environment where finding the right answer is important. Aware of computer generated information, an Interactive school would instead be looking

for the right question, which changes our educational focus. It is important that teacher preparation and professional development reflect this instructional philosophy.

Although the Interactive system is not an inevitable outcome of ever-improving technology (Kilian, 1999), what we learn in online communities may lead to construing a new meaning for not only education but for the way we live with each other. In a more narrowed view, teacher preparation for online instruction should be addressed as separate from the demands of a traditional classroom teaching. Blomeyer (2002) recommends that online instructors should be required to complete appropriate specialized professional development coursework concerned with the design and implementation of online learning environments.

#### Financial Impacts: Beneficial and Obstructive

Teacher preparation costs, the development of materials, and the curriculum research needed for computer assisted instruction have considerable financial implications in the development of virtual instruction. Blomeyer (2002) suggests, "In the best of all possible worlds, an eventual goal might be for students to have

their own notebook computers to support both in-school and at-home learning" (p.10). Few would dispute that the cost factor attached to this idea is substantial. The creation a virtual school in Liverpool, New York (Lavine, 2001) incurred developmental costs estimated at several thousand dollars, far exceeding the delivery costs. Although software tools assist teachers in creating online courses, creating and distributing online courses is a costly endeavor (Russo, 2001).

In contrast to these opinions, Oblender (2004) states that getting started is easy, that many resources are available, and online courses can be purchased at a reasonable price. Natriello (2005) addresses revolutionary changes likely to have a positive impact on the cost of virtual schooling. In fact, he describes four fundamental changes that would change education substantially.

First, the traditional and established packaging of education may be shifting. Second, the teacher or faculty role may be changing. Third, capital may be more available to invest directly in the technology of education. Fourth, there may be a major remapping of the education sector as new entrants become substantial players in the global educational market. (p.1892)

Further elaborating on the financial benefits, Natriello (2005) anticipates a reduction in the necessary investments in physical facilities and the promise of more powerful technologies that will create a more direct delivery of instruction instead of the labor-intensive model currently in use.

With the promise of technology so well positioned to benefit education, Rachel Tompkins, President of the Rural School and Community Trust, which advocates for online learning says, "I've worked in poor communities in the South that have crumbling facilities and difficulty recruiting teachers and principals. Online learning is not a solution to facilities that are falling down, and it doesn't solve underfunding" (as cited in Wood, 2005, p.37). Berger (2005) was discouraged about the expense of an experimental program in Maine that gave laptops to every 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grader in the state at a cost of \$37 million over 2 years. Math scores improved slightly while writing, reading and science scores either dropped or did not change, causing Berger to question whether we could be doing something better with our resources.

Although some educators predict that virtual schools will become a basic component of instruction as e-learning

technology is more prevalent at home and in the workplace, books and traditional teaching strategies will likely maintain their position on the educational landscape, and educators will continue to struggle with making the most of limited educational resources.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the design and methodology of the study and the procedure, for data collection and analysis. It contains the instrumentation and the participants involved in the study.

#### Research Design

This study was designed to qualitatively assess the use of online coursework as perceived by administrators and teachers involved in this alternative method of instructional delivery to high school students in their districts. In keeping with the qualitative nature of the study, face-to-face interviews with four district administrators and two focus groups of six to eight teachers each were conducted to assess the various aspects of administrator and teacher perceptions of e-learning with the intention of discovery from the perspective of the participants. The district administrators interviewed represent various district factor groups, in order to

obtain in depth information from districts with varying profiles. The focus groups represent the same school district as two of the administrators in the research.

The data were obtained through notes taken during the field experience and the recordings and transcripts of the focus group sessions. The interviews and discussion groups took place in a comfortable environment intended to encourage participants to speak freely as they share their perspectives, insights, and opinions audio recorded on tape. Individual interviews with administrators and focus group sessions were expected to last 1 to 2 hours each and were conducted during the month of January, 2007.

Letters formally explaining the study were sent to the superintendent of schools, the school principal and to the teachers to request volunteers from among faculty in districts using e-learning. All participants were asked to sign a permission release for the use of their anonymous responses and to give permission to use an audio-tape recorder with their responses as well. They were informed that a neutral location would be established, the time of arrival, date and length of the session, and the availability of refreshments as an incentive.

During the focus groups the researcher served as the moderator. The researcher met and welcomed the

participants, conversed on small-talk subjects other than the research topic, and created an atmosphere conducive to conversation. Ground rules were explained and discussed so that participants remembered to speak one at a time and to refrain from the mention of names or the use personal identification when speaking.

The interview questions and group discussions were intended to provide an understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of online coursework for high school students in order to learn more about student and teacher experiences with e-learning. They were developed from the literature findings of this researcher and designed to be open ended in an attempt to encourage discussion by the respondents.

### Participants

The participants for this study were school administrators and high school teachers working in urban/suburban New Jersey public school districts that offer online courses as part of their curriculum offerings. The researcher focused on the participants' perceptions and reflections as administrators and teachers having



experienced online learning as a result of their employment in the participating school district.

#### Instrumentation

Face-to-face interviews were used in this study to assess the perceptions of administrators toward online courses in their district's high school. Focus groups were used to assess teacher perceptions toward online courses at the high school level. This instrumentation was designed to ascertain the educator's perception of e-learning and other variables such as social implications, comparison to traditional class work, teacher preparation and implementation issues.

Interview questions were divided into six categories and driven by the information obtained in the literature review and sent to a jury of experts for their input, comment and revision. The six categories were as follows: (a) advantages and disadvantages of virtual instruction, (b) student achievement and academic success, (c) student-teacher relationships, (d) social implications of online coursework, (e) teacher preparation, and (f) cost effectiveness. Validation of these categories is derived directly from the literature review included.

## Advantages and Disadvantages of Virtual Instruction

### (Category 1):

1. McCombs & Vakili (2005): Challenges exist, but the potential of this technology will support and value diverse learners.
2. Keller (2006): Michigan legislation promotes online coursework as a graduation requirement.
3. Christie (2006): Fast track to college programs and school flex programs accommodate students with academic and attendance issues.
4. Blaylock and Newman (2005): Inequities exist in the access to technology experienced by different student groups.

## Online Coursework and Student Academic Success

### (Category 2):

1. Blaylock and Newman (2005): Limited student achievement data exists, but 75% of IVHS students surveyed, felt prepared for college work and lifelong learning.
2. Blomeyer (2002): The National Educational Technology plan emphasizes improved student academic achievement.

Student-teacher Relationships Online Versus the  
Traditional Classroom (Category 3):

1. Blaylock and Newman (2005): Student motivation might be reason enough to shed our tendency to cling to the traditional classroom experience.
2. Wood (2005): The anonymity of computer work empowers students by freeing them from the social pressures of the classroom.
3. Oblender (2004): A blended use of virtual and traditional instruction, a hybrid model, addresses the understanding that all students do not learn in the same way or at the same pace.
4. Blomeyer (2002): E-learning may work best when combined with some face to face classroom experience.

E-learning and the Social Component of a Student's High  
School Experience (Category 4):

1. Schrum (1995): Online social interactions appear to foster social communities.
2. Wood (2005): The freedom of expression students find while sitting at the keyboard is not necessarily experienced in the typical classroom environment. At the same time, schools play a tremendous role in

socialization and students do not always want to stay home.

#### Teacher Preparation for E-learning Coursework

(Category 5):

1. Davis & Roblyer (2005): A good classroom teacher is not necessarily a good online teacher.
2. Natriello (2005): Major obstacle of faculty participation is the need for technology skills and technical support.
3. Jancek (2001): The role of the traditional teacher changes drastically in a virtual high school and training is key to success.
4. Blomeyer (2002): Online instructors should be required to complete appropriate specialized professional development relating to the online learning environment.

Financial Impacts: Beneficial and Obstructive (Category 6):

1. Blomeyer (2002): The cost factor implications for each student having a notebook computer is substantial.
2. Lavine (2001): Creating and distributing online courses is a costly endeavor.
3. Oblender (2004): Many resources are available and

online courses can be purchased at a reasonable price.

4. Natriello(2005): There is an anticipated reduction in the investments in physical facilities with the promise of a more direct delivery of instruction.
5. Wood (2005): Online learning is not a solution to failing facilities and does not solve underfunding.
6. Berger (2005): The expense of a laptop program in Maine did not make a noticeable improvement in student achievement.

The focus group questions were divided into four categories:

- 1) advantages and disadvantages of online coursework; 2) student impact, academic and social; 3) groundwork for an online program, teacher preparation, student selection; and 4) promotion of an online program, financial implications.

#### Courses Taken Online: Teacher Reflections

##### Focus Group Questions

1. Online courses are prevalent at the college level. Online courses are less frequently incorporated into the high school experience in New Jersey public school districts.

- a. Why aren't more public high schools offering

- courses online?
- b. What benefits exist? What are the drawbacks?
  - c. What issues should be addressed to assure the success of online instruction?
2. When providing online coursework for high school students...
- a. How do you see online coursework as best being incorporated into the fabric of a student's high school experience?
    - i. What format should be offered to students?
    - ii. Is a hybrid model viable? Why or why not?
  - b. How does virtual coursework impact students?
    - i. Academic achievement
    - ii. Social development
    - iii. Student-teacher relationships
3. What would you consider necessary preparation to ensure success before implementing an online education program?
- a. What teacher preparation issues should be addressed?
  - b. What student selection issues should be considered?
4. What can be done to stimulate dialogue with district leaders to promote the use of online coursework for high school students?

- a. What issues promote/impede the incorporation of online coursework into high school programs?
- b. What are the financial implications for e-learning?

Tables 1-6 at the end of this chapter indicate the overlap of research questions with focus groups questions intended to elicit the perceptions and attitudes of teachers toward the use of online courses as a method of instructional delivery.

The researcher conducted the interviews and focus groups at a specific time that did not interfere with teacher/student instruction. The length of time for the interviews and focus groups was agreed upon at the beginning of these sessions and each subject signed a consent form stating that they would remain anonymous to the extent possible.

### Data Analysis

Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit (Patton, 2001, p.341). The interview topic should be narrowly focused to assist the researcher in analyzing individual and group responses through transcripts, notes, tapes and memory, to detect

recurring themes, perceptions, and information both common and unique among the respondents. The information was analyzed to detect common themes and perceptions from the administrative and teacher perspective to illuminate trends, opinions, and ideas that may provide a better understanding of the problem.

Table 1

*Research Question 1*

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Advantages and Disadvantages

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Online courses are prevalent at the college level. Online courses are less frequently incorporated into the high school experience in New Jersey public school districts. Why aren't more public high schools offering courses online? What benefits exist? What are the drawbacks? What issues should be addressed to assure the success of online instruction? X

When providing online coursework for high school students... How do you see online coursework as best being incorporated into the fabric of a student's high school experience? What format should be offered to students? Is a hybrid model viable? Why or why not? How does virtual coursework impact students' academic achievement, social development, student-teacher relationships?

What would you consider necessary preparation to ensure success before implementing an online education program? What teacher preparation issues should be addressed? What student selection issues should be considered?

What can be done to stimulate dialogue with district leaders to promote the use of online X



coursework for high school students? What issues promote/impede the incorporation of online coursework into high school programs? What are the financial implications for e-learning?

*Note.* Research question 1 is: What are the advantages and disadvantages of online programs for high school students?

Table 2

*Research Question 2*

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Student Academic Achievement Online

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Online courses are prevalent at the college level. Online courses are less frequently incorporated into the high school experience in New Jersey public school districts. Why aren't more public high schools offering courses online? What benefits exist? What are the drawbacks? What issues should be addressed to assure the success of online instruction?

When providing online coursework for high school students... How do you see online coursework as best being incorporated into the fabric of a student's high school experience? What format should be offered to students? Is a hybrid model viable? Why or why not? How does virtual coursework impact students' academic achievement, social development, student-teacher relationships? X

What would you consider necessary preparation to ensure success before implementing an online education program? What teacher preparation issues should be addressed? What student selection issues should be considered? X

What can be done to stimulate dialogue with district leaders to promote the use of online coursework for high school students? What issues promote/impede the incorporation of online coursework into high school programs? What are the financial implications for e-learning?

Note. Research question 2 is: How does online coursework help students achieve greater academic success?

Table 3

*Research Question 3*

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Student-teacher Relationships Online

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Online courses are prevalent at the college level. Online courses are less frequently incorporated into the high school experience in New Jersey public school districts. Why aren't more public high schools offering courses online? What benefits exist? What are the drawbacks? What issues should be addressed to assure the success of online instruction?

When providing online coursework for high school students... How do you see online coursework as best being incorporated into the fabric of a student's high school experience? What format should be offered to students? Is a hybrid model viable? Why or why not How does virtual coursework impact students' academic achievement, social development, student-teacher relationships? X

What would you consider necessary preparation to ensure success before implementing an online education program? What teacher preparation issues should be addressed? What student selection issues should be considered?

What can be done to stimulate dialogue with district leaders to promote the use of online coursework for high school students? What issues promote/impede the incorporation of online coursework into high school programs? What are the financial implications for e-learning?

Note. Research question 3 is: How do student-teacher relationships online compare to traditional classrooms?

Table 4

*Research Question 4*


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 Social Impact of E-learning
 

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Online courses are prevalent at the college level. Online courses are less frequently incorporated into the high school experience in New Jersey public school districts. Why aren't more public high schools offering courses online? What benefits exist? What are the drawbacks? What issues should be addressed to assure the success of online instruction?

When providing online coursework for high school students... How do you see online coursework as best being incorporated into the fabric of a student's high school experience? What format should be offered to students? Is a hybrid model viable? Why or why not? How does virtual coursework impact students' academic achievement, social development, student-teacher relationships? X

What would you consider necessary preparation to ensure success before implementing an online education program? What teacher preparation issues should be addressed? What student selection issues should be considered?

What can be done to stimulate dialogue with district leaders to promote the use of online coursework for high school students? What issues promote/impede the incorporation of online coursework into high school programs? What are the financial implications for e-learning?

Note. Research question 4 is: How does online instruction impact the social component of a student's high school experience?

Table 5

*Research Question 5*


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 Teacher Preparation
 

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Online courses are prevalent at the college level. Online courses are less frequently incorporated into the high school experience in New Jersey public school districts. Why aren't more public high schools offering courses online? What benefits exist? What are the drawbacks? What issues should be addressed to assure the success of online instruction?

When providing online coursework for high school students... How do you see online coursework as best being incorporated into the fabric of a student's high school experience? What format should be offered to students? Is a hybrid model viable? Why or why not? How does virtual coursework impact students' academic achievement, social development, student-teacher relationships?

What would you consider necessary preparation to ensure success before implementing an online education program? What teacher preparation issues should be addressed? What student selection issues should be considered? X

What can be done to stimulate dialogue with district leaders to promote the use of online coursework for high school students? What issues promote/impede the incorporation of online coursework into high school programs? What are the financial implications for e-learning?

*Note.* Research question 5 is: How does teacher preparation impact e-learning?

Table 6

*Research Question 6*


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 Cost Effectiveness of Online Coursework
 

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Online courses are prevalent at the college level. Online courses are less frequently incorporated into the high school experience in New Jersey public school districts. Why aren't more public high schools offering courses online? What benefits exist? What are the drawbacks? What issues should be addressed to assure the success of online instruction? X

When providing online coursework for high school students... How do you see online coursework as best being incorporated into the fabric of a student's high school experience? What format should be offered to students? Is a hybrid model viable? Why or why not? How does virtual coursework impact students' academic achievement, social development, student-teacher relationships?

What would you consider necessary preparation to ensure success before implementing an online education program? What teacher preparation issues should be addressed? What student selection issues should be considered?

What can be done to stimulate dialogue with district leaders to promote the use of online coursework for high school students? What issues promote/impede the incorporation of online coursework into high school programs? What are the financial implications for e-learning? X

*Note.* Research question 6 is: How cost effective is online coursework?

CHAPTER IV  
ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of this study is to investigate educators' perceptions toward the use of online coursework as an alternative method for the delivery of instruction in urban/suburban New Jersey public high schools. The educators are administrators and teachers in school districts where online courses are offered as part of the high school curriculum.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the study. Four school administrators were interviewed individually. Two focus groups were organized consisting of six and seven high school teachers each. Each focus group was conducted in a school district that offers online courses at the high school level. The interview and research questions were directly derived from the literature review information indicating the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating virtual instruction into the high school curriculum. Qualitative measures were used to elicit the impressions and interpretations of educators

toward the use of online learning at the high school level, based on the research questions:

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of online programs for high school students?
2. How does online coursework help students achieve greater academic success?
3. How do student-teacher relationships online compare to tradition classrooms?
4. How does online instruction impact the social component of a student's high school experience?
5. How does teacher preparation impact e-learning?
6. How cost effective is online coursework?

#### Organization of the Analysis

The following interview questions were posed to the four administrators participating in the study:

1. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of online programs for your high school students?
  - a. What are the reasons school districts should offer online courses at the high school level, and is there a priority ranking among the reasons your district chose to initiate online courses?
  - b. Why would a district choose not to offer courses

- online? What issues cause resistance to online coursework in your district?
2. How does online coursework impact student achievement?
    - a. What are the academic expectations for e-learning in your district?
    - b. Are courses directed at the struggling or successful learners?
    - c. What is the evidence that online students are achieving better?
  3. How do student-teacher relationships online compare to traditional classrooms?
    - a. How do teaching strategies used for online courses meet student needs?
    - b. What is gleaned from student feedback?
  4. How does online instruction impact the social component of a student's high school experience?
    - a. What e-learning format is used? Why?
    - b. What are the social implications for students in an e-learning environment?
    - c. How does student selection impact a successful online experience?
  5. How does teacher preparation impact e-learning?
    - a. What do you consider necessary teacher preparation?
    - b. What are some teacher selection issues? Who should



- be assigned to teach online and why?
- c. What is the impact of scheduling?
6. How cost effective is online coursework?
- a. What is the impact of e-learning on the district's budget?
- b. What should districts expect to budget?

### Responses to the Interview Questions

#### *Research Question 1*

What are the advantages and disadvantages of online programs for high school students?

#### *Respondent 1*

Well, the whole focus when we first started, we started in the Social Studies department, was looking at the innovation of technology, but also looking at it from a perspective of time management for students. That they may want to take a course in addition to their already, you know, large schedule, but one in which they didn't have to meet every day.

...But that they were very computer literate. We wanted to be innovative. There are no downsides, just the need to start small, slowly. Our first course died out, but there was a turnover in the position because I

was reassigned. It is doing well in the Business department. S\_\_\_\_\_ has a viable program.

*Respondent 2*

This is an advantage to students. Students have access to courses not offered in their schools. The type of course that could be offered may be a course that really grabs a student and may be the reason they continue their education and maybe the thing that really has an impact on their future. We have kids that are not coming to school, that are disaffected, if there was a course like in composing rock music... I was looking at some of the sites, there was an intriguing one I think that the high school in Mass., the granddaddy has, about peace, peace making and I thought, what an intriguing social science course. We don't offer it. And I thought, that might grab a disinterested student.

As a high school we can't offer this because it's such a specialized area. And as I said, even if you don't want to come to school, if you would be allowed to take one of these courses, I could see that being an anchor for some students to make them want to stay and even do well in their other classes. It

represents greater opportunities and better preparation for college, you know.

A number of schools in New Jersey already have some components, although it's really more for advance placement, but there's a whole different trek you could take it...having supplemental classes for the kids that need the extra help. Having the summer school component, or the kids who are not in school whether it's because they're at home instruction or because it's, they're ill for whatever reason or they're not in school for disciplinary reasons.

There is a down side. I really don't know how the funding should be handled. This is not from the student perspective. I don't know how we'll pursue the funding. This is an issue in our district because when there is some kind of tuition or the school district would have to meet some kind of financial commitment.

Another issue would be the computers. I had trouble accessing something because I didn't have the latest version of a program on my computer. In our building some of them are not very updated. We have older operating systems, and I would think for some of the students it would require that they would need

newer computers at home. So that might be an issue. Unless we required that you take this course after school in our computer center, but that would mean we would need to make sure.

*Respondent 3*

Are we looking at the size of the school? We're an I district, and we're on the small side, about 1300 students in our district and our high school, we have a junior-senior high school, there's almost 600. There's a little less than 100 on grade level.

Because we're a small district we're at a disadvantage for the courses we can offer. So we can't always be as competitive as the larger regional school district. They can offer so many more courses because they have so many more students who are opting to take a course, so it's worthwhile to run it. So in our situation, we're a small high school and rather than cancel a class because we don't have the enrollment, we now can use this option too, and it gives us a whole outlet and avenue to become a high school that can offer a lot of courses. Many more than we could offer even if we did have the larger enrollment. We can have just one or two students who

can take a course of their interests. It's a real individualized kind of educational plan.

This is actually our second year of offering online courses. The first year I did investigations. And then we decided to try it. Of course we've been doing distance learning for years and years and years. I've been invited to present at the 2007 Net Conference. I'm doing two presentations on distance learning.

Let me tell you more about the advantages. We have students taking courses such as Veterinary Assistants. Students taking college level courses and getting high school and college credit. They're getting credit for both and at the same time. So that's an opportunity for a student to start working on their college education in high school and doing their high school coursework.

So the benefits are, it gives us more course offerings, it makes us unique, because not that many schools do that yet. It gives the students, well, we're offering a more individualized educational plan. We have students taking languages, like French, Spanish, and Latin, that we're not offering. At the

AP level we don't have it. This gives students another opportunity.

We used to do ITV with the county. It was 13 schools and we shared courses. We were sending or receiving courses, and so I've had that experience. The problem with that was you had to fit into the scheduling. It was different in that the scheduling could be a disadvantage. But when you're doing it online and it's not video conferencing, the student goes to a library or to wherever the location is and just works during his lab time.

*Any other advantages or disadvantages?*

Something that could be both an advantage and a disadvantage is this. Last year, and we have one student this year, who takes this online course during their own time. Meaning, they opted to take a full load of high school coursework and then take the online course after school. Last year that proved to be a disaster because the kids really weren't disciplined enough to stay with it and once you fall behind in an online course, it's really hard to catch up. So that's a problem. This year, I would not let them take it after school. There was only one exception I made and that was the student who did it

successfully last year. I knew she was motivated, disciplined and could really follow through with it.

Let me give you some more disadvantages and then we'll talk about student selection. Another disadvantage could be a computer. In the school a computer is available and a technician is basically available. What happens if there is a problem you can move to a better computer or a technician can help you out. But at home, if something happens to your computer and you don't know how to fix it that could hold you up a little bit. It could be somewhat of a disadvantage.

The students logging on at school were not a problem, but when they worked at home they would tell me I tried to log on but couldn't. I don't have a way to know if it's true or not and I'm not sending a technician to their house to fix the problem so if it's a kid who is really behind, they know they have that excuse.

And the only other thing that might be a disadvantage, because I've taken online classes myself, is that I like to know my fellow classmates. Because I like the relationships and I like to make friends and have those peers to talk to. Even if it's

not about the coursework and you don't always get that relationship, it's not the interpersonal relationship. You are not really developing friendships.

*Respondent 4*

Well, first of all because we're a small school, we don't have the opportunity to offer as many elective type classes or AP level classes and that is one concern. Yes, AP classes.

The disadvantages I can see is that students don't take it as seriously as they should because the Board has agreed to pay for the student. I look at that and I feel challenged because the student says, "I'm not paying for it," and the parent says "I'm not paying for it," so they may not have the same push had they had to shell out the cost of the course whether it's four, five or six hundred dollars.

In this community we don't have the parental involvement that other districts do. They are working and so students depend on counselors and teachers to guide their schedules. I can see that parents will say, "Why didn't you choose my child?" Because this is a free program in the eyes of the parent, they will want their child to participate. There can be some



negativity if we don't offer this opportunity to everyone and I see the potential issue down the road.

*Research Question 2*

How does online coursework help students achieve greater academic success?

*Respondent 1*

We are looking for students able to research on independent topics, typical topics in American Society. She zeroed in on topics, really good topics that kids would care about. But that's for that course, but my dream down the road was to offer it as an AP review course. So for that we've just moved the schedule of classes that open up the junior and senior years so there is more opportunity to take AP classes and take more AP tests which is for a kid who loves history, really knows it. You may be only talking five kids, but the trade off is for a teacher to only have five kids as an extra class, is wonderful, they're treated as a college level. That's where we need to go to get buy in big time, yeah. So that if I'm a AP European History teacher and I only have to read five kids' papers and really critique them, I can do that well, as opposed to your normal class that may

be, because of running a school, you have to have 15 or more kids. You would have all those papers, and you have the disenfranchised, those that took it because it was better than Basket Weaving 101.

This lends itself to getting a child into their area of expertise younger, but they still get the college credit and then they can move forward into their career moves.

This goes in any topical area where any teacher can meet them online as well as meet them, be available. It's just like college professor availability hours.

My requirements initially were, that in order for a student to take this they had to have a certain grade point average; they had to be computer literate; they had to write their own letter of recommendation explaining that they are a responsible citizen... and then that had to be signed off by two other faculty members, one in our department and one out of our department. That really worked for us, but we were very, very cautious of who we put in. There was one student (who) asked and begged would we put her in and we finally gave in it was maybe like Octoberish and

she did drag it down because she did not meet all the requirements. And part of it was her timeliness of getting the assignments done.

So you know right away that that is a key factor. I would say at the end of the first year we felt it was a great success. The title of the course, we didn't want top step on anyone's toes, was called The American Society. It was kind of like a college level course. It was more like sociology and an American history course. So the kids that were interested in doing something like that, Modern American Society, because we wanted to bring topical things, that kids would really get into. So knowing that and just in my experience with any elective, you've gotta have kids that are really taking because of the right reasons. It's like any other course. A kid that takes criminal justice as an elective they have to be wanting to be a lawyer, wanting to be a police officer and occasionally yeah, we'll throw in a few people that are going to be our criminals. But if the majority of that course are criminals, you're not going to get the substance out of that class that you want.

Also, you want students to realize that there is immediacy and that somebody else's work is dependent on yours. You have to keep up with the work.

*Respondent 2*

I would think that the expectations are just as rigorous if not more rigorous than the traditional setting because the students have more time, and they actually have access to online sources. The teachers have created links for them to Websites and to databases and the student could certainly continue to use the databases that our district offers, um so I would think students would find them to be even more rigorous.

*Are these courses for the successful or struggling learner?*

Maybe the more motivated learner... I don't know that it would be a matter of learning ability, but motivation is gonna be the key, and ironically some of our students that do well I would say, some of our lower ability students respond very well to computers. To be able to do something online is actually a great thing for them.

*Respondent 3*

I think this is definitely a worthwhile program. I would never want to see our school give it up. It's phenomenal because it offers students the opportunity to take courses they just wouldn't be able to take. Now because they're taking things they're interested in, they are more motivated. So motivation and engagement...if you're engaged then you're actively learning. So that's a strong point for student achievement. If you're asking me, "How does the coursework improve NJ standardized scores?" I really don't think I could give an answer on that because I don't have any evidence. Do you know what I mean?

You would have to have so many... well how could you compare it? You might have to have a high school with all online courses to set up a comparison to see what the scores tell us. Everything would have to be matched. I know it's worthwhile, but I can't tell you it's improving their scores. It is definitely not lowering student scores and they are offered something they're interested to take. They want to do. They're very excited about it. In terms of engagement, excitement and interest which is very high, their

scores are comparable to what they do in their other classes. I enter their online grade and so I go into their report cards. I can see the comparison. If they are B and C student, they are still getting the B and C online. But they are given an opportunity not otherwise available and they like it. These are classes I would never be able to offer. They are very excited to have the class and to get their materials. We pay for their classes and we pay for their materials. They get all kinds of books and things geared to their interests. I don't know if we're improving scores, but it's not lowering them. It's raising the engagement of learning. We value that piece and that's important. It makes it almost like a private school. Their educational plan wraps around their interests. More student-centered.

*Respondent 4*

Well, we chose to go by teacher recommendation as well as disciplinary folders and absentee records when we pick the students. These are students that do fairly well and they know that the grade will show up on their transcripts. And the course impacts the student's college applications because the colleges will see that on the transcript. It could make a

difference at the college level so these are serious students who already do well in school.

The decision to place students will be on the individual level. Not necessarily academics, but self motivation, their attendance is good, their discipline record is good and that is a response to a parent. So there is a selection process, but we are new at this so we don't have a history yet.

*Are the courses directed at the struggling learner?*

That struggling learner is not considered for these classes. It has to be a really self motivated and a self disciplined student, just to be sure they are doing the work.

### *Research Question 3*

How do student-teacher relationships online compare to traditional classrooms?

*Respondent 1*

The lunch time makes sense because that's when the teacher is available. I wonder about taking courses without teacher contact. I've heard that kids for summer school are taking online courses. Lenape Valley, you might want to go there. Talk to the guidance counselor. She has her kids taking an online

Algebra course and the course is offered in south Jersey. I just know from a summer school principal and seeing kids especially in the math classes that I need to keep them small and I need to make tutorial available every day a for those kids because they don't get it. So how are you tutorialing them online? I'm not sure I understand.

Students are very adaptable to this format. They thrive in the Internet environment. You can be sitting next to me and you don't need to know I'm taking a course online. Being the parent of three kids, they're always online. They sleep at the oddest times and for the most part they're up all night. Whether they're doing an online course or just chatting with each other or giving each other information, they do it naturally. It's so hard for us who did not grow up in this environment. They live a different life style than us, and for them it's second nature. I have to admit, I don't know what it would have been like without a television. We are just living in such a different age. And that's why I think this is a change that really works for kids.

My experience with the NJEXCEL cohort - We had to interact with our cohort and we used Blackboard. It



helped me to realize how we could get the kids to think this way and interact with each other.

Another thing I'd love to see down the road in let's say an AP course, is for a district and a college to partner and have a college professor offer his expertise. Maybe not every assignment and not do the nitty-gritty stuff professors do, but to really get into their papers and read them and give a kid feedback... on their area of expertise.

*Respondent 2*

It would depend. The way I look at it, you could take a course that is offered by a private company or a consortium, or your own teachers could compose them. If your own teachers wrote the courses and taught the courses there could be the personal interaction at the beginning maybe midway through the course, a face to face. If the course is offered through a company, you would have an onsite person responsible to guide students. The personal contact is there. I think right now, it should be a component of both. Traditional and online and I like the idea that it should be required. The way things are going, more and more we are preparing our kids for college by giving them the opportunity. Now just about every college I

can think of has that, you know, you have the choice of taking courses online, so this is something that's definitely... kids can use. Even those courses that are not totally online where you are expected to communicate online, you're getting your assignments online I mean there's that piece to it. You really are getting our kids better prepared.

*Respondent 3*

Well, I think it's more distant. This is our situation. Each student has a teacher, an online instructor. And then I personally deal with this company that provides a facilitator. They're an online learning clearing house. So they have gone out and they've looked at all the courses. I register for the courses through them and they do all the leg work. It's a big savings in time for me and it's a one-stop place and I then have the facilitator that works with me and with the students. So I e-mail the facilitator. Today I sent her a message that our semester is ending in 2 weeks. I have two students signed in for this semester. Please tell me what assignments have not been handed in. Now she'll contact the teacher, the teacher will contact the students and she'll copy me on the communication. So

now the students are coming through me. I've told them if they need any help or if they have any problems, or any concerns, anything, they are to come to me. I try to call them down and talk with them, actually seek them out. So they have me, their instructor and the facilitator. They have probably more support than they do with the class room teacher. I mean the instruction is coming from one person, but in terms of support...they actually have three people.

*Respondent 4*

We have our 15 students in one class assigned to the library one period a day to work on their online course. At this point in time we expect our Media Specialist to oversee these students as the on-site coordinator. She is responsible to make sure the students are serious, that they are doing the work. However, the students have the option to do other work at that time and work online at home, so there isn't a 100% oversee during the school day. That student may say today I'm doing biology and I'll work on my other course at home tonight. But the Media Specialist can go in and check on each student to see if they are doing the work. It is actually one of her responsibilities to check each student as the

facilitator, to make sure they put their work in on time. Our online teacher does not have any of our school's own students in her class. That's the deal we have with the provider. That's because a student cannot take an online course if we already provide it in this school. So the course that our teacher provides to outside students is already available here.

Our own students deal with the online teacher, but if there is intervention needed, the Media Specialist is there for direct contact.

#### *Research Question 4*

How does online instruction impact the social component of a student's high school experience?

#### *Respondent 1*

A good part of an online course and the way we were running it, that they were interactive questions that everyone had to react to. The exchange of ideas draws them into discussion. You form a committee in a community and you're working on projects and you're all working toward the same goal. As soon as one person in the group doesn't come through, it holds up everybody else. The goal at a high school level is to

teach them that maturity, social maturity as well. To take them away to let them truly be independent learners, but collaborative thinkers as well.

I would say students should only be limited to one, max two online courses. And even at that you're not talking your 100% student body. You're looking for the intellectual growth of a child. I'm looking at it for the intellectual growth of a kid who is either just waking up to realize its more to it than just mommy making you do your homework. You know, it's the B kid, but he doesn't have all those other snags of classification, you know, disability, just plugged along and life is wonderful as long as he got up in the morning and he ate his breakfast. Because they come out of their shells. It's also such an advantage to the gifted kid. And when I say gifted, I don't mean the straight "A" kid, I mean I think kids are gifted, everybody is. But tapping into that... In terms of music, it would be great for a music theory class. So it wouldn't be good for a hands-on music class, but good for music theory.

*Respondent 2*

Well, I think for kids today, more and more their social interaction is on the Internet. I would hate

to have this become a situation where, that's all they did was sit in front of a computer. I would hope that they would have some other activities.

For those kids who may not feel comfortable verbalizing, being able to do it online might give them a greater degree of participation than they would in a traditional class.

*Respondent 3*

I don't think online instruction is a negative from this perspective at all. I think it is a positive and I'll tell you why. First of all, these kids are involved in the school community anyway. They come to high school and have classes with their peers and they're in after-school activities and extra curricular things and then they have this other experience which to me is a bonus experience. It is preparing them for college to have an online course experience and not only that, but they can be involved with students from around the world. And so they are actually experiencing what a college student experiences. The interesting thing about it is, when you're online, race is not there. Whether you are rich or poor is not there. Whether or not you're wearing designer clothes. They don't know that. It

transcends all of that. It gives everyone an equal opportunity to just be themselves, whereas your tendency to discriminate, in this situation it would be different. You wouldn't know certain things that could lead to discrimination. There's no pre-determined ideas about the other students. There's always the time when they go into a chat room or some place to make comments. They only know the comments of their fellow students. They can't judge another student on any other premise. They just know what is being said. They don't know about race, wealth, looks or anything. Whereas in a school district or a traditional class, those things are easily identified. You know about fellow students which may influence your feelings toward your classmates. So I see the social component as very positive. It is really interesting. I can't think of a negative with this experience. If you said to me, "Kids will be taking online classes all day." Probably then it might be a negative.

*Respondent 4*

Our students are only allowed to take one class per semester. So they have to be here for the other seven. Most of the day they have the courses and

credits that are taken in the high school building. We decided this will work for us. Also we have discussed the option of taking their eight classes here and taking the online course as an additional class, but that could perhaps overwhelm the student and so we decided against that. You want them to maintain their grades without pushing them over the edge. This way they have the one period a day to do the work if they chose to do it in school. Our thinking here is geared toward the success of the student.

#### *Research Question 5*

How does teacher preparation impact e-learning?

#### *Respondent 1*

Some teachers are naturally drawn to the computer and have a no-fear attitude to try something new. The support from administration is there, so we let the teacher take the ball and run. Now for the Business Department, in their courses, you're looking at research, you're looking at hands on. This person, the business person is getting innovative, getting connected, doing statistical analysis on your own and coming up with solutions for things like that. But it



lends itself most, I think, to AP courses, the history, English, the literature kind, the kind that... some courses just adapt well. Like block scheduling there is a better fit with some subject areas. We just need the teacher to be willing and interested.

*Respondent 2*

Most of the teachers that would do this probably have already participated. Like, I've taken online courses and I have found them extremely worthwhile. I've actually done more than was expected because there wasn't a time constraint where the bell was going to ring or I had to cook dinner. When I sat down to do my work, there was a block of time that I had set aside in my mind, and I went above and beyond. And it can be more convenient. At MSU, there is time consumed in parking and things like that. When I went online to present my work or to participate in a discussion with my class, I was very focused; I was very prepared so I felt it was a lot more efficient use of my time. Teachers may feel the same when they teach the course as well.

*Respondent 3*

Right now because the program is small, the only one with responsibilities is me. I piloted the program and loved it so much, I have kept the responsibilities. I feel strongly about the program and so stayed as the main person. For me it is easy because I have this facilitator. A student will come to me and say they would like to take an online course. I give them their choices. They have literally hundreds of choices. There are schools throughout the country on the list. Then they decide what they like to take and we talk about the prerequisites. I work through the Guidance as well. They take the forms home for a parent signature and it becomes a commitment. I fax in the forms to the company and everything is done. They order the books for me and everything is done. It is easy for me and a phenomenal deal. They e-mail me to confirm the student's registration and I get a copy of the letter that goes to the student and there is a parent e-mail. Whatever is sent to the student comes to me and the parent. It could be, you're not doing your work, you need to complete something... or you're doing a

wonderful job. Everyone gets an e-mail. During progress and grade reports I e-mail the facilitator to let her know she needs to get me a grade. So I am the teacher in charge. Our teachers would want a stipend if they were to be assigned the teacher in charge. We are not doing that at this time. I just do it myself. Students can go to the library to work online, but a teacher in school is not the teacher online.

*Respondent 4*

The organization provides the needed training for the teacher involved and it is all online. She has the online class that counts as one of her five classes so the scheduling is not much different. There will be four traditional classes and one online on her class schedule. When training is needed to become the online teacher, a hall duty assignment is taken away so the training time is provided. There really is no interruption to the regular schedule. Even though a teacher may have four classes instead of five, they are likely to go over and above in the amount of time they have put into it. So in trying to describe the expectations of it, some teachers may feel that it is more work to be online.

*Research Question 6*

How cost effective is online coursework?

*Respondent 1*

I'm working with Centenary and working with Morris County College, they're looking for that because it's helping their college image and it's not costing them more. College professors are just like every teacher, they love their subject area. Maybe they could get thrown a bone of some kind like release time or expertise time. I'm not imagining it to be a huge number, but a solid number so that would cost something. But you have to be the salesman. I said, "The price is right." Let's give it a try, let's pilot it. I felt bad when it died out in Social Studies, but it's growing in the Business Dept. I don't care who is learning as long as someone is.

*Respondent 2*

Depends on whether we are writing our own programs. The VHS has workshops that you can send teachers to, or they can earn graduate credits for learning how to develop their own courses. I think they would definitely need some help in that area.

And also the technology, how to post it. But definitely doable. And then there is a program where as a teacher you monitor what someone else does, but there's another teacher involved. But I see, truthfully, the preparation work is comparable to what you would do in a regular class, although it's organized by week not necessarily by daily lesson plans. The teacher would certainly have to be online to interact with the students or to monitor the students conversations, discussions and work that's handed in and so I think it's very equivalent to teaching a standard course.

*Respondent 3*

Actually...very. It's not very expensive because really, you're paying for a course as opposed to a teacher's salary and no benefits are involved and you're offering so many more courses than you could without. You need a classroom, so you're talking facilities, you're talking salary, benefits, so to me it's more cost effective to do this than to try to have a facility, and all you're paying for is the cost of materials. The courses are not expensive, just a few hundred dollars. They're not like \$2,500 for a

course at the university level. They range from \$250 to maybe \$500. And then we're paying for textbooks, but we would have to pay for textbooks anyway. We forgot the computer, but it's not like I bought the computer; they have one anyway. If these people need something, like head phones, I've gotten headphones for the world language courses and they cost about \$30 or \$40 dollars. But at the end of the semester they are returned anyway and we use them again next semester. I think this is very cost effective.

*Respondent 4*

The superintendent and the board have agreed to cover the costs. So we have the program with their support. Recently at a meeting one supervisor at the school could not understand why we would spend the money for online courses when we might spend it on things that are more important. She felt that maybe we should be hiring another teacher that we could really use. So everyone is not sold on the concept. ...I hope it becomes a strong program because it really is a very good opportunity for students.

Table 7

*Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Programs*

Implication	Respondent			
	1	2	3	4
Implications				
Courses can be taken as additional credits beyond high school graduation requirements			X	
Specific student criteria is needed/student required to meet specific standards. Student must be motivated	X		X	X
Class roster will influence course quality	X			
Parent requests for student participation				X
Advantages				
Student motivation	X	X	X	X
Good preparation for college		X	X	X
Student has access to courses not offered in district		X	X	X
Space advantages-no classroom needed		X		

Table 7 continued

*Advantages an Disadvantages of Online Programs*

Implication	Respondent			
Implications	1	2	3	4
Time management supports student schedule	X	X		X
Time management supports teacher schedule		X		
Coursework creates a community	X			
Promotes independence	X			
Encourages collaboration	X			
Grabs disinterested student		X		
Acknowledged administrative support as important	X			
Disadvantages				
Student needs to be computer literate	X			
Lack of funding				X
Equipment/operating systems failure		X	X	
Personal relationships cannot develop			X	
Lack of student commitment				X



Table 8

*Impact on Student Achievement*

Implication	Respondent			
Advantages	1	2	3	4
Will have positive impact	X	X	X	
Creates an opportunity to take AP classes/thus more students taking the AP exam/more rigorous work	X	X		X
Smaller class size	X			X
Potential to earn college credits	X	X	X	
Flexibility allows younger student more access to electives	X			
More challenge for average student	X			
Student interest/more task committed	X	X	X	X
Greater participation for less verbal students		X		
May help the struggling learner		X		
Creates Individualized Education Plan			X	
Disadvantages				
Students may participate for the wrong reason; an easy grade)	X			

Table 9

*Student-teacher Relationships*

Implication	Respondent			
Implication	1	2	3	4
Student-teacher contact is essential	X			
Some personal contact is desired		X	X	X
Students are comfortable in the computer format/need less contact	X	X		
Advantages				
Encourages greater interaction with the coursework	X			
Potential for additional staff dialogue (perhaps college professor) as responses are recorded on screen	X			
Students have greater support than in the traditional class				X

Table 10

*Social Impact of Online Instruction*

Implication	Respondent			
Implication	1	2	3	4
The number of online courses taken by students should be limited	X	X	X	X
The format should include some face to face contact with teacher/facilitator	X	X	X	X
Advantages				
Online coursework encourages students to connect with other students (students' social interaction is on the Internet)	X	X		
Teaches social maturity and promotes social interaction	X	X	X	
Visual prejudices are absent				X

Table 11

*Teacher Preparation Issues*

Implication	Respondent			
	1	2	3	4
Important to have teacher buy-in	X			
Teacher motivation is needed	X	X	X	
Professional development is needed		X		X
Workload is comparable to traditional classes		X		
Our teachers are not the teachers online			X	X

Table 12

## Financial Implications

Implication	Respondent			
	1	2	3	4
Some educators do not support this use of funds				X
Advantages				
The "price is right"	X		X	
Fiscally sound educational opportunity	X	X	X	
Expand the use; summer school, home instruction, etc.		X	X	
Disadvantages				
Costly if the wrong student becomes involved	X			

### Summary of Tables 7 to 12

As a result of interviews with four district administrators, Tables 7 to 12 were created to record the responses in a table format. These tables represent a compilation of the perceptions, opinions, and experiences of the respondents regarding online coursework in their districts. The tables were created in alignment with the research questions and are intended as a representation of the responses given by the administrators interviewed.

Table 7 is a summation of the advantages and disadvantages of online programs as discussed by educational administrators in this research. All the respondents interviewed agreed that student motivation is an advantage experienced with the use of online programs. Three of four stated that the use of specific student criteria and the existence of a student's desire to participate are imperative to the success of e-learners accepted into online courses. The majority of administrators articulated the benefits of time management, college preparation and course offerings not available in district, as advantages of online coursework.

Interview respondents offered seven additional advantages, a total of 11 in all, although none was mentioned by more than one administrator. Five disadvantages were enumerated by participants. Only one issue, equipment and operating systems, was cited as a disadvantage by more than one respondent. In general, administrators strongly support the use of online programs with the advantages substantially outnumbering the disadvantages.

Table 8 summarizes the impact of e-learning on student achievement. All administrators agreed that a high level of interest among students participating online improves their task commitment and three out of four acknowledged a positive impact on student achievement. E-learning creates an opportunity to take AP classes, which provides a more rigorous level of work and affords the potential for students to earn college credits. Two administrators felt that smaller class size online has a positive impact on student achievement. There were a total of 11 advantages and only one disadvantage offered by at least one respondent during the interviews.

Table 9 indicates responses to research question 3 regarding student-teacher relationships. All four

administrators agreed on one point. Some personal contact is needed or even essential as a component of online coursework, although two respondents acknowledged that today's students are more comfortable in the computer format diminishing the need for direct teacher contact. There were three advantages offered by two of the respondents and no disadvantages given to describe student-teacher relationships online. One administrator suggested that greater interaction between the student and teacher could be achieved online than in the traditional classroom.

The social impact of online instruction was collated on Table 10. Administrators agreed that the number of online course taken at the high school level should be limited and that students should participate in a traditional program in combination with online offerings. Results again indicated that all administrators interviewed would advocate some face-to-face contact with teachers or facilitators and three of the four respondents believe that online instruction promotes social maturity and encourages social interaction. There were no disadvantages expressed regarding the social impact of taking courses online.

Teacher preparation issues on Table 11 indicate that three of the four administrators agreed on the need for



motivated teachers to participate as instructors and online facilitators. Two of the four suggested that some professional development is needed as traditional classroom experience does not automatically translate into an ability to work successfully online.

On Table 12 the financial implications as stated by administrators are summarized. Three of the four respondents indicate that e-learning is a fiscally sound educational opportunity and two of the four suggest the expanded use of e-learning for summer school and home instruction could have positive financial benefits. The one disadvantage given by one administrator referred to the costly impact of an unsuccessful student inappropriately placed in a course online. With this one exception, no administrators found financial issues would impede the use of e-learning.

The advantages appear to substantially outweigh the disadvantages of using online coursework at the high school level as expressed during interviews with these four district administrators. In addition, there is strong agreement among respondents regarding certain specific issues supporting the advantages of online coursework such as the benefits of time management, better preparation for

college and the availability of courses not already provided in district. Encouraging to the use of this alternative form of instruction is the high level of student motivation resulting in task commitment to coursework as noted by administrators during the interviews and the support to fund e-learning as a fiscally sound investment for district resources.

#### Analysis of the Focus Group Discussions

As part of the study, the researcher conducted two focus groups from different school districts that provide online courses for high school students. The following responses and comments pertaining to the research questions were obtained during the focus groups sessions.

#### *Research Question 1*

What are the advantages and disadvantages of online programs for high school students?

The responses from 1a, 1b, 1c, and 4a from the question route (see Appendix B) pertain to research question 1. Teachers easily recognized the drawbacks, and in both focus groups the negatives were mentioned first.

I think it's frightening, it's overwhelming.

How am I going to put all this information into a computer course, how am I going to figure out how to put this entire class into this little computer? How am I going to talk with these students ...how will I communicate and find out if they need help?

It's a very daunting task trying to take a class and put it on a computer without the day to day communication.

I'd add to that, most of our educators came to us through traditional classes. They can't conceptualize it.

Online classes are much different from the experience of a traditional class setting. I believe that obstacles to public school implementation include teacher resistance and of course, budget constraints. Not knowing in advance which courses or students will be successful is also a deterrent.

Districts may be leery about bringing courses into the school that they have no control over. They may not know how to go about getting them or are intimidated about the process. They may also feel it is better to be taught by a live teacher. However, the obvious benefit is that students are able to take courses that are not available in their schools.

Teachers commented on their familiarity with the traditional high school format, and several respondents

spoke about their personal experiences with online coursework at the graduate level. Once a participant referred to a positive feature, teachers contributed comments supportive of online coursework and focused on the advantages.

Possibly they are not familiar with the courses... or maybe they just don't realize the potential there is. If you experience these courses you have to admit that there is a lot of potential there. These courses open up a great window of opportunity for students and teachers. Students have the chance to take courses they would otherwise have to pass up.

Personally, I have experienced traditional and online college courses. By going to the university I spent more time parking the car and sitting through boring lectures that were inapplicable to teaching. They were just theory and they were...it wasn't useful. By doing the online courses it was much more effective and poignant.

The benefits include the opportunity to promote self-directed students... because they must communicate online with the teacher or professor. This is good for students who are preparing for college. They will be ready for Web-based or Web-enhanced courses in college. And students are taking course that are interest driven, but may not be

offered in their school district. This is particularly a factor in a smaller high school.

For me the issue is time. Mine is time, with family, having a job, I could do the work at midnight and I could listen to the lectures when I wanted. And I did.

I don't think the problem is that they're purposely not doing it more, it's just new.

Yes. Everything in education is difficult to change, but...

Perhaps not all schools are willing to do this. It should be looked into. Not all programs are worthwhile, but some are.

In an effort to expand on the issues of e-learning the researcher focused on the requirements of a successful program. During this portion of the discussion teacher comfort and administrative support were addressed. One teacher simply stated the words, "administrative support." Another teacher commented on her school leader.

Around here we jump into things and then we figure out the details later, sometimes. We're not afraid to make changes in this building. He's not here, so I'll speak freely. We have a young principal who is, has a good vision for learning and is not afraid to make change.

Many teachers supported the concept of online education in their comments. Participants spoke of the preparation for college work and participation in the global economy.

This is good preparation for the corporate world (alternate route concept). They want different personalities to generate ideas. The group will come up with an idea, one to organize, one to see how it will work, etc. That's what corporations do. They don't want one person to drive the project, they want collaboration. The more different people will make it work, diversity. This prepares students to deal with other people, to give and take, to sit back and listen and not just push their ideas forward. That's a life skill.

One participant spoke of the guidance counselor's perspective. The experience of online coursework offers students preparation to compete in college and in the global economy they will encounter after graduation.

Students are able to take courses not otherwise offered by the school district. College bound students may get a head start on college work. They may be able to try a course to see if they would pursue it as a major in college. This is a plus.

### *Research Question 2*

How does online coursework help students achieve greater academic success?

The responses from 2bi and 3b from the question route (see Appendix B) pertain to research question 2. Several teacher responses supported the existence of academic benefits with online coursework.

Online learning is an expansion of a student's learning opportunity. It's a chance to learn in a way that is different than the traditional classroom setting and so provides enhancement to their academic achievement.

There is the opportunity to speak with strangers and exchange ideas. The opportunity offers cultural diversity and that is fabulous. It brings the coursework to another level.

Academic achievement and student selection are interrelated according to many of the participants. No teachers commented on a negative academic impact from online courses, but several held strong opinions about the need to closely monitor student selection for participation in online coursework. One teacher explained, "Students should fit the profile of an online learner. They should be serious about what they are getting into and insincere

students need to be weeded out." Another teacher added, "Students must be mature enough to work on their own." Academic success was tied to the student's profile in several responses and one teacher explained their procedure for allowing students to participate online.

There should be a screening process in place before students can enroll. Administrators must have parent involvement so that students are aware of what is expected and parents understand the consequences if students do not follow through.

There was agreement among participants that expectations should be clearly defined and student selection should be closely monitored. Several participants commented on student motivation and task commitment.

Students cannot just want to take a course. They must be independent workers. Students with a poor academic record the previous year are not good candidates for online courses the next year.

The student has to be motivated, have to be motivated and organized. It can't be a kid where you have to say, "Come on we have a test tomorrow. You know that's due tomorrow." They have to have their own self-discipline.



Participants explained that successful online students are independent, self-disciplined, self motivated learners. One teacher commented that students are more likely to excel at the courses they can choose for themselves.

### *Research Question 3*

How do student-teacher relationships online compare to tradition classrooms?

The responses from 2ai, 2aii, and 2biii from the question route (see Appendix B) pertain to research question 3. There are several possible formats for online instruction, and teachers expressed a variety of opinions about what works best. Often, their comments were linked to student-teacher relationships. Participants were familiar with one or two specific formats and their responses reflected this knowledge.

The (our) format involves the facilitator who oversees the student during a structured period. He/she is responsible for assuring the student is on task, intervening with the online provider. A hybrid model works, but is not always necessary.

I think semester courses work best. Students should know what needs to be covered and the specific due dates

for coursework. I don't see the hybrid model happening in a wide range of course offerings.

One teacher felt that student-teacher relationships are less personal online in most, but not all cases. This component of teacher perception is in sharp contrast to the advantages afforded students reluctant to speak in class as mentioned in the next set of questions. Teachers mostly agreed that proper use of student selection would assure that students take more responsibility for their coursework.

It is the students' responsibility to be in contact with their online teachers. The onus is on the student and this aspect of online learning is more like a college setting. However, the teacher is very important in the classroom. Students often have questions that may not be answered for days as not all online providers are cooperative.

#### *Research Question 4*

How does online instruction impact the social component of a student's high school experience?

The responses from 2bii from the question route (see Appendix B) pertain to research question 4. Responding teachers appeared keenly aware of the importance of social

growth in students at the high school level. As one teacher stated, "Social interaction is not deterred by online learning. If facilitated properly, the online learners will learn from each other." Some teachers applauded removal of the social component from the course for online students reluctant to speak in class, creating as one teacher described, "...a comfort zone when kids respond."

Some kids do not feel confident. There are some kids that don't like to speak in public, that will not raise their hands and... That doesn't mean they don't have good ideas.

Respondents expressed similar ideas in explaining that a student's quiet demeanor does not equate to a lack of ideas, just less desire to speak in class. With online coursework students have the ability to think about their responses before sharing their ideas.

Teachers in previous years felt that students in that chat room forum, when they got into some very sensitive topics, felt better and more confident expressing themselves in that format and that they may not have raised their hands in the classroom setting because it was an embarrassing topic or they weren't confident enough to speak about that in great detail in front of everyone else.

But this chat room was a wonderful forum to get things out in the open. We have discussions where they have to come in and communicate with one another. The kids are putting in their posts and then other students are replying to them. So there is a social aspect because they do talk to one another through the discussion boards.

Although the experience of online coursework involves a very different social experience than a traditional classroom, teachers often saw a positive social component to the e-learning arena. If coursework is conducted properly, online learners will learn from each other.

#### *Research Question 5*

How does teacher preparation impact e-learning?

The responses from 3a and 1c from the question route (see Appendix B) pertain to research question 5. Teacher reaction to preparation issues and their impact on e-learning was for the most part, related to an individual's personal experience with online coursework. Respondents used hindsight to express their beliefs regarding teacher preparation and the groundwork needed for teachers to work successfully online. There was general agreement that traditional teaching does not automatically translate into an ability to teach online. When asked about the

preparation issues, teachers mentioned the need for training and in-service. No one disagreed.

You can't just take the stuff and teach an online course. I would be uncomfortable without training. I need hands on experiences in order to feel comfortable with the material.

My first thought is that you got to be able to be comfortable with Blackboard. Because there are so many things you can do with it to have a successful class you have to have the comfort level. After that, it's really just taking your class and putting it on Blackboard. It's not anything different than you would do in any normal class. You've got reading, you've got lesson plans, it's the same things you do in a normal class it's just putting them onto the computer. So once you're comfortable with Blackboard, the rest is just like any other class.

Teachers need an in-service. They need to know how the grading system operates, who to contact when problems arise and this information is needed before the start of the first class.

It is important to train your facilitators and evaluate your courses...Staff development is necessary for the role of facilitator. Course monitoring should be understood well in advance of the first session.

*Research Question 6*

How cost effective is online coursework?

The responses from 4b and 1c from the question route (see Appendix B) pertain to research question 6. Several focus group participants mentioned the cost of online learning as an issue in the implementation of high school coursework. Most respondents viewed online course as cost effective and even "cheap."

Online courses can sometimes save money. It should be cheaper for, say three students to take an online Latin class, than to hire an actual teacher to teach a class of three.

I think initially it should be offered to students...say you don't have a Latin teacher because there're only 5 students that want to take Latin. Therefore you can offer an online Latin course so these students have the opportunity for an online education in Latin...so financially it would save the district a lot of money because they wouldn't have to hire a teacher.

One group of teachers considers their use of the Blackboard as an inexpensive way to offer online coursework. This price was the tipping factor in the district when the first course was offered online.

#### Summary of Chapter IV

In this chapter, a presentation of the data and a summary of the findings were presented. The total responses of each group have been combined or clustered in order to produce evidence of common perceptions, strands and themes that assist in a better understanding of the research questions.

The advantages outweigh the disadvantages for using online coursework at the high school level and there is strong agreement about the benefits of time management, better preparation for college and the availability of courses not already provided in district among administrators. A high level of student motivation and support for e-learning as a fiscally sound investment was also gleaned from the administrators interviewed.

Teachers perceive more advantages than disadvantages but expressed concern about the transition from traditional teaching to e-learning and the need for administrative support. Student preparation for college and the real world as well as additional course offerings were considered advantages of online coursework. Teachers applaud the opportunity for students to learn outside the traditional classroom but cautioned that students must fit

a specific profile for success online. They agreed that students should limit the number of online courses taken and that teacher in-service is needed for success online. Teachers see e-learning as cost effective instruction.



## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate educators' perceptions toward the use of online coursework as an alternative method for the delivery of instruction in urban/suburban New Jersey public high schools. This is a qualitative assessment of the perceptions of school administrators and teachers toward the use of virtual coursework at the high school level in order to examine the issues surrounding the incorporation of e-learning as a component of students' public high school experience.

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the information gathered during research and to make recommendations for future research. Data were collected from administrator interviews and teacher focus group discussions. The results provide an opportunity to discover, review and consider common themes and patterns that emerge in the information shared by the participants.

In chapter 1 of this study the researcher presents background information, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research/guiding questions, the

significance, limitations and delimitations of the study, and the definitions. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature and issues surrounding the advantages and disadvantages of online coursework at the high school level. The methodology is explained in chapter 3, which includes the research design, an introduction, participants, instrumentation and procedures. In Chapter IV the research is presented as an analysis of the participants' comments and responses, and in the form of a matrix intended to identify common ideas and themes among the educators. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the findings, conclusions and the recommendations for further study.

#### Summary of the Findings

"E-learning is a powerful idea. It allows learning to be asynchronous, provides access to courses that might be otherwise unavailable, and promotes collaboration and interaction among participants- all while it supports the United States government's vision of improving the quality of education through the use of technology-based delivery systems. Educational leaders must understand the promise of e-learning and virtual schools so that sound decision making and effective implementation is possible" (Sack, 2003, p. 96).

Yet Sack (2003) maintains that the latest technologies through the years have yet to significantly improve the quality of education for our students. McCombs & Vakili (2005) state that virtual high schools, in an attempt to gain favor with traditional educators, have minimized the innovations of their programs by emulating the current systems such as credit hours, schedules, and assignments instead of taking advantage of the medium for change and learner-centered practices. Of course, student access to online programs depends on the local school district, and the promise of this potential is still in the delivery stages.

Successful e-learning is contingent on various factors. In order to realize the potential of this resource as an effective method of learning, teachers and administrators must identify and ameliorate the issues impeding the growth of e-learning at the high school level. Issues include administrator and teacher perceptions regarding the level of students' academic success, opinions about student-teacher relationships, the impact of social experiences online, the need for teacher preparation and the costs related to e-learning.

Research question 1 addresses the advantages and disadvantages of online programs at the high school level.

All administrators agreed that student motivation is a benefit of online coursework. This concept is confirmed by Linda Pittenger, director of the Division of Virtual Learning at Kentucky Virtual High School who explains, "Many students respond to this learning environment in a way they don't in a classroom" (as cited in Wood, 2005, p.36). Three administrators indicated that courses are most successful when students meet the specific criteria of being independent learners and self-starters. One participant explained that motivation is more important than academic standing. This is consistent with Blaylock and Newman (2005) who describe the successful online learner as independent, self motivated and self monitoring. Additionally, the Florida Virtual School has had to replace its self-paced model with one that is much more structured in order to address timely course completion issues (Blaylock & Newman).

Three administrators mentioned that college preparation and college course offerings are advantages of online courses. State institutions of higher education in collaboration with school districts now allow students to earn college credits while working toward their high school diplomas. Indiana House Bill 1347, along with other issues, addresses students on a high school fast-track-to-

college program (Christie, 2006). This concept supports the responses obtained from the research questions.

In addition, administrators generally agreed that online courses offer students an important opportunity to take courses not otherwise available to them due to limited budgets or small school size. In the literature, review it is stated that factors such as geographical location, small school size, large school size, socioeconomics, budget restraints, and substandard teachers can prevent students from the same preparation for college or career demands as those in well-funded districts. Computer-based instruction may allow equality where educational inequities presently exist. Administrators also listed time management as a student advantage. Time issues occur for a variety of reasons. Each concept discussed offers a valid premise for potential student benefit.

Focus group responses to research question 1 confirmed that e-learning is a new territory. Participants described "traditional" teacher resistance and possible budget constraints as limiting features of this concept. The advantages included the availability of courses not otherwise offered in district, time management, and good college preparation.

Research question 2 asks about student academic achievement. The responses to this question produced a consensus among administrators that benefits exist. Student success is impacted in a positive way through e-learning. Respondents noted the availability of AP courses and the more rigorous level of academics they require of students. The potential to earn college credit was mentioned by three participants, which relates to the concept of college preparation that emerged in the first research question. This parallels the ideas promoted by the Indiana Double Up for College Program, which allows districts and state education institutions to collaborate on offering early college, dual credit or dual enrollment programs. High school juniors and seniors may enroll in the courses (Christie, 2006).

All administrators recognized a high level of interest and improved task commitment that appears when student choose their courses online. The assumption is that academic achievement improves as well, but no administrators were able to offer concrete evidence of improved test scores or grades. Each participant felt certain that there existed a positive impact on student achievement, although without tangible proof.

Teachers commented on the expanded learning opportunities in research question 2, but cautioned that students selected to participate should be closely monitored. Participants must pass through a screening process that identifies them as independent and self-motivated learners and therefore fitting the profile of a successful online learner.

Student-teacher relationships were explored in research question 3. Administrators conveyed that some personal contact as a component of online coursework is either desired or essential. The format should most likely be a hybrid model that allows for teacher or facilitator input on a regular, even if infrequent basis. One participant suggested that greater interaction between student and teacher could be achieved online than in the traditional classroom.

Teacher responses to research question 3 did not express much concern regarding student-teacher relationships or the lack of teacher contact time. Respondents agreed that proper student selection would alleviate issues created by less contact time and allow for more independent students to work in this format.

In research question 4, all administrators were in agreement that the number of online courses students take

should be limited but also strongly agreed that online courses promote social interaction and social maturity. Since students are prone to the Internet and more likely to use their computers to connect with friends, this means of interaction is comfortable to most students. The social component of online coursework is seen as having a positive impact on a student's social development as long as the number of online courses per student is limited.

Some focus group respondents stated that social interaction is not deterred by online learning and viewed the social component of e-learning as a benefit for students reluctant to speak in the traditional classroom. Students post their ideas online and relate to other students in the class. When coursework is conducted properly, online learners will learn from each other.

In research question 5 administrators considered the issue of teacher preparation and its impact on e-learning. Since not all districts use their own teachers for online courses, professional development was not necessarily an issue. Most administrators agreed that teacher motivation is needed when teachers function as facilitators as well as instructors online. In order for the concept of e-learning to expand, faculty and guidance counselors need to



understand and support the value of having an online experience available to students.

Teacher participants generally agreed that traditional teaching does not automatically translate into an ability to teach online. When asked about the preparation issues, teachers mentioned the need for training. No one disagreed. Teachers need to be in-serviced. They need to know how the grading system operates, who to contact when problems arise, and this information is needed in advance of the experience.

School budgets tend to be jam packed with important items that leave little or no room for innovations or initiatives. Districts often struggle to ensure adequate funding for ongoing programs, recurring expenses and the money needed to cover fixed costs. When asked about the cost effects of online coursework in research question 6, administrators found e-learning to be fiscally sound and affordable. Although they had not yet explored many of the potential cost saving aspects of online courses, the opinion that small school size and the demands of global economy will render e-learning an affordable necessity was apparent.

Focus group teachers spoke of the cost effective possibility of offering classes not otherwise feasible due

to low enrollment. Districts could open the door to a handful of students interested in a course not otherwise available in their schools. Schools could say yes to student interests creating more individualized programs. The opportunity is there.

### Conclusions

The use of e-learning is well established at the college and graduate level. Educators are updating the model for learning in order to prepare students for an ever-changing world. The purpose of education is that of helping learners communicate with others, find relevant and accurate information for the task at hand, and be colearners and partners with teachers and peers in diverse settings and learning communities that go beyond school walls (McCombs & Vakili 2005).

New Jersey high schools are beginning the task of taking this concept to heart, but the change is much slower than experienced at the college level. This research was intended to address the issues surrounding the use of e-learning in high school. In order for the concept to expand, administrators and teachers need to provide the opportunity for students to take courses online and to assure that online courses are available. The many

positive responses to online learning elicited during the research leaves even the most enthusiastic educators wondering about the slow growth of this venue.

Participants in this study did articulate the need for administrative support and leadership at the school level as a necessary component for growth in this arena. As well, there was a recurrent theme suggesting that e-learning at the high school level should be adapted to the needs of the high school environment. Undergraduate and graduate consumption of online learning occurs in an environment and developmental stage that is different than high school. Educators in this research have cautioned against a strict diet of online coursework for high school students, but they anticipate many benefits will accompany the use of e-learning at this level, if adapted properly.

It appears that most educators in this research envision e-learning as a concept geared toward the independent and motivated learner. In our test-driven NCLB world, the at-risk student often steals the lion's share of attention, leaving educators to rely on successful students to fend for themselves. E-learning as indicated by the participants in this study, should take its place on the menu of high school experiences as one component of

student-centered curriculum available to motivated students interested in the opportunity.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following additional areas are recommended for consideration:

#### *Recommendations for Practice*

1. School districts should offer students the opportunity to choose online coursework as part of their high school experience.

2. School districts should offer faculty the opportunity to teach online as a component of their regular teaching assignment.

3. Guidance counselors should be aware of e-learning opportunities and the criteria for student success online.

4. All college bound students be required to take a course online.

#### *Recommendations for Policy*

1. School districts provide online coursework as a component of the high school experience.

2. The district makes e-learning available to students as an alternative component of their education in order to address special needs.

3. Colleges responsible for teacher education programs are required to provide coursework to instruct and prepare future teachers to become online instructors and provide a practicum experience in this venue.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

1. A research study of the academic component of students working in virtual courses to elicit specific evidence of academic achievement.

2. A research study to examine the experience of online students considered independent, self-starters versus the less motivated e-learner.

3. Parents of high school students participate in focus group discussions to give their perceptions of the use of online coursework at the high school level.

4. This study to be replicated to gather data from a student perspective.

5. A study of the use of online course in public versus private high schools.

6. A study of the experiences and academic performance of students in a traditional AP course with students in an online AP class.

7. A study that follows the college path of high school online students as compared to similar students without an online experience.

8. A comparison of the perceptions and experiences of teachers using Blackboard with those who participate in other virtual high school courses.

9. Replicate and expand this same study in 5 years.

#### Concluding Remarks

Our society hopes to enjoy an educated citizenry, and our schools work hard to create an academic environment that maximizes student achievement. There is no lack of issues confronting education, and we need to capitalize on every potential for success. Can online coursework provide quality education? Will it be cost effective? Will students, teachers and districts benefit from e-learning?

Using all the tools at our disposal and recognizing the demands of a new century and a global society it seems evident that e-learning holds tremendous potential. We need to encourage its growth to match the needs of its beneficiaries.

E-learning is still in the newborn stage. While we anticipate its potential to make global contributions, without direction and guidance its youthful exuberance could render it ineffective or at least diminish its promise.

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Appendix A

## Interview Questions

1. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of online programs for your high school students?
  - a. What are the reasons school districts should offer online courses at the high school level and is there a priority ranking among the reasons your district chose to initiate online courses?
  - b. Why would a district choose not to offer courses online? What issues cause resistance to online coursework in your district?
2. How does online coursework impact student achievement?
  - a. What are the academic expectations for e-learning in your district?
  - b. Are courses directed at the struggling or successful learners?
  - c. What is the evidence that online students are achieving better?
3. How do student-teacher relationships online compare to traditional classrooms?
  - a. How do teaching strategies used for online courses meet student needs?
  - b. What is gleaned from student feedback?
4. How does online instruction impact the social

component of a student's high school experience?

- a. What e-learning format is used? Why?
- b. What are the social implications for students in an e-learning environment?
- c. How does student selection impact a successful online experience?

5. How does teacher preparation impact e-learning?

- a. What do you consider necessary teacher preparation?
- b. What are some teacher selection issues? Who should be assigned to teach online and why?
- c. What is the impact of scheduling?

6. How cost effective is online coursework?

- a. What is the impact of e-learning on the district's budget?
- b. What should districts expect to budget?



Appendix B  
Focus Group Questions

### Focus Group Questions

1. Online courses are prevalent at the college level. Online courses are less frequently incorporated into the high school experience in New Jersey public school districts.

- a. Why aren't more public high schools offering courses online?
- b. What benefits exist? What are the drawbacks?
- c. What issues should be addressed to assure the success of online instruction?

2. When providing online coursework for high school students...

- a. How do you see online coursework as best being incorporated into the fabric of a student's high school experience?
  - i. What format should be offered to students?
  - ii. Is a hybrid model viable? Why or why not?
- b. How does virtual coursework impact students?
  - i. Academic achievement
  - ii. Social development
  - iii. Student-teacher relationships

3. What would you consider necessary preparation to ensure success before implementing an online education program?

- a. What teacher preparation issues should be addressed?
- b. What student selection issues should be considered?

4. What can be done to stimulate dialogue with district leaders to promote the use of online coursework for high school students?

- a. What issues promote/impede the incorporation of online coursework into high school programs?
- b. What are the financial implications for e-learning?

Appendix C

Institutional Review Board Approval



January 3, 2007

Heather Carr  
350 Passaic Ave  
Nutley, NJ 07110

Dear Ms Carr,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed the information you have submitted addressing the concerns for your proposal entitled "Administrator and Teacher Perceptions of the Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Coursework in urban/Suburban New Jersey Public High Schools". Your research protocol is hereby approved as revised through expedited review. The IRB reserves the right to recall the proposal at any time for full review.

Enclosed for your records are the signed Request for Approval form and the stamped original Informed Consent Forms. Make copies only of these stamped forms.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

According to federal regulations, continuing review of already approved research is mandated to take place at least 12 months after this initial approval. You will receive communication from the IRB Office for this several months before the anniversary date of your initial approval.

Office of Institutional Review Board  
Presidents Hall  
Tel: 973.313.6314 • Fax: 973.275.2361  
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2641

Thank you for your cooperation.

*In harmony with federal regulations, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final discussion and the vote.*

Sincerely,

*Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.*

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.

Professor

Director, Institutional Review Board

cc Dr Anthony Colella

Please review Seton Hall University IRB's Policies and Procedures on website (<http://www.provost.shu.edu/IRB>) for more information.  
Please note the following requirements:

**Adverse Reactions:** If any untoward incidents or adverse reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to immediately notify in writing the Seton Hall University IRB Director, your sponsor and any federal regulatory institutions which may oversee this research, such as the OHRP or the FDA. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending further review by the IRB.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change **any** aspect of this study, please communicate your request in writing (with revised copies of the protocol and/or informed consent where applicable and the Amendment Form) to the IRB Director. The new procedures cannot be initiated until you receive IRB approval.

**Completion of Study:** Please notify Seton Hall University's IRB Director in writing as soon as the research has been completed, along with any results obtained.

**Non-Compliance:** Any issue of non-compliance to regulations will be reported to Seton Hall University's IRB Director, your sponsor and any federal regulatory institutions which may oversee this research, such as the OHRP or the FDA. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending further review by the IRB.

**Renewal:** It is the principal investigator's responsibility to maintain IRB approval. A Continuing Review Form will be mailed to you prior to your initial approval anniversary date. **Note:** No research may be conducted (except to prevent immediate hazards to subjects), no data collected, nor any subjects enrolled after the expiration date.

Appendix D  
Informed Consent Forms



## Informed Consent Form

### ***Researcher's Affiliation***

1. The researcher is a doctoral student in the College of Education and Human Services, Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University.

### ***Purpose of the Research/Duration of Participation***

2. The purpose of this study is to investigate educators' perceptions toward the use of online coursework as an alternative method for the delivery of instruction in urban/suburban New Jersey public high schools. A focus group will be conducted and will last for about one hour.

### ***Description of Procedures***

3. At a set time and place, six to eight teachers will participate in a discussion group that will include the use of a predetermined set of questions. The discussions will be recorded with a Sony tape recorder and will be transcribed so the data can be analyzed. The data obtained will be stored on audio tape and written transcripts will be created and transposed onto a CD to be kept by the researcher who will maintain permanent possession of the information in a secured location (locked file drawer). Audio taping will ensure that no vital statements or ideas from participants are lost in transcription. During the focus group sessions, teachers will be given numbered cards folded tent style, with their names hidden from the moderator. Information will be recorded according to the participant's number.

### ***Instruments***

4. No questionnaires or surveys will be used.

### ***Voluntary Nature***

5. By signing the Informed Consent Form and attending the focus group session, the subject is consenting to participate in the study. Participation is completely voluntary. Should participants choose to leave before the end of the focus group discussion, he/she will do so without any penalty or loss of any kind.

### ***Anonymity***

6. The responses of all focus group members will be combined in the analysis and presentation of the data. No individual or school district will be identified in the study, but the very nature of a focus group does not allow respondents to be anonymous.

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

JAN 03 2007

Approval Date

College of Education and Human Services  
Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy  
Tel. 973.761.9397

400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685

Expiration Date

JAN 03 2008



***Confidentially***

7. The taped recordings will remain in the possession of the researcher after they have been transcribed. The data on the taped recordings and the data in written format will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's private office and will be destroyed after three years. No mention of the subject's name, name of school, administrators or school district will be included in the dissertation.

***Access to Records***

8. The data from the focus groups will be handled in strict confidence. The research records will not be available to anyone but the researcher and the members of the research committee. No one else will have access to the data.

***Foreseeable Risks***

9. There are no anticipated risks for participation in this study.

***Expected Benefits***

10. There are no direct benefits that subjects may reasonably be expected to receive as a result of participation in this study. The results of this research may provide valuable data and feedback to help guide the efforts of educators to provide or enhance e-learning opportunities for students.

***Remuneration***

11. Subjects will not be paid or given any type of remuneration.

***Compensation***

12. This research does not involve risk and no compensation will be offered.

***Alternatives to Research Study***

13. If any participants are unable to attend the focus group session, they will have the opportunity to respond in written format to the research questions and return them to the researcher in a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

***Contact Information***

14. The researcher is available to answer any questions about the research study or the research subject's rights. You may contact the researcher, Heather Carr, in writing at 155 Broad Street, Bloomfield, NJ 07003, by telephone at 973-680-8501x2016 or by e-mail at [hcarr@bloomfield.k12.nj.us](mailto:hcarr@bloomfield.k12.nj.us). If you prefer, you may contact the researcher's mentor, Dr. Anthony Colella at 973-761-9397. You may also contact the Office of the IRB, President's Hall, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079 or call 973-313-6314.

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Institutional Review Board

JAN 03 2007

Approval Date

Expiration Date

JAN 03 2008

***Permission to Use Audio Tape Recorders:***

15. Please be advised that tape recording equipment will be used in order to assure that no important comments or ideas are missed that may add to the depth and substance of the data. Subjects will be identified by code number on the tape. Subjects have the right to review all or any portion of the taped recordings and request that it be destroyed. Once the session has ended the researcher will have the tape recordings transcribed into written format so the researcher can analyze the data. The data will be locked in a secure cabinet that will not be accessible to anyone else. The data will be included in the dissertation and will be destroyed three years after completion of the dissertation.

***Informed Consent Form***

16. As a participant in the study, you will be given a signed and dated a copy of this Informed Consent Form, as required by the IRB at Seton Hall University.

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Subject's signature

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Date

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

JAN 03 2007

Approval Date

Expiration Date

JAN 03 2008



## Informed Consent Form

### *Researcher's Affiliation*

1. The researcher is a doctoral student in the College of Education and Human Services, Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University.

### *Purpose of the Research/Duration of Participation*

2. The purpose of this study is to investigate educators' perceptions toward the use of online coursework as an alternative method for the delivery of instruction in urban/suburban New Jersey public high schools. A individual interview will be conducted and will last for about one hour.

### *Description of Procedures*

3. At a set time and place the researcher will conduct a one-on-one interview using a predetermined set of questions. The responses will be recorded with a Sony tape recorder and will be transcribed so the data can be analyzed. The data obtained will be stored on audio tape and written transcripts will be created and transposed onto a CD to be kept by the researcher who will maintain permanent possession of the information in a secured location (locked file drawer). Audio taping will ensure that no vital statements or ideas from participants are lost in transcription.

### *Instruments*

4. No questionnaires or surveys will be used.

### *Voluntary Nature*

5. By signing the Informed Consent Form and attending the interview session, the subject is consenting to participate in the study. Participation is completely voluntary. Should participants choose to leave before the end of the focus group discussion, he/she will do so without any penalty or loss of any kind.

### *Anonymity*

6. Be assured that the participant's anonymity will be protected. The responses of all interviewees will be used in the analysis and presentation of the data. No individual or school district will be identified in the study.

Seton Hall University  
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Subject's signature

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Date

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