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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses what makes a high-quality online teacher, examining: what it takes to be a high-quality teacher (knowing one's subject and how to teach it); what is unique about online teaching (online teachers rarely see their students, need strategies to ensure that each online student participates actively, and provide courses online so are able to work any time and any place); and how the quality of online teaching is assessed. A checklist identifies essential qualities of online teaching to help states and schools select, train, and evaluate online teachers. It discusses: state qualifications (the extent to which the teacher meets the state standards for professional teaching); curriculum, instruction, and student assessment (the extent to which the teacher meets the criteria in such areas as promoting student participation and interaction and using online resources effectively to deliver instruction); management (the extent to which the teacher meets the criteria in such areas as providing students with timely feedback and ensuring that students' work and data are secure); and evaluation (the extent to which the teacher meets the criteria in such areas as understanding that student success is an important measure of course success and ensuring that students participate actively in the course). (SM)

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ED 477 169

# *Essential Principles of High-Quality Online Teaching:*

## Guidelines for Evaluating K-12 Online Teachers

SREB

*Each student needs a quality teacher. That means someone who knows how to teach — and can show it. It also means someone who knows the subject matter well — and can prove it. Most of all, it means someone who is successful in raising student achievement.*

**SREB Goals for Education, 2002**

What are the essential qualities of an online teacher? As more K-12 students use Web-based courses, schools and states need to make careful efforts to select, train and evaluate teachers in order to ensure that every Web-based course is taught by a high-quality teacher.

### *What does it take to be a high-quality teacher?*

Classroom teachers and online teachers alike need to know their subjects and how to teach them. They also must know their students, stay up-to-date in the subject areas, and manage and monitor students' academic progress to ensure success.

### *What is unique about online teaching?*

High-quality online teaching should be measured based on the criteria in this document and on the achievement of students who take the courses. There are several differences between online teaching and traditional teaching in classrooms:

- Online teachers rarely, if ever, see their students; they communicate primarily through writing.
- Online teachers provide courses through computers and the Internet. As a result, teachers and students can work at any time and in any place.
- Online teachers need strategies to ensure that each online student participates actively.

*Essential Principles of High-Quality Online Teaching* was based on the SREB *Essential Principles of Quality* and on the work of SREB Educational Technology Cooperative representatives who have hired, trained and evaluated teachers of Web-based courses.

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Perhaps the most unique aspect of online instruction is that teachers and students rarely, if ever, see one another. As a result, online teachers need to use various technologies and approaches to know each student, lead and direct student discussions, evaluate students' academic progress, and respond effectively to students' needs. Because students and teachers communicate primarily through e-mail and online discussions, online teachers must be able to write and communicate well. They must be able to recognize the tone of their writing and must pay attention to the nuances of words.

SREB states that have used Web-based courses for K-12 students have found that students are more likely to succeed if the courses are highly interactive. Students in these courses must communicate with one another and with teachers to improve their understanding of concepts and to assimilate information gained in the exchange of perspectives and insights. As one Georgia educator observed, "the online students who are doing well in my school are the ones who have teachers who have mastered the art of online communications." This interaction must focus on students: what they know, what they need to know, and how they are engaged in learning. High-quality online teachers can use available technology to communicate effectively and efficiently with students.

Online instruction often is called "anytime, anyplace" instruction. Students have access to Web-based courses every day of the week and every hour of the day. This flexibility requires teachers as well as students to have excellent time-management skills. Online teachers need to respond to students' questions and provide them with feedback on their work in a timely manner.

Online teachers in SREB states report that they know their online students better than they knew their students in traditional classrooms. High-quality online teachers know that they constantly must be in touch with their students to ensure the students' success. While many traditional classrooms emphasize teachers' and students' physical presence, online instruction emphasizes active participation by and frequent interaction among teachers and students.

High-quality online teachers know how to get students involved actively in their own learning. High-quality online courses require students to assume much more responsibility for their own learning than they would in traditional classrooms. These courses also require students to communicate more frequently with one another and with teachers than they would in traditional classrooms.

## *How is the quality of online teaching assessed?*

As with any teacher, the online teacher is central to student academic achievement. SREB states are learning this lesson as they provide more and more online courses for K-12 students. Student success depends on the quality of the instructor and the teaching methods used. It is essential that states and schools select, hire, train and evaluate teachers to ensure that they can teach effectively online. The checklist that begins on the next page identifies essential qualities of online teaching and can help states and schools select, train and evaluate online teachers.

# *Essential Principles of High-Quality Online Teaching*

*Checklist for Selecting, Preparing and Evaluating Online Teachers for K-12 Students*

## Checklist

## State Qualifications

| To what extent does the teacher meet the state standards for professional teaching? | Indications | Meets criteria | Somewhat meets criteria | Does not meet criteria |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The teacher meets the core professional-teaching standards established by state licensing agency. | Recent evaluations report that the teacher is utilizing the core professional-teaching standards. | | | |
| 2. The teacher has the necessary academic credentials in the field in which he or she is teaching. | The teacher has provided evidence that he or she has credentials in the field of study to be taught. | | | |
| 3. The teacher has the prerequisite technology skills to teach online. | The teacher can provide evidence that he or she can use Internet browsers, e-mail applications (including attaching and downloading files) and word processing applications. | | | |

***Comments: State Qualifications —***

## Curriculum, Instruction and Student Assessment

| To what extent does the teacher meet the criteria in this area? | Indications | Meets criteria | Somewhat meets criteria | Does not meet criteria |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The teacher assesses each student's background and content knowledge before beginning instruction. | The teacher demonstrates knowledge of each student and bases instruction on the student's academic needs. | | | |
| 2. The teacher uses appropriate technology to teach the online course successfully. | The teacher demonstrates effective use of e-mail applications and course-management software to teach the online course. | | | |
| 3. The teacher uses fair, adequate and appropriate methods to assess students' mastery of content. | The teacher uses valid, reliable assessments. These assessments may include online or proctored testing, performance assessments, standardized tests, projects, demonstrations, multimedia presentations, case studies, simulations or electronic portfolios. | | | |
| 4. The teacher demonstrates high-quality written-communications skills. | The teacher's ability to communicate effectively in writing is evident in the course syllabus, learning activities, instructions, threaded discussions and e-mail. | | | |
| 5. The teacher makes clear to students his or her availability and willingness to support them. | The teacher actively responds to students and anticipates their needs. | | | |
| 6. The teacher facilitates and monitors appropriate interaction among students. | Collaborative learning opportunities — through e-mails, discussion strands, simulations, lab activities and other group projects — are embedded in the course and are monitored by the teacher. | | | |
| 7. The teacher provides and enforces appropriate standards for student behavior. | The teacher establishes standards for student behavior that are designed to ensure academic integrity and appropriate uses of the Internet and written communication. | | | |

## Curriculum, Instruction and Student Assessment (continued)

| To what extent does the teacher meet the criteria in this area? | Indications | Meets criteria | Somewhat meets criteria | Does not meet criteria |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8. The teacher's instruction complies with the Americans With Disabilities Act. | All course materials are provided in a format that can be used by students with a range of abilities and disabilities. If the materials are not compatible with assistive technology, students with disabilities still must be able to use them. | | | |
| 9. The teacher uses online resources effectively to deliver instruction. | All materials and/or Web resources have been reviewed for appropriateness and are aligned with course objectives and standards. | | | |
| 10. When appropriate, the teacher gets others to assist him or her in supporting students' learning. | The teacher provides access to technical and academic support personnel to meet students' needs. | | | |
| 11. The teacher adapts the Web-based course to meet students' needs. | Learning activities for the course have been adapted to meet the needs of the current group of students. | | | |
| 12. The teacher promotes student participation and interaction. | Collaborative learning opportunities — through e-mails, discussion strands, simulations, lab activities and other group projects — encourage student participation and interaction. | | | |

***Comments: Curriculum, Instruction and Student Assessment —***

## Management

| To what extent does the teacher meet the criteria in this area? | Indications | Meets criteria | Somewhat meets criteria | Does not meet criteria |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The teacher ensures that students know one another and feel comfortable interacting with one another online. | The teacher includes icebreakers and other activities to build relationships among students and to create a learning community. | | | |
| 2. The teacher provides students with timely feedback. | The teacher responds to students' questions within 24 hours. Feedback may include e-mails, discussions, telephone calls, regular progress reports and term/semester grades. | | | |
| 3. The teacher ensures that students' work and data are secure. | Student information remains confidential, as required by the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act. | | | |
| 4. The teacher monitors students to ensure academic honesty. | Learning activities and assessments are designed to promote academic honesty. | | | |
| 5. The teacher helps students with technical issues. | The teacher tells students what materials and technological resources they will need and how they may be obtained. | | | |
| 6. The teacher coordinates and assists students in understanding course requirements and procedures for working online. | Students are given clear timelines for learning activities and assessments. Students receive a list of rules for participation in the online environment and a list of issues associated with the use of copyrighted materials. | | | |
| 7. The teacher guides and monitors students' management of their time. | The teacher monitors student progress by using management tools provided in the course. The teacher has intervention plans for students who are failing. | | | |
| 8. The teacher shares information about student progress with mentors, principals and parents. | The teacher maintains regular contact with key people at students' school(s) and with their parents. | | | |

*Comments: Management —*

## Evaluation

| To what extent does the teacher meet the criteria in this area? | Indications | Meets criteria | Somewhat meets criteria | Does not meet criteria |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The teacher understands that student success is an important measure of course success. | Evaluation of the course includes students' grades, level of participation and final exam scores, as well as the percentage of students who enrolled in the course and completed it successfully. | | | |
| 2. The teacher accepts and follows policies and procedures to monitor courses. | The teacher provides school and state agencies with the necessary data to show that the course is meeting standards and state requirements. | | | |
| 3. The teacher ensures that students participate actively in the course. | The teacher provides clear rules for participation and monitors student participation. | | | |

*Comments: Evaluation —*

*Checklist for Selecting, Preparing and Evaluating Online Teachers for K-12 Students*

## Checklist Summary

Teacher is: ❑ Recommended ❑ Not recommended

Teacher name: _____

Evaluator: _____

Date: _____

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