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**Online Learning, Efficacy, Accountability and Responsibility**

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The increase in demand for online learning opportunities in schools is raising questions about the efficacy of this mode of learning. There is evidence across the country of increased online course offerings and corresponding enrollments by the thousands, but how do we know that it works? Whether an educational program is delivered online or face-to-face, there is a tendency to evaluate efficacy based on such things as NCLB requirements, standardized test scores, graduation rates, and course completion rates. Students with individualized education plans have additional assessments based on meeting specific and unique goals. Individualized learning goals, while not part of most state frameworks for quality, are important considerations. In an online environment, communication and information literacy are very important measures for assessment along with the traditional academic requirements of face-to face-courses.

Unfortunately, because data collection is immature in most online learning programs, accountability has been based primarily on quality and standards. In programs that offer online learning as a supplement, student information systems are often not integrated with learning management systems or virtual school management systems so valuable data may not be collected in a way that differentiates the online student from the face-to-face student, or the online delivery measures. The foundation of measurement therefore, is rooted in the state requirements for certification, accreditation, curriculum acceptance and professional development. For the most part, this is enforced and monitored at the district level.

The Southern Regional Education Board is very informative as a K-12 online learning resource. Most of the states in this region have successfully established statewide virtual schools. Here is an excerpt from a recent SREB article *Telling the Online Learning Story, What People Don't Understand, They Don't Support*.

**Have online courses proven to be successful?**

Yes! More and more middle grades and high school students across the country are enrolled in online courses. This increase illustrates the success that many students are experiencing. In Florida, for instance, student completion rate is now over 90 percent. In some states students' success levels are as high as, or higher, than their classroom counterparts. Other providers of online courses, including the Virtual High School (VHS) organization, also report student completion rates above 90 percent. How many face-to-face classes are this successful?

Florida Virtual School's survey of students and their parents concerning the rigor of online courses indicates that the courses are as difficult as or more difficult than comparable face-to-face courses. "This class, while challenging, allowed me to gain