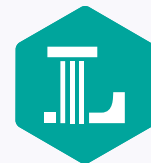# ESTABLISHING A SUCCESSFUL K-12 PROGRAM

LINCOLN
LEARNING
SOLUTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, there has been a significant surge in the popularity of online K-12 education programs. This trend was particularly pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools across the globe have embraced diverse learning modalities to ensure the delivery of effective education and support to their students. These modalities encompass in-person instruction, hybrid learning models, and fully online environments. The prevalence of digital learning environments has emerged as a practical and effective response to address critical challenges within the education landscape.

According to Gemin, Pape, Vashaw, and Watson (2013), all 50 states provide online options to students. Now, more than ever, schools are in need of flexible and efficient learning options.

Leading K-12 curriculum organizations offer highly adaptable options for online learning through customizable courses accessed through learning management systems that enable teachers to personalize teaching and learning. According to Powell et al. (2015), "Online teaching and learning is evolving as fast as the emerging technology that provides an engine for personalization."

Common online learning formats include live streaming for virtual learning, a hybrid or blended model where students combine in-person and online activities, and asynchronous learning, allowing students to progress at their own pace without live instruction.

One alternative is not necessarily better than another, and each learning mode provides benefits that can be helpful for a large number of students. Typically, schools will adopt one online learning method for their entire student population. However, it is not entirely uncommon for schools to offer several online learning options.

DEFINITIONS CHART

The following definitions provide insight and clarification to digital teaching and learning.

TERM	DEFINITION
Virtual Learning	• Often consists of a teacher presenting face-to-face through streaming video in an online classroom environment • Typically, it takes place on a web-based platform through the Internet • Can be completed independently or in real time
Online Learning	• Refers to any form of education a student receives via the Internet
Remote Learning or Distance Learning	• A type of learning wherein students and teachers are not present in the same physical location, such as a classroom • Can be implemented via synchronous, blended, or asynchronous environments
Asynchronous Environment	• Students learn independently • Curriculum and instruction are self-guided • Students work at their own pace
Synchronous Environment	• Students learn in real time, either virtually or in a classroom setting • Courses often include a teacher
Blended Environment or Hybrid Environment	• Includes a combination of synchronous, in-person instruction in a traditional classroom setting; synchronous, virtual instruction; and/or asynchronous, self-paced instruction • Often implemented by allowing students to attend class several days each week and work online the remaining days
Brick-and-mortar Classroom	• A traditional learning environment where students learn in a physical school setting
Student Information System	• Software, typically web-based, wherein school administrators, educators, facilitators, and businesses can enter, update, store, and manage student data
Learning Management System	• Software, typically web-based, that can manage a variety of tools, such as instruction, assessment, training, reporting, and tracking

THE PROBLEM

Establishing a robust online program presents significant challenges, with tasks such as securing funding for implementing an innovative, non-traditional program and recruiting experienced online instructors being particularly daunting (Hill, 2010).

In addition to these challenges, schools must ensure that the chosen program aligns with relevant standards, allocate a budget for its implementation, and successfully carry out the execution while providing support to staff, students, and parents. Administrators face the crucial task of assessing student needs and gauging parental support and technological accessibility in homes, especially in diverse socioeconomic areas.

In "*Management and Operations of Online Programs: Ensuring Quality and Accountability,*" Watson and Gemin (2009) listed the five most taxing processes in establishing an online program. Today, these top five challenges remain the same.

CHOOSING CURRICULUM

At the onset of the pandemic, schools hastily adopted online options. However, during normal circumstances, the curriculum selection process should be deliberate.

Administrators face the decision of developing curriculum internally or outsourcing from a vendor, considering what aligns best with their requirements and budget. According to the Aurora Institute (formerly iNACOL) (2018), there are several benefits to purchasing a third-party curriculum:

- The expertise of vendor development teams, including writers, instructional designers, multimedia developers, and technologists, often exceeds the expertise within an in-house program.
- A wide variety of curriculum and specialty courses is challenging to produce in-house.
- An in-house program may lack staffing, funding, and/or expertise to develop and update high production-value content.
- Organizations focused on curriculum development often have the resources to incorporate more extensive user testing and feedback than individual schools. They also may be more equipped to provide regular updates, including maintenance of multimedia-based content over generations of versions and changing technology.

HIRING AND MANAGING TEACHERS

Selecting a captivating and rigorous curriculum is a demanding task, yet equally challenging, particularly in terms of funding, is the recruitment and training of qualified faculty. Undoubtedly, the online teaching environment represents a departure from traditional classrooms.

Given the escalating demand for online K-12 instructors, together with the increasing need for digital offerings, the preparation of teachers becomes paramount. Kennedy and Archambault (2012) emphasize that field experiences are "a critical component to preparing preservice teachers who are well-qualified."

However, researchers contend that teacher education programs struggle to adequately prepare professionals for teaching in diverse, contemporary learning environments.

Giffin (2020) believes that "more than ever, teachers need high-quality, job-embedded professional learning to develop teaching practices for virtual environments and strategies to support students with potential learning loss and social-emotional well-being."

STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Along with the added pressures on faculty, families are also finding it difficult to adapt to their new, participatory roles in their children's educations. According to Mike English, author of The 5 Biggest Challenges in Delivering K-12 eLearning (2020), "Many households were not prepared to help their children optimally achieve in a 'learn at home' model."

Moreover, parents with more than one child have an even bigger challenge to either supply or acquire multiple devices and secure Internet bandwidth to access online content.

Online programs must also be accessible for all students, especially those with disabilities. Features such as text-to-speech and speech-to-text, font colors and sizes, alternative text for images and documents, and closed captioning help ensure learning management systems are suitable for every student (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2021).

> Overall, students need several support systems, including:
> - Teachers and staff
> - Parents and guardians
> - Technological availability
> - Program accessibility

SELECTING AND MANAGING TECHNOLOGY

Schools aspiring to establish a virtual program encounter funding, implementation, and maintenance challenges in selecting and constructing online education technologies. Notably, technology issues, including the complexities of determining and sustaining a learning management system supporting personalized, multimodal learning, and instant data reporting, rank among the prominent factors discouraging schools from venturing into online programs (Powell et al., 2015).

While online programs offer schools and students a range of unique educational options, the inherent challenges in building such a program from the ground up can be overwhelming, often acting as a deterrent for administrators.

"Technological constraints, including access, infrastructure, and hardware and software issues stifled early [online learning] initiatives. Finding quality content and software programs that integrate with a school's learning management system is a major issue, combined with the lack of translatable, universal data reports able to flow into teacher dashboards coherently," (Powell, et. al., 2015).

Administrators must assess what students and staff have access to at home in terms of device and Internet capabilities and decide how to provide such options to families who do not have adequate technology.

ASSESSING PROGRAM SUCCESS

The success of implementing an online program is not immediately measurable, requiring administrators and staff to convene for ongoing evaluations of effectiveness and problem-solving. A crucial aspect involves understanding whether students are thriving or encountering difficulties.

To gain insights, targeted surveys for teachers, parents, and students offer administrators a clear understanding of what aspects to sustain, update, or modify. Identifying additional needs enables schools to continually enhance and adapt their programs and guidelines.

Utilizing a learning management system with built-in data reporting proves especially valuable for teachers because it provides insights into students' time spent on the platform and their active engagement with the content.

A survey conducted by Ian Kingsbury suggests that "Virtual schools would be expected to outperform brick-and-mortar counterparts that were forced to adapt to virtual learning with limited warning." With such expectations, schools face significant pressure to identify, secure funding, and successfully implement a thriving online program.

LINCOLN LEARNING IS THE SOLUTION

Alleviating the complications of establishing an online program, some education leadership organizations assist schools in transitioning to online learning (Hill, 2010). One such organization providing these services is Lincoln Learning Solutions.

In its web guide, "How to Start an Online Program: A Practical Guide to Key Issues and Policies," the Aurora Institute (2018) elaborates upon the major steps to establishing a successful online program. They are as follows:

STEPS TO ESTABLISHING A SUCCESSFUL ONLINE PROGRAM

1. Determine potential student population and stakeholders

2. Analyze faculty and staff needs

3. Establish funding

4. Choose a curriculum

5. Determine technology needs and arrange related services

6. Recruit, hire, and train staff members

7. Market the program to students and families

8. Train students and families

9. Evaluate the program's effectiveness and future success

SUCCESS IN ANY SETTING

Lincoln Learning Solutions offers the Lincoln Empowered curriculum—a high-quality, customizable educational framework designed for adaptability in any learning environment. By emphasizing robust partnerships through its turnkey program, Lincoln Learning aims to ease the workload for partner schools. The Lincoln Empowered curriculum is accessible for students ranging from pre-kindergarten through grade 12.

BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In a blended learning setting, teachers can leverage Lincoln Empowered to enhance both live and online classrooms, creating a more engaging educational experience. The curriculum content is versatile and recommended for small and large group instruction using smart boards or other devices.

Teachers have the flexibility to set up station rotations, allowing students to engage with games, videos, and skill-building exercises.
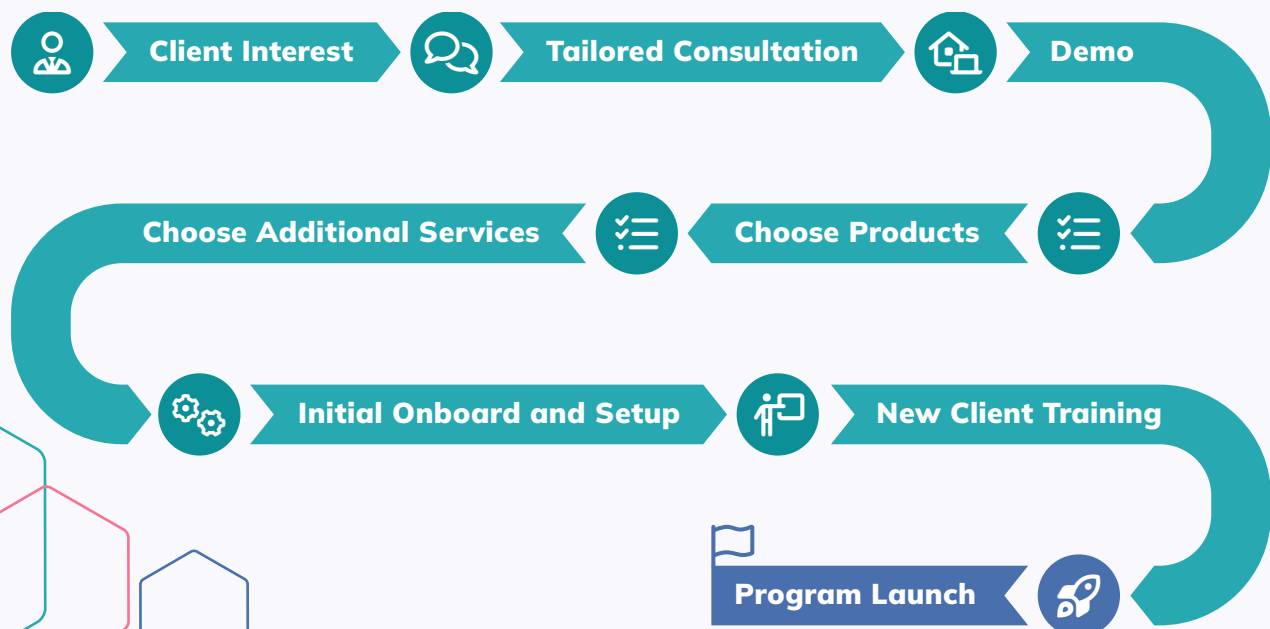
FULLY REMOTE OR VIRTUAL LEARNING

In fully remote or virtual learning environments where students work from home, schools can utilize Lincoln Learning's content through a wide variety of LMS providers.

Teachers can integrate their live-stream video sessions if desired. While Lincoln Learning teachers do not stream live, they provide office hours and one-on-one student support. Collaborating with school mentors, Lincoln Learning teachers ensure students are on the path to success.

In a flipped classroom, teachers can provide lessons that students can do at home or on their own time. Then, students can come to class prepared for discussion and other applications. Content can also be assigned for homework. Importantly, teachers can utilize the Lincoln Content Bank to pull in content to personalize lessons and individualize instruction.

LINCOLN LEARNING PARTNER JOURNEY

KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL LINCOLN
LEARNING PROGRAMME AT A GLANCE

Client Interest → Tailored Consultation → Demo

Choose Additional Services ← Choose Products

Initial Onboard and Setup → New Client Training

Program Launch

CHOOSE PRODUCTS > PROGRAM EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- Would you like your students to participate in a curriculum that is housed entirely online?
- Do you need a stand-alone curriculum or curriculum that is adaptable to meet the needs of your students or program?
- Are you seeking a project-based curriculum where students create and upload authentic assessments?
- What are your students' and program's needs?
- Are you looking for a supplemental curriculum from which you can create or enhance your courses?

Lincoln Learning Solutions offers distinct product solutions tailored to meet students' and teachers' needs and and preferences.

EMPOWERED TRADITIONAL

- Authentic and project-based assessments
- Auto-graded assessments
- Teacher grading and support
- Time-based completion
- Partner point person for student support

CREDIT RECOVERY

- Diagnostic auto-graded pre-tests
- Auto-graded post-tests
- Teacher support
- Time-based completion
- Partner point person for student support

EMPOWERED AUTO-GRADED

- Auto-graded checkpoints every five lessons
- Auto-graded summative mastery assessments
- No teacher grading or support
- Action-based completion
- Partner point person for student support and teacher of record

LINCOLN CONTENT BANK

- A library of nearly 110,000 rigorously vetted, standards-aligned educational assets for grades EK-12
- Supplemental content for all learning types and levels
- Cross-curricular opportunities
- Flexibility to differentiate instruction
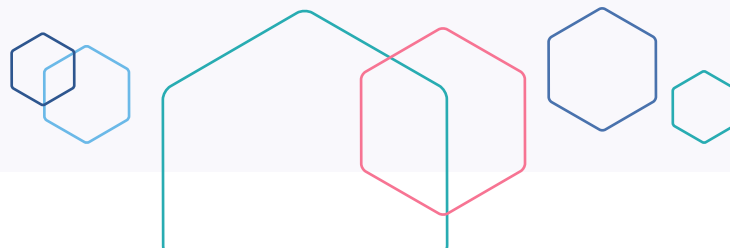
CHOOSE ADDITIONAL SERVICES > SERVICE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

MATERIALS

- How would you like to incorporate tangible learning materials and supplies?
- Who will be responsible for purchasing course materials?
- Do you want Lincoln Learning to supply materials, including printables and course kits?

TRAINING

- Are you in need of additional training sessions and training services?
- What kind of support do you need after the program has launched?

COURSE IMPLEMENTATION

- Do you have teachers available to implement Lincoln Learning courses and offer student support?
- Would you prefer instructional services from Lincoln Learning's teachers?

INITIAL ONBOARDING & SETUP > ONBOARDING & SETUP EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- Who will be the main point of contact?
- What is your timeline for setup and program launch?
- Who will be responsible for setting up student, parent, and staff accounts and enrollments?
- Where will your students be learning: in the classroom, remotely, or a combination of both?

Lincoln Learning Solutions focuses on assisting partners after the program launches and supporting students through their academic journeys.

LINCOLN LEARNING'S VALUE-ADDING SOLUTION

Lincoln Learning Solutions includes specialized departments that collaborate to produce and maintain curriculum and partner needs. The following outline provides an overview of how teams serve partners.

LINCOLN EMPOWERED	
Curriculum	Lincoln Empowered gives students the opportunity to exceed academic standards. Using a variety of media, students learn new and exciting grade-appropriate content. Students establish their own learning paths with Lincoln Empowered videos that inspire, motivate, and prepare students to learn—online manipulatives, like simulations and games, gauge students' understanding. As part of the Lincoln Empowered curriculum development, each piece of content goes through an extensive process of planning, development, review, editing, and sign-off.
Instructional Services and Student Support	Lincoln Learning Solutions hires highly qualified teachers to facilitate courses. These teachers are certified by state content area. State certifications will vary. Lincoln Learning teachers grade coursework and provide content support for students within their classes. Expert teaching staff uses best practices, teacher tools, and individualized support to help students progress through their courses. As part of Instructional Services, teachers adhere to Lincoln Learning's internal guidelines and evidence-based practices. Virtual Liaisons are available for partner schools that have students with accommodations from IEP/504 plans and are using Lincoln Learning Solutions' instructional staff. For more information, review the following resources: Teacher Facilitation Overview Student Support Services Information Guide.
Solutions Specialists	Solutions Specialists work with partners to determine the most appropriate products and services. Solutions Specialists meet with partners throughout the year to monitor program success and to introduce new products and services.
Training & Teacher Preparation	The Training team assists partners through customized implementation, training, and ongoing support. This team provides modules of support for individual teachers, trains the trainer teams, and leads groups through webinars, in-person sessions, and ongoing sessions—all of which are supported by precise resources available in the Help Center. Partner school teachers can implement the curriculum within their own classrooms with the support of our Professional Development team.

LINCOLN EMPOWERED	
Partner Success	Following the thorough and structured training sessions, the implementation plan concludes with assigning partners a single point of contact: a Lincoln Learning Solutions Client Success Specialist. Success Specialists assist partners with enrollments and curriculum questions, and they work closely with other departments to answer questions partners may have beyond the curriculum. These accessible, friendly individuals serve as support systems for partners throughout the terms of their partnership/ contact and offer customer service in real time, responding to calls and emails within 24 hours during the business week.
Marketing	The marketing team, in part, supports partners and families by maintaining a user-friendly website, including blogs, newsletters, and other time-released resources, promoting community engagement, and highlighting philanthropic endeavors.
Technical Support	Technical Support at Lincoln Learning Solutions provides a strong collaboration with service teams to help establish efficient workflows and solutions for partners. The IT team created and maintains the Lincoln Learning enrollment tool, Pulse.
Program Analytics	Lincoln Learning Solutions sends surveys to collect data in order to enhance curriculum and suggest how partners can improve their own programs. Reports can show student and teacher data from the learning management system and student information system to inform partners on curriculum analytics.

TESTIMONIALS

"Lincoln Learning has continued to be a positive educational partner for all of us at the Gull Lake Virtual Partnership. During the pandemic, our established partnership proved to be a powerhouse, which allowed us to creatively work together to meet our increased enrollment needs in a timely manner. Our stakeholders consistently report that Lincoln's content is high quality, relevant, and rigorous. The customer service from Lincoln is outstanding, and they have demonstrated a growth mindset in meeting our unique needs. Gull Lake Virtual Partnership strives to provide students with meaningful, personalized learning pathways. It is important to us that we choose vendors who share the same sentiment for student learning."

Bobbie Jo Stoner, Principal of Early College and Innovative Programs

"Lincoln Learning has been such a blessing in an already stressful season in education. As an elementary school principal, I was looking for a vendor that would be a good fit for my students who were opting to learn remotely due to COVID-19. We found Lincoln Learning and discovered that you had Michigan-certified teachers. What a perfect fit for us! Despite my lack of experience with an online vendor, I have been completely at ease throughout this process. Everyone at Lincoln Learning has been patient and gracious to me. Your initial start-up training was informative and answered all of my questions. The training videos and support materials helped me work at my own pace and explained everything I needed to know to begin the process. Pulse is user-friendly, and the enrollment of my students was quick. I am really excited for my students who have chosen to learn remotely this year because of Lincoln Learning. I am confident it will be seamless, and they will learn a lot! Thank you for providing excellent training and support so far throughout this process."

Julie Farmer, Elementary Principal/Special Education Supervisor

CONCLUSION

Across the nation, K-12 online education initiatives are thriving. As a result, districts are reaping the benefits of establishing online programs, including:

1. Opportunities for individualized learning options, including advanced placement and credit recovery
2. Freedom from limitations, including location and scheduling
3. Flexible schedules for students (Archambault et al., 2016)

The initiation of online programs brings forth numerous challenges, including curriculum selection, staff recruitment and training, student support, technology management, and program assessment. These complexities often deter schools from venturing into expanded online curriculum offerings.

In response to these challenges, education leadership organizations like Lincoln Learning Solutions now provide solutions to help schools establish their own online programs with minimal difficulty. This support facilitates schools nationwide in more effectively and efficiently individualizing learning for their students.

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