Best Practice Considerations for Divisions Using Online Schools

The local school board may wish to make a broad general statement on their approach to online learning. The following is an example of such a philosophical statement:

The _____ School Board ("board") believes a variety of learning options, including online courses and programs, are critical for 21st century learners. The board understands that virtual learning environments provide students with unique opportunities to become self-disciplined learners and to develop lifelong learning skills. Further, the board believes that online learning provides a range of opportunities for students to access curricula and specialized courses in a flexible learning environment that might not otherwise be available.

Therefore, the board supports online learning opportunities that are equally accessible to all students in the school division. The board directs the superintendent to provide information to parents, students, and staff regarding online learning options and the guidelines for participation.

The division superintendent or designee will develop procedures to implement this policy. The procedures will include, but not be limited to, the types of online courses and programs available to students through the school division, when the school division will pay course fees and other costs for nonresident students, and the granting of high school credit.

Costs:
Local school boards may make agreements with each other to allow students from one division to take online courses or programs through the contract another division has made with an approved multidivision online provider. School divisions are encouraged to enter into reciprocal arrangements with one another to establish fair rates for this type of cross-divisional coursework, or determine that a student's state funding will be shared based on a fair percentage and following all standard state procedures.

To support student success in online courses and/or programs, the following procedures might be useful:
1. The school's counseling office advises students in selecting and registering for online learning options approved by the division. (*This service will be available through the multidivision online provider's student support services for those enrolled full time in an online program.*)
2. The student is required to participate in the online course/program orientation, reported to the school counseling office by the online provider.
3. If using a mentoring model of online coursework, qualified mentors will be designated and trained by the virtual program. The mentor will meet regularly with online students to ensure that they are connecting to the online coursework and the

online teacher and that they are making satisfactory progress in their online coursework.

4. The division dedicates a class period during the school schedule in which students will have access to the online course (*and to the local mentor*).

5. The division offers access to online computers during the school day *(OR outside regular school hours). NOTE: If divisions supply computers for students taking online classes, they may choose among many variations. For instance, divisions may supply a laptop for student use outside school but not provide Internet access.They may also supply computers when certain conditions are met, such as demonstrated financial need. Additionally, some providers may provide equipment and Internet access if these provisions are stipulated in their contracts with the divisions. How local support of computers used by online students, whether provided by themselves, by the school division or by an outside entity must be considered.*

To facilitate communication among all involved parties, the following procedures might be useful:

1. The division uses a variety of methods to provide information to parents or guardians and students regarding online learning opportunities, such as through the division Web site, counseling office brochures, newsletters, the student handbook, and other appropriate division communication resources.

2. The division informs parents or guardians prior to student enrollment in any online course or program.

3. Inform staff, parents or guardians, and students about ways to access technology resources and technological requirements beyond the school day.

4. Facilitate effective communications among students' local school counselors, mentors, and/or their parents or guardians. Students and their parents or guardians are made aware of rescheduling options or grade impacts in the event a student withdraws from an online course or online school program prior to completion.

5. Provide parents or guardians with a clear process, including individuals to contact, for resolving concerns related to online coursework.

6. Review all the offered online courses and programs to ensure they meet all applicable state and federal laws and regulations.

7. Parents or guardians should inform the division's counseling office if a student ceases or changes participation in an online course or program.

Issues to consider when making contracts with approved multidivision online providers:

1. Determine how the provider will convey teacher credentials (meeting Virginia legal requirements) to the division prior to a student's participation in an online course.

2. Determine which courses provided by the multidivision online providers are to be offered through your division. Only courses approved and designated by the Virginia Department of Education as SOL aligned may be offered, unless no SOL are available for a particular topic. Eventually, CTE courses will be aligned to their associated competencies, but for 2011-2012 they were not approved on that basis.

3. Determine which courses will be granted high school credit by the division.
4. Determine who will schedule and administer SOL tests for students in online full-time programs (following all state guidelines for secure testing).
5. Determine who in the division has access to the contracted online courses in order to review or spot-check them for the purposes of verifying that the courses are in compliance with all state and federal laws and regulations.
6. Determine how students with an IEP will have their needs communicated to the appropriate teachers and how online teachers will communicate back to the schools.
7. Determine procedures for exchanging data and for meeting FERPA requirements, as well as Virginia Department of Education requirements (the data ultimately must be provided to the Virginia Department of Education by the school division in which the student is registered).
8. Determine how the provider will communicate and address local interruptions in school days and hours as well as procedures for local extended power/Internet outages.
9. Determine who is responsible for technology support for students.
10. Determine how parents or guardians, mentors, and appropriate school personnel will be notified of progress and/or issues (time limitations should be included).
11. Determine how providers will be notified of issues related to a student's participation or progress or any other issues (time limitations should be included).
12. Determine how and when payments must be made to providers.