

# K-12 Online Learning

## Update to 2011 Evaluation Report

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### Problems Identified

- **Decreasing Course Completion Rates.** Between the 2006-07 and 2009-10 school years, course completion rates for full-time online students fell from 84 percent to 63 percent.
- **High and Increasing School Drop-Out Rates.** In 2009-10, 25 percent of full-time online students in grade 12 dropped out of school completely by the end of the school year, up from 18 percent in 2006-07. In comparison, only 3 percent of twelfth-grade students statewide dropped out of school by the end of their senior year in 2009-10.
- **Low Growth on State Math Tests.** Full-time online students in grades 4 through 8, on average, made about half as much progress on the state's MCA-II standardized math tests as traditional students in the same grades. Test results for secondary students were similar.
- **Poor Oversight.** The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) did not assign sufficient staff to fulfill its online learning responsibilities. As a result, MDE did not review applications for new online schools in a timely manner, and its annual reapproval process for existing schools likewise suffered. Furthermore, MDE's reapproval process for existing online schools did not incorporate any performance-related components.

### Changes Implemented

- **Hired Staff.** In March 2012, MDE hired a new staff person to oversee online learning.
- **Establish Timelines.** Legislation passed by the 2012 Legislature requires that MDE (1) act on applications for new online schools within 90 days of receiving a completed application and (2) review existing online schools on a cyclical three-year basis.

### Action Needed

- **Examine Performance.** The Minnesota Department of Education should redesign its reapproval process for existing online schools to focus more attention on school and student performance, including the schools' progress in meeting the goals and objectives stated in their initial applications. Statutory language adopted by the 2012 Legislature simply requires that MDE use "research-based standards of quality" when reapproving online schools.
- **Encourage Online Learning Consortia.** Interest in online learning has grown and will likely continue to do so. Participating in online learning consortia (groups of school districts and charter schools that offer online courses on a part-time basis) offers numerous benefits—financial and programmatic—to administrators, staff, students, and parents, and MDE should encourage the development of these consortia throughout the state.