

DEFINITION OF E-SCHOOLS

My name is Gregory Soper and for the past 13 years I have been a Social Studies Teacher for the Canton City Schools Digital Academy. It is important to keep in mind these are my views and may not reflect the views of The Canton City School District, Ohio Education Association or the Canton Professional Educators Association.

E-Schools can and do play an important role in education. However, it is important that a student be correctly placed in an online school and not just placed for convenience. Here at the Canton City Schools Digital Academy, that is priority one. Students are given a probationary period to see if this is the correct place, and if they are successful, they are placed in Digital, if they are not successful, we meet with the families to discuss what it is best for the child's learning experience. In order to be considered for the Digital Academy, a referral from a student's current Counselor is required. A comprehensive review of the academic history of the student is conducted by the program principal, if there are no red flags, a face to face interview is conducted with the school community worker. Students are required to attend a 2 hour orientation, and must be successfully complete one lesson in each class they are enrolled full time. If students are behind, we use restorative practices to see what the issue is. Working with families, students are given opportunity to work in our labs until they are caught up. If students are still not successful, they are placed back in their traditional school with the option to re-apply in 9 weeks.

What defines an E-School? An E-School should not be defined solely based on what is online. It must be based on face to face instruction, online instruction and completion of work. At the Digital Academy, each of these components is used to track attendance. We began doing this when it became clear that a student would just log in and do nothing else. Another reason we did this was students could finish their work in less time than others, and by using only seat time, it could create absences when there was none. We also require face to face time because much online work is very difficult for students to learn, students are required to come to school 2-3 days a week for class sessions and tutoring. For schools that cannot provide this option, there are programs like EZ-talks that would create these opportunities.

Much of the controversy of e-school attendance is because of work that is not online is often not accounted for. At the Digital Academy, students who choose to do their work on paper, must turn it in their work and their work is uploaded to the learning management system.

It is paramount, that multiple criteria be used to measure attendance. Multiple criteria must be allowed including online seat time, face to face instruction, completion of work. It is important to note that regardless of what is used, evidence must be documented to ensure a student is learning. Using these three criteria guarantees this. It allows for differentiation because struggling learners will have other options to assist them in their learning, more advanced students will not be penalized for not completing a defined number of hours and those who prefer hard copies of work are also not penalized for time as a management system could not track this. However, regardless whatever model is determined, evidence MUST trump everything else.

This is a very simple way to track attendance. If a school can document and provide evidence the work is done and are students are actively participating than students should be considered enrolled on a full-time basis. If schools cannot provide this, funding must be decreased.

It's all about the evidence.

Thank You
Gregory Soper