

Essential Principles of Quality

Guidelines for Web-based Courses for Middle Grades and High School Students

SREB

As the World Wide Web increasingly is used to provide academic courses for students in the middle grades and high school, standards and guidelines are more important than ever. States, school districts and schools need to be able to identify high-quality, effective Web-based courses, and the *Essential Principles of Quality* are designed to help them. **Web-based courses in the SREB region should be measured initially against the *Essential Principles* and ultimately by the achievement of students who take the courses.**

The *Essential Principles* are intended to assure states, school districts and schools that courses complying with the principles will be high-quality courses that effectively get students to meet academic goals. The principles also are intended to ensure that the characteristics of good teaching and learning are addressed during the development and use of electronically delivered courses. Web-based courses should be at least the same quality as traditional courses.

Essential Principles of Quality focuses on three primary areas in assessing the quality of Web-based courses:

- curriculum, instruction and student assessment;
- management; and
- evaluation of delivered courses.

Web-based courses will meet students' needs across the SREB region if they are designed carefully, supported appropriately and used effectively. Quality and effectiveness are the cornerstones upon which courses should be developed and used.

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A checklist to determine the quality and effectiveness of Web-based courses and their implementation is available from Bill Thomas at bthomas@sreb.org.

Curriculum, instruction and student assessment

1. The course content and assessments are aligned with the state's academic standards.
2. The course engages students in learning activities that address various learning styles.
3. The course provides students with opportunities to engage in abstract thinking and critical reasoning.
4. The course structure includes fair, adequate and appropriate methods and procedures to assess students' mastery of content.
5. Each course will provide appropriate teacher-to-student interaction, including timely, frequent feedback about student progress.
6. Each course will provide appropriate student-to-student interaction and a plan for monitoring that interaction.
7. The teacher of the Web-based course can adapt learning activities to accommodate students with disabilities.
8. Students have access to resources that enrich the course content.
9. A complete, clearly written course syllabus is available for review.
10. Issues associated with the use of copyrighted materials are addressed.

Management

1. The course provider is authorized to operate by the state where the course originates or is received, or the provider is accredited by a regional accrediting agency.
2. School districts or state departments of education will review a course to ensure its quality before it is used.
3. The school or school district where a student is enrolled or resides will accept the course for credit.
4. Procedures for fees and payment are established before students enroll in a course.
5. Student work and personal data are secure from access by others.
6. Students are monitored to ensure academic honesty.
7. A teacher or other educator in the school will coordinate and assist students with instructional, technical and management requirements.

8. The company or organization that offers the Web-based course will provide the course teacher and school coordinator with technical and course-management assistance.
9. Necessary, relevant learning materials are available to help students meet the course requirements.
10. The course provider has identified prerequisite technology skills for students.
11. There are technical requirements for acceptable access.
12. The teacher is trained to use the course and resources effectively to deliver instruction.
13. The teacher and students receive technical support to ensure easy use of the course.
14. There is a policy for recourse or appeal if the Web-based course is not delivered as described.
15. The academic calendar of the students and teacher is coordinated before the course begins.

Evaluation

1. A Web-based course's success should be measured by the achievement of students taking it.
2. Each course is evaluated over time by the state agency or its designee.
3. A new course will provide documentation that validates its reliability and completeness.
4. A company or other organization offering a Web-based course that was taught previously will provide evidence of its effectiveness, reliability and completeness.
5. Each teacher of a Web-based course will be evaluated at least once a year.
6. The school and the state can verify a student's participation and performance in a Web-based course during the course and upon its completion.

The *Essential Principles of Quality* were developed based on the *Principles of Good Practice* of the *Electronic Campus* of the Southern Regional Education Board; on SREB's *Essential Elements for Web-based Courses for High School Students*; and on the work of SREB Educational Technology Cooperative representatives who have developed, administered and used Web-based courses.

