

MSOC LEA Profile

Part II: Synopsis of MSOC Participation

Background:

Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) took the lead in developing the grant proposal for online learning for high school students, which eventually became the MSOC. The proposal was selected for implementation and the grant started in the summer of 2003. The first activity in BCPS was to reconvene the Online Learning Committee and charge them with developing and seeking approval for a set of comprehensive guidelines that would outline the procedures for using online courses for students in BCPS high schools. These guidelines, *The BCPS Guidelines and Procedures for Online Student Courses* were approved in January 2004.

Benefits and Impact:

- Participation in the MSOC has provided BCPS with an opportunity to explore the options for online student learning for high school students.
- Over 60 students in BCPS have had the opportunity to take an online course. This number represents only 5 high schools who are currently involved in the program, therefore once more schools are participating the impact will become substantial.
- BCPS has been able to expand the range of course offerings available to students.
- BCPS has included funding in the FY06 budget for e-Learning, including, but not limited to, providing seats for students in online courses.

Implementation Issues:

As with any new program certain issues arouse. They included:

- *difficulties with student progress* – online learning is a new delivery system for the majority of students, therefore took time in understanding the different learning experience and time-management necessary for success,
- *constant mentor support needed* – face-to-face interaction is essential for providing needed support and nurturing. The teacher is not necessarily replaced in an online course.
- *concern about BCPS curriculum matching with online course* – although all courses are approved by the MVLO, there are times when the BCPS curriculum is stronger than the state mandated curriculum. Since many courses have an end of course exam, it is important to communicate the gaps between the curriculum offices, mentor, and online teacher;
- *instructional issues* – just like a face-to-face class some teachers are better prepared than others, therefore monitoring the course and the course vendor is necessary.

Lessons Learned:

BCPS has realized a number of key findings or lessons learned. They include:

- Mentors need to have content expertise in order to provide useful feedback.
- The mentor is an essential element in the process. Thus, it is important to attempt to build mentoring time into faculty's schedule it possible.
- "Human interaction" is essential for providing needed support and nurturing. The teacher is not necessarily replaced in an online course.
- Upfront orientation to all stakeholders which specifies who is responsible to whom and what is critical. This is essential for making sure that everyone, including parents, understand the guidelines and procedures, etc.

Next Steps:

Issues facing BCPS with regard to expanding implementation of online learning include:

- *manpower* – keeping up with the rapid increase in enrollments, requests, managing expected increases in growth;
- *funding* – the need for continued general funds to grow the program after the MSOC grant concludes. BCPS has included funding in the FY06 budget for e-Learning, including, but not limited to, providing seats for students in online courses;
- *education* – high schools participating in online learning need to be educated and informed consumers. This includes teachers, administrators, students, parents, and the community.