

MSOC LEA Member Profile Part III: Full Narrative

Prince George's County Public Schools: Online Learning – Ready for Takeoff!

Prince George's County has been one of the leaders in the MSOC project in terms of enrolling a significant number of students in a variety of courses. Students are taking online courses in Prince George's County for several reasons. One group of students is taking online courses for credit recovery; seniors filling in graduation requirements or taking some AP courses that are not offered in high schools are other common reasons. There is also one student who transferred in from another state where the required biology course wasn't offered.

The greatest benefit of participating in MSOC has been being able to give students the opportunity to take courses that were otherwise not available to them. These courses included certain Advanced Placement classes as well as courses needed for graduation that were not available at the time. Participating in the MSOC has also made Prince George's County more aware of what is happening in the online learning arena. An additional benefit to students is that taking online courses in high school will help prepare them for online learning experiences in post-secondary education.

Prince George's County Public Schools' participation in the online learning arena to date has been a great learning experience but the process hasn't been without challenges. Part of the learning process has been working through unfamiliar territory and learning many important lessons as a result of participating in this project. Among these is the importance of establishing a detailed policy and procedures document that identifies specific responsibilities, expectations and process. This is new territory for us. After two years in the project we are still encountering new situations and adjusting our original plans.

To identify online courses that are needed by students, Prince George's County Public Schools has been working on an individual needs basis mainly to assist students needing specific graduation credits. Meetings with guidance counselors, schedulers, principals and content supervisors all proved to be part of the equation. Participating in the review, development and modification of online courses has posed a challenge because the review/selection process moves much more slowly than the immediate needs of the school system. Issues related to implementing online courses during the current (2004-05) school year include late student identification and not enough time for mentor preparation. Prince George's has decided there is a need to train at least one mentor for each building so that they are prepared if/when online courses are offered to student(s) in their building.

In summary, participating in MSOC has been a great learning experience for Prince George's County Public Schools. Along the way, PGCPs has learned that they are sitting on a lot of untapped potential and that online learning offers great opportunities for students.