

Interim Evaluation Report

Evaluation of the Texas Virtual School Network



February 16, 2011

Submitted to:
Education Service Center Region 10



Submitted by:
ICF International
9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031

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Executive Summary

In light of the ongoing work of the TxVSN, a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the implementation of the TxVSN is being conducted. This evaluation includes an examination of the extent to which the TxVSN provides equitable access to courses in an online learning environment to benefit students throughout Texas. The main objective of the evaluation is to examine the effectiveness of the TxVSN Central Operations and Course Review functions in the implementation of the contractual, statutory, and legislative directives governing the project.

This interim evaluation report is the first in a series of reports that will be published throughout the comprehensive evaluation. Specifically, this report describes the initial development and current status of the TxVSN program, including its organization, functions, and processes. Furthermore, this report includes findings from the review of extant data on the progress of the implementation of the TxVSN, a high-level summary of baseline extant data related to program participation, and looks forward to what will be learned throughout the evaluation. Lastly, this report includes a summary of initial information collected that will guide the analysis of research on other state-led or statewide virtual schools and concludes with a description of the next steps in the TxVSN program evaluation.

Background and Understanding

In the last decade online learning has become a key component of education in America. This period has witnessed an unprecedented investment in technology to support the offering of new courses with new delivery methods. Initially, online courses were primarily utilized by students from schools where there were not a sufficient number of students to make up a traditional class. Most recently, though, attention has been directed at a more comprehensive view of which students could benefit from enrolling in these courses. Research and evaluation studies on the efficacy of online learning have focused on its impact on student achievement, and most studies have found that online learners perform as well as or better than their counterparts in traditional classrooms. In light of these generally positive results, researchers have identified some of the person-level (e.g., time management skills, reading comprehension skills), program-level (e.g., course quality, student supports), and state-level (e.g., adequate funding, accountability) factors that contribute to online learning success.

Establishment and Implementation of the TxVSN

The passage of Senate Bill (SB) 1788¹ gave the Texas Education Agency (TEA) administering authority over the Texas Virtual School Network (TxVSN). The TxVSN is structured to include an advisory council, course review process, central operations, receiver districts, and outreach functions. The 21-member TxVSN Advisory Council was established in 2008 to provide input and recommendations on the implementation of the TxVSN. Education Service Center (ESC) Region 4 was awarded responsibility for TxVSN Course Review. ESC Region 10, in collaboration with the Harris County Department of Education (HCDE), was selected by TEA to serve as TxVSN Central Operations. Approved TxVSN Professional Development (PD) Providers are selected through a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process.

¹ Senate Bill 1788, passed by the 80th Texas Legislature in 2007 established TEA's administering authority over the development of a statewide network that provides students with high quality online courses, which they created as the TxVSN. Passage of SB 1788 led to the codification of Chapter 30A State Virtual School Network in the Texas Education Code (TEC). House Bill 3646, passed by the 81st Texas Legislature in 2009, called for additional amendments to the TEC.

Information collected to date indicates that all functions of the TxVSN are up and running and functioning properly. A review of the historical documentation shows that the various parties that make up the TxVSN are successfully implementing the contractual, statutory, and legislative directives governing the TxVSN. Supportive evidence includes:

- Advisory Council members representing districts and organizations across the state have participated in quarterly meetings to assist TEA and TxVSN staff in making informed decisions about administering the TxVSN. The Advisory Council has engaged in discussion about questions like: What is the definition of student success? In what ways might the TxVSN ensure that teachers are implementing these best practices in online teaching consistently?
- The Course Review function has been established and processes put in place before, during, and after course review to determine whether courses should be “approved,” “approved with modifications,” “not approved: major corrections,” or “not approved.” Course Review has been scrutinized and tweaked since the inception of the TxVSN to improve services to those who wish to offer courses through the TxVSN. This process is likely to continue to evolve based on the level of demand. Although evaluators received a list of courses submitted for review, not every course was listed with its associated initial review rating. In 2008-09 only 15% of courses were “approved” on initial review, and this number decreased to 1% in 2009-10. No dual credit course received an initial course rating of “approved.”
- Central Operations has created and maintained the TxVSN, and continues to oversee all functions. Since the start of the TxVSN, Central Operations has:
 - Approved contracts for 10 high school course Provider Districts and 6 dual credit course providers
 - Approved agreements with 401 TxVSN Receiver Districts (32% of the eligible districts and open enrollment charter schools in the state) as of fall 2010
 - Provided a publicly accessible list of approved electronic courses each semester
 - Coordinated course registration and interacted with Site Coordinators and Purchasing Approvers to facilitate the enrollment of students in TxVSN courses
 - Submitted performance reports to TEA so that TEA can report to the Legislative Budget Board, State Comptroller, and other state entities
 - Coordinated Provider District (\$400 per student) and Receiver District (\$80 per student) financial transactions
 - Created and managed the technology infrastructure for the TxVSN that includes course registration, Site Coordinator registration, workspace for Site Coordinators and district administrators, Help Desk, TxVSN course catalog, Readiness for Education at a Distance Indicator (READI) Secondary Assessment for Students, and webinars/training
 - Utilized a variety of outreach strategies (over 3,000 communiquéé to disseminate information about the Network including conference presentations, articles in professional journals and newsletters, and dissemination of information via videoconferences and webinars
- Ten approved PD Providers offered various PD courses to beginning and experienced online instructors. The length, cost, and available Continuing Professional Education (CPE) hours of these PD courses vary. All approved courses emphasize the iNACOL National Standards of Quality for Online Teaching and the list of courses is updated regularly.

Baseline Data on TxVSN Participation

Extant data collected during the first few years of startup and implementation of the TxVSN and reviewed demonstrate that the TxVSN was very active through the 2009-10 academic year. In terms of district participation and student enrollment and completion, the following observations were made based on the review of baseline data provided to the external evaluators by the TxVSN staff:

- During the spring 2010 semester, 7 high school provider districts offered approved high school courses to 614 TxVSN students, and 6 dual credit providers offered approved courses to 618 TxVSN students.
- The data received from the spring 2010 semester revealed that for the most part students are passing the courses in which they are enrolled.
- As of June 2010, of the 1,235 districts and open enrollment charter schools eligible to participate in TxVSN, 313 were registered as receiver districts. An analysis of the enrollment data for spring 2010 showed that 128 receiver districts had at least one student enrolled in an approved TxVSN course.
- About half of the top 15 receiver districts (8 of 15, or 53%) had less than 70% of their students pass the course in which they were enrolled.
- During spring 2010, TxVSN students were enrolled in 41 courses – 30 of which were high school courses, and 11 of which were dual credit. The high school courses with the largest enrollment were Driver Education (169 enrollments) and Driver and Safety Education (134 enrollments). Both of these courses also proved to have some of the lowest pass rates, and highest drop rates.
- When reviewing the data across providers and receiver districts, and by course, the courses that proved to offer the most challenge to participants in spring 2010 were Driver Education and Driver Education and Safety. This finding gives some cause for concern as these courses also had the highest enrollment of all high school courses.
- Students in dual credit courses appear to be more successful (i.e., more likely to pass) than students in high school courses. This, however, is not surprising as it is expected that students who enroll in dual credit courses would more likely be at or above the academic level of their peers.

TxVSN Participation

Initial information collected that will guide the analysis of research on other state-led or statewide virtual schools for the evaluation is presented in this report, highlighting a few studies that have outlined perspectives on various characteristics of successful state-led virtual learning networks. With a majority of states developing statewide e-learning networks, a variety of structures and course models have evolved, as have questions related to policy and best practices. A number of agencies are collecting information and reporting on statewide networks. A more complete analysis of what other states are doing will be presented in the next interim evaluation report in August 2011, where the evaluation team will begin to identify evolving structures, models, policies and best practices across the state systems.

Next Steps in the Evaluation

The evaluation of the TxVSN is multi-faceted and comprehensive. As such, the project is organized into seven inter-related tasks that will be conducted over the two-year period of the evaluation when 11 evaluation questions are addressed through various data collection activities. Information will be sought from participating stakeholders, including students participating in TxVSN courses.

1. Introduction

“The growing capacity of the Internet and the increasing sophistication of distance-learning technologies are making it increasingly possible for students to take non-traditional approaches to continuing and completing their education. It’s time to expand our use of these technologies to our state’s more vulnerable students as a way to decrease our state’s dropout rates even farther.”

– Texas Governor Rick Perry, January 19, 2010

In the last decade online learning has become a key component of education in America. This period has witnessed an unprecedented investment in technology at federal, state, and local levels to support the offering of new courses with new delivery methods. A number of organizations have attempted to track the nature and growth of online learning and to categorize its varied forms, and iNACOL, The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) has assessed the pace of growth of the K-12 online learning market at 30% annually. The 2009 publication, *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning* (Watson, 2009),² determined that 44 states, including Texas, have significant online learning programs or full-time programs and that the majority of existing online programs show considerable growth in the number of students they are serving from one year to the next.

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has been active in recognizing the role of e-learning in today’s education system. The 2004 National Education Technology Plan advocated a number of action steps to promote online instruction, including recommendations to provide every student access to e-learning and every teacher an opportunity to participate in e-learning training. The plan also encouraged the development of quality measures and accreditation standards as well as the exploration of funding mechanisms (ED, 2004). The recently released National Education Technology Plan for 2010 (ED, 2010) takes stock of the current status of online learning and weighs in on what is needed to promote equity and quality in the future.

Initially, online courses were primarily utilized by students from schools where there were not a sufficient number of students to make up a traditional class. An issue of the *Innovations in Education* series (ED, 2007), for example, focused on case studies of advanced courses made available through online delivery. Most recently, though, attention has been directed at a more comprehensive view of which students could benefit from enrolling in these courses. Two recent publications have focused on how online learning can provide additional learning time (Cavanaugh, 2009) and how online courses can benefit a broader range of students and be used to promote graduation and address course recovery (iNACOL, 2008).

Research and evaluation studies on the efficacy of online learning usually focus on its impact on student achievement, where student achievement is typically measured by end of course grades, scores on national- and state-level standardized tests, and graduation rates. Most studies have found that online learners perform as well as or better than their counterparts in traditional classrooms. For example, a comprehensive assessment of the Florida Virtual School (FLVS) found that “FLVS students consistently outperformed their counterparts in traditional schools on grades, Advanced Placement test scores, and FCAT scores” (Florida TaxWatch, 2007). A recent meta-analysis compared student achievement across

² This represented the fourth time since 2004 that these researchers have tracked the trends in online learning and what individual states are doing.

46 studies that used an experimental or quasi-experimental design and objective measures of student achievement to evaluate online and face-to-face learning. Researchers found that students who took online only courses outperformed their peers who took face-to-face only classes (ED, 2009).

In light of these generally positive results, researchers have tried to identify the person-level, program-level, and state-level factors that contribute to online learning success. At the person or online learner level, researchers have noted that online learners must be skilled at time management, be effective technology users, and have strong reading comprehension skills. Additionally, researchers have noted that online learners who are motivated, engaged, and who take initiative are more likely than their counterparts to thrive in an online learning environment (Mandernach, Donnelly, & Dailey-Herbert, 2006; Owens, Hardcastle, & Richardson, 2009).

At the program level researchers have noted that course quality (the content and structure of the course), the course management skills of the online instructor, and the availability of student supports (such as the availability of a pre-course orientation, and a pre-course assessment to gauge student attitudes toward and comfort with the online learning environment) are significant predictors of success in an online learning environment (Mandernach et al., 2006; Watson & Gemin, 2009b). Weiner (2003) notes that high quality programs are also those that prompt learner reflection, give learners control of their interactions with media, with instructors, and with other students.

In addition to person- and program-level factors, researchers have also examined state-level factors to identify those that influence the success of online learning. Most state-level online learning policies address topics such as funding, oversight, evaluation, and reporting. iNACOL recommends policies that support adequate funding, choice for students and parents, professional development for teachers, accountability. Policies that hinder online learning growth and success are those that require a certain amount of face-to-face instruction, limit student enrollment, or limit per pupil funding to levels well below that of students attending traditional schools (Watson & Gemin, 2009a).

1.1 About the TxVSN

The Texas Virtual School Network (TxVSN) has recently joined several similar entities that have invested heavily in online learning. TxVSN is a clearinghouse for online courses provided by Academically Acceptable or higher public school districts, Recognized³ or higher open enrollment charter schools (OECS), regional education service centers (ESCs), and public and private institutions of higher education. TxVSN was authorized in 2007 by the 80th Texas Legislature and offered its first courses in January 2009. In the fall of 2009, TxVSN began its Dual Credit Pilot program to meet its expanded priorities of offering courses that would likely benefit a student in obtaining admission to a postsecondary institution, and offering courses (including dual credit courses), that allow a student to earn college credit or other advanced credit.

³ The Texas state accountability system assigns ratings to every campus and district in the Texas public education system each year. In most cases one of the following four labels (ranging from lowest to highest) are assigned: Academically Unacceptable, Academically Acceptable, Recognized, and Exemplary. More information about these ratings can be found [here](#).

1.2 About the TxVSN Program Evaluation

In light of the ongoing work of the TxVSN, ESC Region 10 (Region 10) contracted with ICF International and Wexford, Inc. to plan and conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the implementation of the TxVSN. This evaluation includes an examination of the extent to which the TxVSN meets its goals of providing: (a) high quality courses in an online learning environment, (b) equitable access to those courses, (c) courses that are likely to benefit students applying to postsecondary institutions, and (d) courses that allow students to earn college credit or other advanced credit.

The main objective of the evaluation, as described in the evaluation plan, is to examine the effectiveness of the TxVSN Central Operations and Course Review in the implementation of the contractual, statutory, and legislative directives governing the project. This objective, as well as the research questions described later in this report, will guide the development of data collection protocols, interpretation of results, and presentation of the evaluation findings.

1.3 Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this interim evaluation report is to describe the development and current status of the TxVSN program, and discuss the policies and processes established to create, implement, and improve the TxVSN. This report summarizes the implementation of the TxVSN program from a historical perspective, including a description of the progress of the implementation of the contractual, statutory, and legislative directives governing the project. Furthermore, this report provides a high-level summary of baseline extant data related to program participation and looks forward to what will be learned throughout the two-year evaluation of the TxVSN program. Lastly, this report includes a summary of initial information collected that will guide the analysis of research on other state-led or statewide virtual schools and concludes with a description of the next steps in the TxVSN program evaluation.

2. Establishment and Implementation of the TxVSN

This section provides an overview of the policies and processes established to create, implement, and improve the TxVSN. A description of the structure and function of the TxVSN organization, advisory council, course review process, central operations, receiver districts, and outreach functions are provided. Related data collected during the first few years of startup and implementation of the TxVSN are summarized and included throughout this section where appropriate. Specifically, this section concludes with a summary of feedback collected by TxVSN staff through focus groups and interviews.

2.1 Summary of the Authorizing Legislation and TEA's Administrative Authority

Senate Bill 1788, passed by the 80th Legislature in 2007, called for the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to have administering authority over the development of a statewide network that provides students with high quality online courses. As a result of this legislation, TEA created the Texas Virtual School Network (TxVSN). Passage of SB 1788 led to the codification of Chapter 30A State Virtual School Network in the Texas Education Code (TEC). House Bill 3646, passed by the 81st Legislature in 2009, called for additional amendments to the TEC.

The TEC, as amended by authorizing legislation, outlines TEA's administrative authority as it relates to the TxVSN. Specifically, the TEC describes the governance of the Network, general powers and duties,

designation of administering authority, reports, limitations on administering authority powers, contracts with virtual school service providers, course eligibility, and reporting to the legislature. Table 2.1 provides a summary of each of these aspects of the TxVSN with a reference to the applicable sections of the TEC.

Table 2.1. TxVSN Administrative Authority as Codified in the Texas Education Code (TEC)

Administrative Provision	Summary	TEC Reference
<i>Governance of Network</i>	TEA is responsible for administering the TxVSN and ensuring that high-quality education and equitable access to courses are offered through the network. TEA is required to solicit advice from school districts concerning administration of the network and adoption of rules.	Sec. 30A. 051
<i>General Powers and Duties</i>	TEA has exclusive jurisdiction over TxVSN assets and is responsible for providing a biennial budget to the legislature. TEA employs a limited number of administrative employees and has a contract with a regional education service center to operate the network.	Sec. 30A. 052
<i>Designation of Administering Authority</i>	TEA must designate an agency employee or group of agency employees to act as the administering authority for the network.	Sec. 30A. 053
<i>Limitations on Administering Authority Powers</i>	TEA does not provide educational services directly to students.	Sec. 30A. 055
<i>Contracts with Virtual School Service Providers</i>	All contracts between TEA and TxVSN providers (school district, OECS, or public or private institution of higher education) are public and include a provision that allows TEA to cancel the contract without penalty.	Sec. 30A. 056
<i>Course Eligibility in General</i>	TEA is responsible for paying the cost of evaluating and approving electronic courses. If TEA does not have sufficient funds to cover the cost of evaluating all submitted courses it must give priority to courses meeting certain criteria. If TEA determines there are not sufficient funds to evaluate a course, the Course Providers may elect to pay these costs to ensure that the evaluation occurs.	Sec. 30A. 105
<i>Reporting to the Legislature</i>	No later than January 1, 2011, TEA is responsible for submitting reports to the legislature that include its findings and recommendations related to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whether Course Providers should be compensated differently based on course type offered - The feasibility of offering language acquisition courses through TxVSN along with recommendations for ensuring student progress towards language proficiency - The feasibility of creating TxVSN course series for students in alternative education settings, including a full-time educational program, only supplemental courses, and/or courses for credit recovery. 	Sec. 92 Sec. 93 Sec. 94

Source: Texas Education Code – September 30, 2010

The TEC also provides guidance on the operational, course evaluation, and professional development (PD) requirements of the Network. Table 2.2 lists a summary of each of these functions of the TxVSN.

Table 2.2. TxVSN Functions as Codified in the Texas Education Code (TEC)

Function	Summary	TEC Reference
Operational	Funding: The cost of operating the TxVSN is borne by the state; with the exception that TEA may accept grant and federal funds for the purposes of operating the network.	Sec. 30A. 151 Sec. 30A. 152
	Listing of Electronic Courses: Central Operations publishes the criteria for courses that may be offered through the network. Course Review uses the criteria to evaluate submitted courses, and Central Operations makes the list of approved electronic courses publicly available on the TxVSN website.	Sec. 30A. 102
	Students: Students eligible to enroll in a TxVSN course are younger than 21 on September 1 of the school year, have not graduated from high school, are otherwise eligible to enroll in a Texas public school, and have been enrolled in a public school in the preceding school year. Eligible students may also be dependents of a member of the United States military if they meet enrollment and residential requirements. Students enrolled full-time in a school district or OECS may take one or more electronic courses. A student may continue enrollment in an electronic course if he/she transfers to another educational setting after beginning enrollment in the course.	Sec. 30A. 002 Sec. 30A. 107 Sec. 30A. 1051
	Provider Districts/Open Enrollment Charter Schools: School districts and OECS that are rated Academically Acceptable or higher are eligible to serve as Course Providers. Provider districts and OECS are entitled to an allotment of \$400 for each student that successfully completes a TxVSN course, provided that course satisfies a graduation requirement and is part of a normal course load.	Sec. 30A. 101 Sec. 42. 159
	Receiver Districts: The school district or OECS in which the student is enrolled is entitled to an allotment of \$80 to reimburse the district or school for associated administrative costs. This allotment is contingent on a student’s successful completion of the entire course.	Sec. 42. 160
Course Evaluation	Courses offered through the network must: (a) be in a subject that is part of the required curriculum, (b) be aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and (c) have equivalent instructional rigor and scope as traditional face-to-face class.	Sec. 30A. 104
	TxVSN Course Review: (a) establishes a schedule for the annual submission and approval process for electronic courses, (b) evaluates electronic courses to be offered through the network, and (c) approves electronic courses that meet established criteria no later than August 1 of each year.	Sec. 30A. 105
	A Provider District may appeal Course Review’s refusal to approve a submitted course and TEA may overrule this decision. In the case of an appeal, TEA’s decision is final and cannot be appealed.	Sec. 30A. 106
Professional Development (PD)	In addition to being certified to teach their grade level and subject, TxVSN teachers must complete PD training that prepares them to be online instructors. PD is also required of college instructors who provide instruction for dual credit courses offered through the network.	Sec. 30A. 111
	TxVSN Central Operations has administering authority to approve professional development providers.	Sec. 30A. 112
	TEA has established objective standard criteria for determining the quality of an electronic professional development course.	Sec. 30A. 113

Source: Texas Education Code – September 30, 2010

2.2 Structure and Function of the TxVSN Organization

TEA is the administering authority for the TxVSN. In this capacity, TEA has oversight of the TxVSN Advisory Council and the operational branches of the TxVSN, which include Course Review, Central Operations, and approved providers of professional development (Figure 2.1). Through an RFP process, ESC Region 4 was awarded responsibility for TxVSN Course Review. ESC Region 10, in collaboration with the Harris County Department of Education (HCDE), was selected by TEA to serve as TxVSN Central Operations. Approved TxVSN Professional Development Providers are selected through a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process. All approved PD providers must offer courses that meet the national standards for quality online teaching set forth by iNACOL. As described earlier, ICF International and Wexford, Inc. were selected to serve as the external evaluators of the TxVSN. Evaluators report to Region 10 as the fiscal agent of the evaluation contract, but are engaging all parties involved in the TxVSN as part of conducting the evaluation.

Figure 2.1. Structure of the TxVSN

<p>Texas Education Agency <i>Administering Authority</i></p> <p>TEC § 30A.052. The commissioner shall: (1) employ a limited number of administrative employees in connection with the network</p>	
<p>TxVSN Advisory Council</p> <p>TEC § 30A.051 To the extent practicable, the commissioner shall solicit advice from school districts concerning: the administration of the state virtual school network and adoption of rules...</p>	
<p>ICF International / Wexford Institute Independent Evaluator of the TxVSN</p>	
<p>TEC § 30A.052. (2)(c) contract with a regional education service center for the service center to operate the network.</p> <p>TEC §30A.102 requires electronic courses submitted by a provider school district or school to be reviewed.</p>	<p>TEC §30A.111 Instructors must successfully complete the appropriate professional development before teaching an electronic course offered through network.</p>
<p>Texas Virtual School Network Region 10 ESC Harris County Department of Education</p>	<p>TxVSN Approved Professional Development Providers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Education Development Center, Inc. ▫ ESC Region 1 ▫ ESC Region 4 ▫ ESC Region 11 ▫ ESC Region 16 ▫ Harris County Dept. of Education ▫ Texas A&M University CDLR ▫ University of Houston Clear Lake ▫ PBS TeacherLine of Texas ▫ LincoTower, LLC ▫ And more coming...

Source: TxVSN Website (www.txvsn.org)

2.3 Description of the TxVSN Advisory Council

The TxVSN Advisory Council was established to provide TEA, Central Operations, and Course Review with input and recommendations on the implementation of the TxVSN. The Advisory Council is comprised of Texas educators, professional developers, technology leaders, and experts in K-16 education as well as the field of online learning. The council currently includes 21 members representing 12 school districts, four state agencies, and five national agencies/organizations. Council members' primary role is to participate in meaningful and expert-based discourse that assists TEA in making informed decisions related to administering the Network.

Advisory Council Meetings

The Advisory Council first convened in June 2008, with subsequent meetings occurring quarterly. Each year (June) the Advisory Council has one face-to-face meeting, two virtual webinar meetings, and communicates in other ways in between formal meetings. The annual June meetings provide TEA with the opportunity to engage council members in discussion of pertinent topics related to the administration of the TxVSN. Table 2.3 lists the discussion topics presented to the Advisory Council at the June meetings each year.

Table 2.3. Summary of Advisory Council Annual June Meetings, 2008 to 2010

Topics	Discussion Outcome Highlights
June 2008	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should course reviews be conducted in two separate parts (TEKS alignment by curriculum specialists and iNACOL National Standards alignment by online savvy teachers), or should reviews continue as a full review of both areas by one review team? • How often should courses be reviewed? • What constitutes significant course modification? • What online instructor credentials might cause the professional development requirement to be waived? • With what frequency must the professional development requirement be renewed? • What TxVSN funding model would best benefit Texas students, school districts and open enrollment charters? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group recommended a full-review. • An approved, final change in the course TEKS would prompt the need for a course review. This review would occur 12 to 18 months after an approved course TEKS is released. • Deletion of essential technical or resource components should be considered a significant modification. The benchmark figure of a 10% modification should be considered. • Online teachers with two or more years of experience teaching online academic courses for high school students and/or have a graduate degree in online or distance learning, do not have to take the TxVSN approved professional development every three years. • Consideration should be given to using the textbook allotment, high school allotment, technology allotment, or other state funding to pay for courses. Districts should receive full ADA funds for virtual courses. Legislature should consider weighted funding, scholarships for targeted students, and/or straight ADA funding. Receiver districts could consider sending a fraction of ADA funding (one-sixth per credit) to the provider district.
June 2009	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the course costs, what required materials should be available within the course LMS, supplied by the course provider and what is reasonable to expect a student to obtain? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision to rely on the student and the district to “shop” the catalog carefully • Final grade of 70 or better; All required course activities and assessments are completed.

Topics	Discussion Outcome Highlights
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the definition of student success? • With the possibility of funding to pay for TxVSN courses, what enrollment priorities should be established to equitably serve students statewide? • What phase-in plan should TxVSN implement for currently approved courses to meet Section 508 standards and universal design principles? • If you were a course reviewer, what demonstrable evidence of interaction would you expect to see? • When course seats remain after priority enrollments are met, how might the TxVSN serve middle and high school students wanting to accelerate on graduation requirements; as well as, students eligible to enroll in Texas public school, but not currently enrolled? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students in grades 9-12 enrolled in a Texas public school district or OEC; Student must be physically present on campus to generate ADA; Must be enrolled in a course that satisfied graduation requirements; students enrolled in dual credit courses must meet The Higher Education Coordinating Board’s enrollment priorities. • Measurement tool and benchmark and timelines to be developed. • At least two types of Instructor/Student interaction and two types of Student/Student interaction. They should be quality interactions, frequent, and on-going. • Districts and OEC first, private and home school students next; Middle school students eligible for summer courses; Commissioner has identified funds for students to take courses “outside” the normal course load.
June 2010	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways can the TxVSN assure our receiving districts that quality coursework and instruction is delivered to every student? • In what ways might the TxVSN ensure that teachers are implementing these best practices in online teaching consistently? • How can the TxVSN improve its completion rate by reducing the number of drops and increasing the number of successful completions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes not available as of September 30, 2010

Source: Analysis of TxVSN Documentation: Summary Notes from Annual Advisory Council Meetings (2008 to 2010)

2.4 Description of the Course Review Function

Course Review, under the administration of ESC Region 4, is responsible for reviewing all submitted electronic courses prior to the courses being offered through the TxVSN. Courses submitted to TxVSN Course Review undergo a rigorous review process to ensure that only high quality courses are listed in the TxVSN Catalog. Courses must be 100% aligned to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for their specific discipline and must also meet or exceed the National Standards of Quality for Online Courses as endorsed by iNACOL. It should be noted that submitting courses for review and applying to be a course provider are concurrent activities. Eligible Providers that submit more than one course for review must prioritize their courses in the order in which they want them reviewed. An overview of the course review process is summarized in the following subsections about actions that take place before, during, and after the course review process.

Before Course Review

Provider Districts and Open Enrollment Charter schools that meet TxVSN eligibility requirements, submit courses for approval to Course Review. Eligible providers prepare each course for review by first submitting a series of forms and documents including: Provider District Priority List, TxVSN Course Review Submittal Form, TEKS Correlation Document, Course Review Questionnaire, Course Syllabus, TxVSN Course Review Access Form, Science Field and Laboratory Investigations Course Review

Documentation (science courses only), College Board AP Documentation (AP courses only). A description of these forms and documents is shown in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4. Description of Provider District Forms and Documents Required by Course Review

Form or Document	Description
<i>Provider District Priority List</i>	Eligible Providers submitting more than one course for review must prioritize their courses in the order in which they want them reviewed; however, TEA ultimately decides which courses will be reviewed.
<i>TxVSN Course Review Submittal Form</i>	Completed by the eligible Provider. General application form with information about the course to be submitted for review.
<i>TEKS Correlation Document</i>	Each course submitted includes a document that describes where each TEKS Student Expectations are taught in the course as well as at what level Bloom's Taxonomy the TEKS should be taught. Every course must be 100% aligned, including the Bloom's level to the TEKS.
<i>Course Review Questionnaire</i>	This form allows each Provider District the opportunity to explain how the course instructor's interactions enrich and complete the TEKS instruction to ensure 100% alignment. It also allows the course reviewers to gather data specifically for all of Standard E and a portion of Standard D of the National Standards of Quality for Online Courses. Course reviewers do not see evidence of these particular criteria when reviewing a course; detailed responses aid in meeting the National Standards.
<i>Course Syllabus</i>	Provider Districts submit a course syllabus for each course being reviewed. Providers are given a sample syllabus to follow but are allowed to decide the final design of the course syllabus. The syllabus must include alignment with the National Standards of Quality for Online Courses.
<i>TxVSN Course Review Access Form</i>	Providers complete this form for each course being submitted. This form allows reviewers access to the course for evaluation purposes. Reviewers should be given the maximum allowable access to a course to conduct a thorough review.
<i>Science Field and Laboratory Investigations Course Review Documentation</i> (Science Courses Only)	Provider Districts submitting online science courses must complete the Science Investigations Documentation describing each field or laboratory investigation. All secondary science TEKS begin with the expectation that students will spend at least 40% of instructional time conducting field and laboratory investigations using safe, environmentally appropriate, and ethical practices. Only hands-on and blended labs will count towards the required 40% of time.
<i>College Board AP Documentation</i> (AP Courses Only)	Advanced Placement courses are not evaluated for 100% alignment with the TEKS. In lieu of the TEKS alignment documentation, Advanced Placement Courses are required to submit the College Board Audit documentation. After a course has been approved this documentation must be submitted yearly. All Advanced Placement courses are evaluated against the National Standards of Quality for Online Courses.

Source: Analysis of TxVSN Documentation and TxVSN website – September 2010

As courses are submitted to Course Review, Provider Districts are contacted to acknowledge their course submission. A review of the submission occurs to verify that all required documents have been included. Course Review also communicates to the Provider Districts its ability to conduct the review(s) within the current budget cycle or following budget cycle. If submission(s) cannot be conducted until a new budget cycle, the submissions are kept on file for future review.

Final selection of courses to be reviewed each year is determined by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). TEA selects courses for review based on priorities, demand, and available budget. TEA uses the following set of priorities when selecting courses for review:

- Courses that are needed for high school graduation requirements
- Foundation courses that satisfy the new 4:4 requirements in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies
- Advanced Placement courses
- Languages other than English

During Course Review

Course Review assigns a team of three reviewers to each course selected for review. Course reviewers are Texas certified teachers with content certification for the course to be reviewed who have completed a Course Review training program. Course reviewers independently review each course to determine if the submitted course aligns with the corresponding TEKS and meets or exceeds the National Standards of Quality for Online Courses adopted by iNACOL.

Using the National Standards of Quality for Online Courses Review Instrument and the TEKS Alignment Instrument, the reviewers rate course components on a scale from 0 to 4, where 0 is “absent, component is missing”, and 4 is “very satisfactory, no improvement needed.” Reviewers’ comments, recommendations, and scores are aggregated and averaged to determine an overall score of each criterion. To be approved, course ratings must fall in the satisfactory or very satisfactory range.

After Course Review

Based on reviewer data, a Course Review Report is generated and accepted by TEA and is then delivered to the course provider. The report summarizes where, if at all, a course does not meet expectations or requirements and offers suggestions for improvement. The report includes the overall course rating, reviewers’ comments, recommendations and average scores on the National Standards of Quality for Online Course Review Instrument and TEKS Alignment Instrument. Based on the overall rating, the course is either entered into the TxVSN Catalog to be offered to Texas students, or the Provider District completes required modifications to the course and submits it for re-review. Courses receive one of the following overall ratings:

- *Approved* – Course is placed in the TxVSN Catalog and Central Operations begins the contract process with the Course Provider.
- *Approved with Modifications* – Within 45 days of receiving the review results, the Course Provider makes minor modifications identified by reviewers and re-submits the course for review by the Course Review Project Manager. The course is reviewed to confirm the changes, and if modifications are complete, the course is approved and placed in the TxVSN Catalog. A course requiring modifications may be resubmitted for review no more than 3 times in 24 months.
- *Not Approved: Major Modifications* – Within 120 days of receiving the review results, the Course Provider makes major modifications identified by reviewers and resubmits the course for review by the Course Review Project Manager. The course is reviewed to confirm the changes, and if modifications are complete the course is approved and placed in the TxVSN Catalog. A course requiring modifications may be resubmitted for review no more than 3 times in 24 months.
- *Not Approved* – The course does not meet the criteria to be placed in the TxVSN Catalog. To be considered again, the Course Provider must modify the course and resubmit it for a full review.

2.5 Description of Central Operations

Central Operations was awarded to ESC Region 10 in collaboration with Harris County Department of Education. The role of Central Operations is to create and maintain the overall network, approve Provider District and Receiver District contracts, provide a publicly accessible list of approved electronic courses, coordinate course registration and student enrollment, coordinate TxVSN performance reporting to TEA, and coordinate Provider District and Receiver District financial transactions. Through a subcontract with ESC Region 10, the Harris County Department of Education is responsible for creating and managing the technology infrastructure for the TxVSN as well as providing approved professional development for teachers intending to be online instructors with the TxVSN.

Oversight of Provider District and Receiver District Contracts

Central Operations reviews applications submitted by prospective Provider Districts. Upon approval of the application, Central Operations notifies Course Review. After approval of submitted courses, Central Operations and Provider Districts enter into contract and Central Operations makes the approved courses available to Receiver Districts. Central Operations currently has contracts with 10 high school Course Providers including six school districts, two ESCs, one district collaborative, and one ESC collaborative.

Table 2.5. Approved TxVSN Provider Districts

Provider Type	Provider Name
<i>Texas Independent School District (ISD)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alief ISD • Amarillo ISD • Mansfield ISD • Mineral Wells ISD • Pasadena ISD Virtual School • Plano ISD
<i>Education Service Center (ESC)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESC Region 6 • ESC Region 12
<i>District Collaborative</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SUPERNet Consortium (East Texas districts)
<i>ESC Collaborative</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texas Virtual School (ESC Region 4)

Source: TxVSN Website (www.txvsn.org) – September 2010

Receiver Districts must sign an agreement with TxVSN. Central Operations requires that these districts complete this agreement annually.

Oversight of Dual Credit Course Pilot Program

Work on the TxVSN dual credit pilot began prior to the HB 3646 statutory requirement to offer college credit courses. During the first year of TxVSN operations, Central Operations heard requests for dual credit courses. Districts cited many reasons for needing online dual credit. These included:

- Offering students the opportunity to get college credit while still in high school
- Providing students with scheduling flexibility afforded by online courses compared to face-to-face dual credit courses and existing videoconferencing courses provided by ESCs and IHEs
- Addressing rural districts' concern that travel to face-to-face service area colleges is inefficient and cost prohibitive for many families
- Addressing rural district's concern that it is not economical or efficient to send a face-to-face

teacher to instruct a very small number of students

- Addressing districts’ desire to expand dual credit course offerings beyond what is currently offered by their attendance zone school district

Research by TxVSN staff on the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) accountability website indicated that community colleges provided the majority of dual credit courses for Texas juniors and seniors. Further research indicated that participating community colleges and technical schools shared online courses through the Virtual College of Texas (VCT). Approved by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the VCT host (service area college) enrolls students locally to take courses from remote (provider) colleges, awards course credit, proctors exam, and includes the courses on its own transcripts. The VCT provider (remote) college provides instructors who define course content and instructional methodologies, directs all class activities, including assignments and tests, and awards final grades.

The TxVSN approached the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) eLearning Committee about how the VCT system might work in the TxVSN system and those involved in the discussion agreed that a small pilot would be appropriate. To pilot the dual credit course program, it was decided to limit courses to US History, Economics, and Government and the TACC sent an invitation to college presidents explaining the pilot and asking for participation. The following community colleges decided to participate and submitted courses for course review and inclusion in the TxVSN catalog. Two universities were later added to the pilot.

Table 2.6. Community Colleges and University Dual Credit Pilot Program Participants

Institution of Higher Education	Location	Pilot Courses Offered
Howard College	Big Spring, TX	US History 1301/1302
Angelina College	Lufkin, TX	US Government 2301
St. Philips of Alamo Colleges	San Antonio, TX	Economics 2301
Texas State Technical College	Harlingen, TX	US Government 2301
University of Texas at Arlington	Arlington, TX	Composition 1301 American Literature 2329 History 1312 Political Science 2311/2312 Art III 1301 Biology 1333 & Lab Psychology 1315 College Algebra Composition 1302 British Literature MATH 1308: Statistics
Lamar University	Beaumont, TX	Composition 1301 American Literature 2326 History 1301 Computer Science 1336 Programming English 1302: Composition (English 4A) English 2322: British Literature (English 4B) Geology 2376 History 1302

Source: Analysis of TxVSN Documentation – September 2010

Maintenance of Approved Electronic Course Catalog

Central Operations maintains and publishes the TxVSN Catalog, which is a web-based list of approved high school and dual credit courses available through TxVSN.

Coordination of Course Registration and Student Enrollment

Central Operations coordinates with Site Coordinators and Purchasing Approvers to facilitate the enrollment of students in TxVSN courses.

Coordination of Performance Reporting

TxVSN regularly reports performance and financial data to TEA, and TEA reports to the Legislative Budget Board, State Comptroller, and other state entities.

Coordination of Financial Transactions

TxVSN Central Operations coordinates payment of the entitled allotments to Provider Districts (\$400 per student) and Receiver Districts (\$80 per student). Provider Districts receive payment when students successfully complete all components of a course. The process for reimbursing Receiver Districts begins when, at the end of each semester, Provider Districts report successful course completions to Central Operations and Central Operations reports these completions to the TEA Finance Division.

Technology Infrastructure of TxVSN

As part of TxVSN Central Operations, the Harris County Department of Education is responsible for building, maintaining, and supporting the technology infrastructure of the TxVSN. The infrastructure components include:

- Course Registration
- Site Coordinator Registration
- Workspace for Site Coordinators and District Administrators
- Help Desk
- TxVSN Course Catalog
- Readiness for Education at a Distance Indicator (READI) Secondary Assessment for Students
- Webinars/Training

2.6 Description of Professional Development Providers

TEC Chapter 30A requires that any teacher providing instruction for an online course delivered through the TxVSN must complete professional development through a TxVSN-approved professional development provider. The list of approved providers has grown from five in 2008 to the currently approved list of ten providers. Among the approved providers are four ESCs, two institutions of higher education, two online professional development companies, PBS TeacherLine of Texas, and the Harris County Department of Education. The training offered by these providers has been approved for beginning online instructors only or for beginning and experienced online instructors. The course length, cost, and available Continuing Professional Education (CPE) hours vary; however, all approved courses emphasize the iNACOL National Standards of Quality for Online Teaching.

Table 2.7. TxVSN-Approved Professional Development Providers (as of September 2010)

Audience	Provider	Professional Development Course(s) Offered	Course Details
Beginning Online Instructors	ESC Region 1	Online Instructor Certification Course	5 weeks, \$500, 25 CPE
	ESC Region 11	Online Teaching	6 weeks, \$150, 18 CPE
	ESC Region 16	Web Instructor Certification Course (I/II)	5 weeks, \$500, 24 CPE
	LincoTower, LLC	Strategic Teaching for Online Learning (I/II)	4.5 weeks, \$279, 65 CPE
	Texas A&M CDLR	Virtual Instructor Certification Program	6 weeks, \$1250, CEUs available
	PBS TeacherLine of Texas	Online Facilitator Training I	6 weeks, \$525, 45 CPE Optional 3 hours of graduate school credit
		Peer Connection Professional Learning Community	Enroll after completion of training (\$129 annually)
Beginning and Experienced Online Instructors	Education Development Center, Inc.	Instructing Virtual School Courses	8 weeks, \$675
		Advanced Online Teaching Skills and Techniques	7 weeks, \$599
	ESC Region 4	Web Instructor Certification Course I	5 weeks, \$500, 24 CPE
		WICC Web Instructor Certification Course II	5 weeks, \$600, 24 CPE
		Online Teaching: It IS for Me! (experienced)	Skills Assessment: \$100 2 week mini training: \$200, 9 CPE Specialty Modules: \$50/per
	Harris County Department of Education	Online Instructor's Training – Part 1-3	2 weeks, \$160, 10 CPE
	University of Houston-Clearlake	Interactive Distance Learning (beginning)	15 weeks, \$1180, 3 graduate credits
		Technology and eLearning Advanced Technology Applications Multimedia Design Applications (experienced)	15 weeks, \$1180, 3 graduate credits

Source: Analysis of Provider Websites – September 2010

2.7 Description of Receiver Districts

By definition, Receiver Districts are those school districts or open enrollment charter schools (OECs) that have students with academic needs including: credit recovery, credit advancement/acceleration for high school students, courses for college credit offerings (dual credit/AP), expanded high school course offerings, and scheduling conflicts/flexibility. The data in Table 2.8 show the number of participating districts and open enrollment charter schools by ESC Region as well as the overall percentage of Receiver Districts and Receiver Open Enrollment Charter Schools by ESC Region. As of fall 2010, there are 401 TxVSN Receiver Districts and open enrollment charter schools. This represents 32% of the eligible districts and open enrollment charter schools in the state. Participating districts vary by ESC Region, with the greatest percentage of districts and open enrollment charter schools participating in ESC Region 11 (47%) and the smallest percentage participating in ESC Region 9 (10%). Among participating Receiver Districts, 93% are school districts.

Table 2.8. Number and Percentage of Receiver Districts and Receiver Open Enrollment Charter Schools by ESC Region

ESC Region	ESC Location	Number of Receiver Districts	Number of Receiver OECS	Percentage of Districts/OECS in the ESC Region
ESC Region 1	Edinburg	14	0	30%
ESC Region 2	Corpus Christi	6	0	12%
ESC Region 3	Victoria	14	0	34%
ESC Region 4	Houston	32	3	32%
ESC Region 5	Beaumont	6	0	16%
ESC Region 6	Huntsville	23	1	39%
ESC Region 7	Kilgore	31	0	30%
ESC Region 8	Mt. Pleasant	11	0	23%
ESC Region 9	Wichita Falls	3	1	10%
ESC Region 10	Richardson	36	6	37%
ESC Region 11	Fort Worth	41	5	47%
ESC Region 12	Waco	15	2	20%
ESC Region 13	Austin	26	1	34%
ESC Region 14	Abilene	11	1	28%
ESC Region 15	San Angelo	15	0	33%
ESC Region 16	Amarillo	26	0	41%
ESC Region 17	Lubbock	20	0	33%
ESC Region 18	Midland	13	0	37%
ESC Region 19	El Paso	4	2	30%
ESC Region 20	San Antonio	27	5	40%

Source: TxVSN Website (www.txvsn.org) – September 2010

Process for Becoming a Receiver District

Central Operations manages and provides oversight for registering Receiver Districts with the TxVSN. Registration is seven-step process, which is described in detail on the TxVSN website (www.txvsn.org). Before beginning the registration process for enrolling students in TxVSN courses, the prospective receiver district must ensure that their students meet established student enrollment priorities. The process for becoming a receiver district is as follows:

Table 2.9. Seven-step Registration Process for Enrolling Students in TxVSN Courses

Step	Process
Step 1	A prospective receiver district completes the TxVSN agreement indicating its understanding of the requisite role the district plays in assisting students to succeed in online courses. The agreement requires the superintendent’s signature.
Step 2	A prospective receiver district activates its campuses that serve grades 9-12 (i.e., the first student enrollment priority) by completing the Campus Activation form.
Step 3	The district receives a TxVSN System log-in to upload student data.
Step 4	Receiver districts employees a Site Coordinator whose responsibilities include coordination and administration of district enrollments and on-site student mentoring (Site Coordinator Handbook). Receiver districts must register their Site Coordinator(s) in the TxVSN System and Site Coordinators must complete training related to fulfilling the responsibilities of their position.
Step 5	Districts complete an annual online Needs Assessment survey.
Step 6	Districts may administer the optional SmarterMeasure pre-assessment to students interested in taking a TxVSN course as a means of identifying those students who are at risk of not doing well in online courses.
Step 7	Districts register a Purchasing Approver whose responsibility it is to approve payment for any tuition-based courses in which students wish to enroll.

Source: TxVSN Website (www.txvsn.org) – September 2010

2.8 Description of the Outreach Function

TxVSN has utilized a variety of outreach strategies to disseminate information about the network including conference presentations, articles in professional journals and newsletters, and dissemination of information via videoconferences and webinars. The main purpose of this outreach is to:

- Distribute general information about the function of the network and the services it provides to school districts across the state
- Notify current participants (principals, site coordinators, students, parents) of upcoming courses, deadlines, and training sessions
- Provide information to potential Receiver Districts on how to begin receiving courses and how to recruit and enroll students
- Disseminate information to potential online Course Providers on how to become an approved provider, and the course review and approval process

Specific outreach activities, which include webinars/videoconferences, communications, face-to-face training sessions, help desk inquiries, and conference participation/exhibits, are described here.

Webinars/Videoconferences

Target Audience: *high school technology teachers/specialists, counselors and principals, school district administrators and technology specialists.*

TxVSN disseminates information about the Network's course options, information for site coordinators, districts, and potential Course Providers via webinars and Texas Education Telecommunications Network (TETN) videoconferences. TETN facilitates videoconferencing communications among educational entities throughout Texas, allowing personnel at regional ESCs and school districts to participate remotely. Webinars, conducted via Elluminate, are web-based presentations promoted via the TxVSN website and accessible to anyone with an Internet connected laptop or desktop computer with speakers.

Communications

Target Audience: *TxVSN Site Coordinators, high school teachers, high school technology teachers/specialists, counselors and principals, school district administrators and technology specialists, school board members.*

TxVSN reaches out to current and potential participants through a variety of written and electronic communication methods. The TxVSN Listserv is utilized to send reminders of key enrollment windows and deadlines, funding updates, and notifications when new courses or providers are added to the catalog and/or data is added to TxVSN web page.

Written notices, letters, and flyers are distributed to high school campuses across the state with information on courses and course registration, how districts can participate in the Network, student eligibility and other general information. The language and information contained in flyers and posters are generated to target two specific audiences:

- Generic – for a general audience; for distribution at conferences, seminars, and meetings.
- Targeted – information for distribution that is specific to a group of participants (e.g., high school parents, high school students, high school counselors)

Face-to-Face Site Coordinator Training Sessions

Target Audience: *TxVSN Site Coordinators*

Topics covered in these sessions include:

- The role and responsibilities of the site coordinator
- Developing working knowledge of the TxVSN catalog
- How to register students in the system
- Providing answers to specific questions site coordinators have about TxVSN

Help Desk Inquiries

Target Audience: TxVSN Site Coordinators, Providers, and Receiver Districts.

Site coordinators, Receiver Districts, Course Providers and anyone needing assistance can submit comments and questions via the TxVSN Help Desk. Inquiries can be submitted by inquires via online form, email, or fax. Requests for assistance can also be made by phone, Monday through Friday from 7 am to 4:30 pm.

Conference Participation/Exhibits

Target Audience: current and potential TxVSN participants, high school students, parents, teachers, high school technology teachers/specialists, counselors and principals, school district administrators and technology specialists.

TxVSN presents and exhibits at national, statewide, and regional conferences. Presentations provide a general overview of the function of the Network, the course catalog, how courses are reviewed and approved for distribution through the Network, course costs, and requirements for participating districts, site coordinators, providers, online instructors, and students.

2.9 Barriers to Program Implementation

TxVSN met its development milestones and began offering online courses to students in spring 2009, yet barriers to program implementation exist. There are a number of issues of concern to TxVSN that are administrative, instructional, operational, and evaluative in nature.

Table 2.10. Known Challenges with Various Program Implementation Areas

Program Implementation Area	Known Challenges
<i>Measuring the effectiveness of professional development delivered to online instructors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While originally tracked by the Texas Education Agency staff, the TxVSN now keeps track of the number of TxVSN teachers that have completed the requisite professional development, but does not know the TxVSN course provider for whom they work. Due to privacy issues, this data is not always collected by the professional development provider.
<i>Establishing measures that indicate Course Providers are delivering courses as submitted to Course Review</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TxVSN oversight of online courses stops after the course is approved. Course providers are responsible for implementing the approved courses, but due to FERPA issues and the number of courses and providers, the TxVSN cannot monitor “live” instruction.
<i>Identifying methods of communication between TxVSN stakeholders that ensure student success</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TxVSN does not have access to accurate email addresses for students (primarily because most districts do not allow students to have an email address or use a single email address for all students).
<i>Evaluating the satisfaction of TxVSN stakeholders (i.e., students, provider districts, receiver districts)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current use of statewide focus groups is time intensive. Course Providers administer end-of-course surveys to students, but are not required to share those data with TxVSN. Stakeholders are experiencing “survey fatigue,” requiring TxVSN to consider other means by which to gather data. There is disparity in the quality of student mentoring across districts.

Program Implementation Area	Known Challenges
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The response rate to student surveys is low so the timing and frequency of administering surveys needs to be addressed.
Minimizing Course Drops and Increasing Course Completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority of Receiver Districts are single high school districts whose administrators and students have limited experience with rigorous online courses*. Student completion of the Readiness for Education at a Distance Indicator (READI) assessment is optional, and therefore few districts take advantage of this diagnostic tool. Most course drops occur during the last week of instruction*. Potential to lose Provider Districts or for Provider Districts to inflate grades if course drops do not decrease because providers do not get the entitled allotment if students fail or withdraw.
Using TxVSN to meet the needs of students with special needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phasing in Section 508 compliance. All courses are reviewed for web accessibility standards and providers are working with Course Review to implement TxVSN specific standards. Providers must serve students with special learning needs; however, providers have varying levels of experience in collaborating with students' home district to implement assistive technology and other needs.

Source: Analysis of TxVSN Documentation

*A concern expressed during May 2010 Advisory Council Meeting

2.10 Factors That Help Facilitate Program Implementation

Data gathered from focus groups and interviews conducted with Alternative Education Program (AEP) personnel in spring 2010 are instructive to TxVSN program implementation. The inquiry provided feedback that helped TxVSN staff determine if program needs varied by region or by urban or rural setting, as well as by AEP program type. The focus group facilitators queried participants about three main areas related to the TxVSN: Procedures, Model, and Courses. Participants were provided with guiding questions that fell under subcategories within each main area. To begin the discussion, participants were asked to create a flow chart that chronicled their first exposure to TxVSN up to their current status with the state virtual school.

Table 2.11. Topics Discussed During Focus Groups and Interviews

Topic	Subcategory
Procedures	Seven Step Process Registration Windows for Courses Site Coordinator Registration
Model	Workspace Help Desk User Friendliness of Catalog READI Secondary Assessment Webinars/Training
Courses	Viability Rigor and Quality Interactivity Special Needs

Source: Analysis of TxVSN Documentation

TxVSN staff conducted focus groups and interviews in the following locations:

- Windham School District Interview, Richardson, Texas - January 12, 2010
- North Texas DAEP Principals Focus Group, Richardson, TX - January 21, 2010
- Statewide JJAEP Principals and Directors Focus Group at TAAE Conference, Austin, Texas - February 5, 2010
- West Texas DAEP Principals Focus Group, Lubbock, Texas - February 17, 2010
- Texas School Safety Center Interview, Austin, Texas - March 3, 2010

Feedback from Focus Group and Interview Sessions

Focus group and interview participants provided information about factors that help facilitate the implementation of the TxVSN. This feedback was organized into specific topics regarding various procedures used to implement the TxVSN, the model of the TxVSN, and the courses offered through TxVSN.

PROCEDURES: Seven Step Process

Positive Feedback

- Some participants recommended that no changes be made to the registration process

Other Comments/Questions/Suggestions

- Make uploading student data and completing the READI Secondary assessment the last two steps in the 7-step process.
- Send notice regarding registration renewal to Site Coordinators, since in many small districts they are submitting all of the documentation.
- There were several questions regarding the interpretation of READI Secondary assessment data.
- Some participants thought the registration process was too long and had too many steps, too many tabs, and unclear directions in the registration process as areas to address.
- Include more instructions with each step in the registration process

PROCEDURES: Registration Window for Courses

Positive Feedback

- Satisfied with current opening windows which allow administrators to include TxVSN courses as an option when building master schedules
- Like the provider-specific course closing dates
- Catalog is easy to navigate and courses are easy to find
- Terminology used to describe courses as “Open” helpful and intuitive
- Satisfied that terminology to describe courses as “Closed” is being clarified

Other Comments/Questions/Suggestions

- Add the term “Pending” to indicate that an upcoming course is “waiting for registration to open”
- Divide and color code courses by status: Open, Pending, Closed
- Concerns about registering students in courses that are already in progress
- Concerns about multiple registration processes to enroll students in State U courses
- Frustration and confusion that some State U courses are not listed in the TxVSN course list

- Provide districts with verification of completion after completing all seven steps in the registration process and/or send a verification after each step in the process is completed
- Send reminders when registration windows are opening and closing

PROCEDURES: Site Coordinator Registration

Positive Feedback

- Good flow of information during the registration process

Other Comments/Questions/Suggestions

- Provide a direct link to Site Coordinator log in from the TxVSN home page
- Challenges with data interchange caused by “bottleneck effect” when trying to get progress reports, report cards, or determine student eligibility
- Provide definition/outline of assignment completion
- Copy Site Coordinators on emails sent to campus administrator
- Copy District Administrators on approval emails sent to Site Coordinators
- Provide opportunities for Site Coordinators to attend face-to-face trainings through ESCs
- Request to have the District Coordinator approve the Site Coordinator rather than waiting for Principal’s approval
- Provide a list of Site Coordinator responsibilities
- Reorganize the list of course in the drop down menu into core subject areas
- Some administrators are involved in recommending a Site Coordinator, while others only approve the recommended Site Coordinator

MODEL: Workspace

Positive Feedback

- Ongoing website improvements are noticeable and helpful
- Workspace is useable and does not require any changes
- Tabs across the top of the workspace make it easier to enroll students

Other Comments/Questions/Suggestions

- Workspace is cumbersome and not user friendly
- Automatically add Site Coordinator email to Listserv once they complete registration
- Create a section for Administrators and Mentors
- Difficult to locate template used to upload students

MODEL: Help Desk

Positive Feedback

- Help Desk staff are “extremely helpful” and “outstanding”

Other Comments/Questions/Suggestions

- Update FAQs with “technical” FAQs
- Make it easier to update fee-based vs. allotment status if error is made
- Assign Help Desk staff to specific schools and/or districts

MODEL: User Friendliness of Catalog

Positive Feedback

- Catalog easy to use and navigate
- Course Details provide adequate information
- Like the ability to view various syllabi for the same course; aids in comparison when making course selection

Other Comments/Questions/Suggestions

- Clarify “closed” status to distinguish between upcoming courses for which enrollment is pending and those that are closed to registration because the course is full or the end date has passed
- Add “Pending” status for courses that have upcoming enrollment dates
- Provide post-course student rating system (e.g., “star” rating) in the course catalog
- Ask Providers to post a link to their course syllabus that includes the number of proctored exams
- Include a check box on the enrollment screen to indicate if a student is involved in UIL activity

MODEL: READI Secondary/SmarterMeasure Assessments

Comments/Questions/Suggestions

- Mixed feedback on the extent to which districts are using READI Secondary
 - Some using it fully
 - Some not aware of READI Secondary assessment
 - Some aware READI Secondary, but not using it
- Districts interested in learning more about how other districts are using READI Secondary
- Districts interested in having TxVSN compare READI Secondary results to student success rate
- Provide webinars and training on READI Secondary
- Provide more concrete directions on the indicated ranges and what they mean in relation to the probability of student success
- Provide a short summary report in addition to the longer 15-page report the system generates
- Allow districts to complete READI Secondary assessment before uploading student data files

MODEL: Webinars/Training

Positive Feedback

- Webinars are helpful and timely
- Some prefer webinars over face-to-face training
- Good advertisement of upcoming webinars

Other Comments/Questions/Suggestions

- Provide training specifically for the District Administrator
- Use the TxVSN Listserv to advertise TETN sessions and upcoming webinars
- Offer a face-to-face training prior to the start of the school year to help districts get involved
- Require all counselors, whether they are Site Coordinators or not, to attend Site Coordinator training
- Offer webinars that discuss timely changes to the workspace

COURSES: Viability

Other Comments/Questions/Suggestions

- To the extent possible, standardize courses

- Request for TxVSN to provide accountability by visiting courses and monitoring content/instruction
- Too many provider choices, which increases the number of logins and emails that need to be managed
- Send student email confirmation after assignment is uploaded
- Suggest state purchase an LMS that provides a common format for student and Site Coordinator end-of-course surveys as well as a course rating system that includes pass rates
- One district found it helpful to have a content knowledgeable teacher available to provide face-to-face assistance to students taking dual credit courses

COURSES: Rigor and Quality***Positive Feedback***

- The LMS is easy for students to use

Other Comments/Questions/Suggestions

- Mixed feedback on course difficulty
 - Some districts felt the online courses were “intentionally” more difficult than the corresponding face-to-face course
 - Some districts want the courses monitored to ensure that the rigor is the same as face-to-face courses
- Student interest in TxVSN courses is being piqued by feedback from students who have completed courses
- Need better alignment between College Algebra and Algebra 2
- Monitoring student progress is difficult
- Some trouble viewing online video and finding text for dual credit course
- Open entry/exit courses with a lab component create school calendar issues
- Request to add College Trigonometry to the course offerings
- Provide pass rate data organized by core subjects and electives
- Report that in some courses teachers are not communicating with students

COURSES: Interactivity***Positive Feedback***

- Good feedback from instructors, including quick email responses from dual credit teachers
- Evidence of interactivity in courses

Other Comments/Questions/Suggestions

- Uncertain whether feedback in dual credit courses is coming from instructor or teaching assistant
- No or limited interactivity on course discussion boards
- Develop a set of standards for course interactivity

COURSES: Special Needs***Comments/Questions/Suggestions***

- Some districts are not enrolling special needs students
- One district enrolled a special needs student in Driver’s Ed
- Want ability to assign different assessment to students based on their individual needs

3. Summary of Baseline Extant Data

This section summarizes data received from TxVSN project staff on various activities of the Network. Three primary data sources were used to create this section:

- Student-level data on students enrolled in the TxVSN in spring 2010. This data included information on students' completion status (pass, fail, dropped, and incomplete), name of the receiver and provider districts, and course name.
- Course review data on the rating given to each course (approved, approved with modifications, not approved) by the TxVSN course review team for the 2008–09 and 2009–10 school years.
- A copy of the data packet distributed to Advisory Council members at the June 2010 meeting.

Using these data a picture of students' performance by provider district, receiver district, and by course is presented. Additionally, a summary of the ratings given to courses that underwent review as well as a summary of the outreach activities in which the TxVSN engaged is described.

3.1 TxVSN Providers

As of summer 2010, there were nine provider districts approved to provide high school courses, and six IHEs approved to provide dual credit courses. Table 3.1 summarizes the growth in the number of provider districts since the start of the TxVSN by semester.

Table 3.1. Provider Districts by Semester, Summer 2009 to Summer 2010

Spring 2009	Summer 2009	Fall 2009	Spring 2010	Summer 2010
High School Providers				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pasadena ISD Virtual School • SUPERNet Consortium (District Collaborative) • Texas Virtual School (ESC Collaborative) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pasadena ISD Virtual School • SUPERNet Consortium (District Collaborative) • Texas Virtual School (ESC Collaborative) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alief ISD • Pasadena ISD Virtual School • Plano ISD • SUPERNet Consortium (District Collaborative) • Texas Virtual School (ESC Collaborative) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alief ISD • Amarillo ISD • ESC Region 6 • Mansfield ISD • Pasadena ISD Virtual School • Plano ISD • SUPERNet Consortium (District Collaborative) • Texas Virtual School (ESC Collaborative) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alief ISD • Amarillo ISD • ESC Region 6 • Mansfield ISD • Mineral Wells ISD • Pasadena ISD Virtual School • Plano ISD • SUPERNet Consortium (District Collaborative) • Texas Virtual School (ESC Collaborative)
Dual Credit Providers				
n/a	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lamar University * • University of Texas at Arlington* • Angelina College ** • Howard College ** • St. Philips of Alamo Colleges ** • TSTC-Harlingen** 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lamar University * • University of Texas at Arlington*Angelina College ** • Howard College ** • St. Philips of Alamo Colleges ** • TSTC-Harlingen** 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lamar University * • University of Texas at Arlington*Angelina College ** • Howard College ** • St. Philips of Alamo Colleges ** • TSTC-Harlingen**

Source: Analysis of TxVSN Documentation – September 2010

*Four-year university

**Two-year college participating in the TACC Virtual College of Texas

In spring 2010 (the time period for which detailed data was available), seven high school provider districts offered approved courses to TxVSN students (i.e., courses that were not later dropped). A total of 614 high school enrollments were documented. Overall, 30% of these enrollments were registered through the Texas Virtual School ESC Collaborative that offered 19 approved courses; 28% were registered through Amarillo ISD in Driver Education; 22% were registered through ESC Region 6 in Driver and Safety Education; and 14% were registered through the Pasadena ISD Virtual School that offered 7 courses. Less than 1% of enrollments were registered through Mansfield ISD and Alief ISD.

Six dual credit providers offered approved courses to TxVSN students. A total of 618 enrollments were documented, and 80% of these enrollments were registered through the University of Texas at Arlington that offered nine courses.

Almost all providers had the majority of their students pass the course in which they were enrolled. The only provider that did not have the majority of their students pass the course in which they were enrolled was the high school provider – ESC Region 6. Overall, 20% of the students enrolled with this provider passed, 43% dropped, and 37% obtained a grade of incomplete. Every other provider district, with the exception of the Amarillo ISD, had at least 70% of their students passing. In Amarillo, 56% of students passed, 8% failed, 9% dropped, and 27% received a grade of incomplete. Table 3.2 summarizes enrollment and completion by provider.

Table 3.2. Student Enrollment and Completion by Provider, Spring 2010

Provider	Number of Courses Offered	Number of Students Enrolled	Percentage of Total Enrollment Who...			
			Passed	Failed	Dropped	Incomplete*
High School Provider Districts						
Alief ISD	1	2	100%	-	-	-
Amarillo ISD	1	169	56%	8%	9%	27%
ESC Region 6	1	134	20%	-	43%	37%
Mansfield ISD	1	1	-	-	-	100%
Pasadena ISD Virtual School	7	86	80%	19%	1%	-
SUPERNet Consortium (District Collaborative)	7	36	86%	8%	3%	3%
Texas Virtual School (ESC Collaborative)	19	186	83%	16%	2%	-
Dual Credit Course Providers						
Angelina College	1	26	96%	-	4%	-
Blinn College	1	16	94%	-	6%	-
Howard College	1	33	100%	-	-	-
Lamar University	3	47	74%	13%	13%	-
Northeast Texas Community College	2	2	100%	-	-	-
University of Texas at Arlington	9	494	81%	10%	10%	-

Source: Analysis of TxVSN Documentation – Spring 2010

Note: Rows may not add to 100% due to rounding

*Students enrolled in course sections that end after the reporting period are assigned a grade of incomplete.

3.2 TxVSN Receiver Districts

As of June 2010, of the 1,235 districts and open enrollment charter schools eligible to participate in TxVSN, 313 were registered as receiver districts. An analysis of the enrollment data for spring 2010 showed that 128 receiver districts had at least one student enrolled in an approved TxVSN course – i.e., a course that was not later dropped. The receiver district with the largest enrollment was Alief ISD, with 200 students enrolled. Nine of these students were enrolled in more than one course, resulting in a total of 209 course enrollments divided among the 16 courses in which Alief ISD students were registered. The majority (62%) of Alief ISD students passed the course in which they were enrolled. Overall, 13% failed, 13% dropped the course, and 11% obtained an incomplete. Although El Paso ISD only offered two dual credit courses – Psychology and United States Government – with 59 students enrolled, El Paso ISD had more dual credit enrollments than any other ISD. In addition to the dual credit courses offered, El Paso also had students enrolled in three high school courses. In total, 92% of all El Paso ISD students enrolled in a dual credit course passed that course, 3% failed, and 5% dropped the course. Of the five El Paso ISD students enrolled in a high school course, 80% passed and 20% failed.

Table 3.3 shows the enrollment and completion status of students in the 15 receiver districts with the largest TxVSN enrollments. About half of the top 15 receiver districts (8 of 15, or 53%) had less than 70% of their students pass the course in which they were enrolled. These districts were: Alief ISD where 62% passed, Moody ISD (15%), Wellington ISD (0% - all received a grade of incomplete), Anahuac ISD (6% of students enrolled in dual credit courses), Houston (19%), Goose Creek CISD (69%), Responsive Education Solutions (55%), and Uvalde CISD (53%).

Table 3.3. Completion Status of Students in Receiver Districts with the Largest TxVSN Enrollment

Receiver District	Course Type	Number of Courses Offered	Total Enrollment	Total Unique Enrollment	Percentage of Total Enrollment Who...			
					Passed	Failed	Dropped	Incomplete*
Alief ISD	HS	16	209	200	62%	13%	13%	11%
El Paso ISD	DC	2	61	59	92%	3%	5%	-
	HS	3	5	5	80%	20%	-	-
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	HS	3	48	47	98%	-	2%	-
Moody ISD	HS	1	39	39	15%	-	51%	33%
Crowley ISD	DC	6	35	28	89%	11%	-	-
Liberty ISD	DC	6	36	28	92%	8%	-	-
Wellington ISD	HS	1	25	25	-	-	-	100%
Anahuac ISD	DC	22	26	22	85%	12%	4%	-
	HS	1	17	17	6%	-	71%	24%
Houston ISD	DC	5	21	21	19%	24%	57%	-
Navasota ISD	DC	3	21	21	100%	-	-	-
Angleton ISD	DC	7	21	20	76%	14%	10%	-
Goose Creek CISD	DC	7	26	20	69%	27%	4%	-
Lexington ISD	DC	5	20	19	90%	10%	-	-
Responsive Education Solutions	DC	4	20	19	55%	35%	10%	-
Uvalde CISD	HS	1	19	19	53%	47%	-	-

Source: Analysis of TxVSN Documentation – Spring 2010

Note: Rows may not add to 100% due to rounding

*Students enrolled in course sections that end after the reporting period are assigned a grade of incomplete.

3.3 Outreach

According to data received from TxVSN project staff, TxVSN personnel were involved in several types of outreach activities during the 2009-10 academic year, including webinars, face-to-face trainings, and conference presentations. A list of TxVSN outreach activities is summarized in Table 3.4. A total of 167 webinars were hosted, 5 face-to-face training sessions were conducted, staff represented TxVSN through 21 conference activities, and over 3,000 communiqués were documented.

Table 3.4. TxVSN Outreach Activities, 2009-10

Description	Number
Webinars	
Custom District Webinars	21
How to Receive Courses Webinars	25
Site Coordinator Webinars	68
Summer Planning Webinars	26
Advisory Council	2
Course Review/How to be a Provider Webinars	6
Focus Group Webinars	3
Request for Qualifications Webinars	5
TETN Sessions	11
Total Webinars	167
Face-to-Face Site Coordinator Training Sessions	
<i>Locations: Spring Branch ISD, Klein ISD, Lewisville ISD, Denton ISD, Clear Creek ISD</i>	5
Total Face-to-Face Training Sessions	5
Conference Activities	
Conferences – Exhibiting	8
Conferences – Presenting	13
Total Conference Activities	21
Communications/Publications/Help-Desk Activities	
TxVSN Listserv: <i>30 Notifications sent to 725 members</i>	30
Help Desk Calls Answered	519
Help Desk Mailbox Inquiries Answered	2,628
Publication Briefs	7
Total Communications/Publications/Help Desk Activities	3,184

Source: Analysis of TxVSN Documentation – June 2010

3.4 Course Review Status

The TxVSN evaluators received detailed data on the course review status of courses submitted for review in the 2008-09 and 2009-10 academic years. According to this data, 163 semesters of courses were submitted for review in 2008-2009, of which 144 were high school courses, and 19 were dual credit courses. In 2009-10, 218 semesters of courses were submitted for review, of which 186 were high school courses and 32 were dual credit courses.

Although evaluators received a list of courses submitted for review, not every course was listed with its associated initial review rating. Table 3.5 summarizes the initial rating of courses reviewed in the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 academic years. In 2008-2009 only 15% of courses were “approved” on initial review. This number decreased to 1% in 2009-2010. No dual credit course received an initial course rating of “approved.” However, ratings were not provided for 75% of the course semesters.

Table 3.5. Initial Course Review Status by Course Type

Course Type	School Year	Number of Course Semesters Reviewed	Percentage of Course Semesters Approved	Percentage of Course Semesters Approved with Modifications	Percentage of Course Semesters Not Approved	Rating not Provided
High School	2008-09	144	15%	54%	30%	1%
	2009-10	186	1%	40%	44%	16%
Dual Credit	2008-09	19	-	16%	84%	-
	2009-10	32	-	6%	19%	75%

Source: Analysis of TxVSN Documentation – June 2010

Note: Rows may not add to 100% due to rounding

3.5 Course Completion Rates

During spring 2010, TxVSN students were enrolled in 41 courses – 30 of which were high school courses, and 11 of which were dual credit. The high school courses with the largest enrollment were Driver Education (169 enrollments) and Driver and Safety Education (134 enrollments). Both of these courses also proved to have some of the lowest pass rates, and highest drop rates.

The high school courses with the lowest pass rates were: Driver and Safety Education (20%), English I (50%), Mathematical Models and Applications (50%), Driver Education (56%), and World History Studies (57%). The high school courses with the highest drop rates were: Driver and Safety Education (43%), Economics with Emphasis on the Free Enterprise System and its Benefits (10%), Driver Education (9%), Languages Other than English Level I – Spanish (8%), Sociology (7%), and Languages Other than English Level II – Latin (7%). Students did not drop any other high school courses in spring 2010.

The dual credit courses with the largest enrollments were: United States Government (159), and Psychology (133). The dual credit courses with the lowest pass rates were Independent Study in Mathematics (67%), Algebra II (76%), English IV (76%), English III (76%), and Psychology (77%). Dual credit courses with the highest drop rates were: Independent Study in Mathematics (22%), Independent Study in Technology Applications (20%), Psychology (15%), English IV (12%), and Algebra II (11%). Table 3.6 summarizes spring 2010 student enrollment and completion status by course.

Table 3.6. Student Enrollment and Completion by Course, Spring 2010

Course Name	Number of Providers Offering Course	Total Enrollment	Percent of Total Enrollment Who...			
			Passed	Failed	Dropped	Incomplete*
High School Courses						
Algebra II	1	2	100%	-	-	-
Astronomy	1	5	80%	20%	-	-
Business Computer Information System	2	31	74%	26%	-	-
Driver And Safety Education	1	134	20%	-	43%	37%
Driver Education	1	169	56%	8%	9%	27%
Economics With Emphasis On The Free Enterprise System And Its Benefits	2	10	70%	20%	10%	-
English I	1	4	50%	50%	-	-
English IV	2	7	86%	-	-	14%
Health Education	2	39	95%	5%	-	-
Integrated Physics And Chemistry	1	1	100%	-	-	-
Level I - French	1	2	100%	-	-	-
Level I - German	1	3	67%	33%	-	-
Level I - Latin	1	32	100%	-	-	-
Level I - Spanish	1	26	73%	19%	8%	-
Level II - French	1	27	59%	41%	-	-
Level II - Latin	1	15	93%	-	7%	-
Level II - Spanish	1	11	64%	36%	-	-
Level III - French	1	6	100%	-	-	-
Level III - Latin	1	15	93%	7%	-	-
Level III - Spanish	1	8	100%	-	-	-
Macroeconomics Advanced Placement	1	3	67%	33%	-	-
Mathematical Models With Applications	1	4	50%	25%	-	25%
Physics	1	2	100%	-	-	-
Psychology Advanced Placement	1	7	100%	-	-	-
Sociology	1	14	79%	14%	7%	-
United States Government	2	18	83%	17%	-	-
United States Government And Politics Advanced Placement	1	3	100%	-	-	-
United States History Since Reconstruction	1	3	100%	-	-	-
World Geography Studies	2	6	83%	17%	-	-
World History Studies	2	7	57%	43%	-	-

Course Name	Number of Providers Offering Course	Total Enrollment	Percent of Total Enrollment Who...			
			Passed	Failed	Dropped	Incomplete*
Dual Credit Courses						
Algebra II	1	37	76%	14%	11%	-
Art III History	1	52	88%	8%	4%	-
Economics With Emphasis On The Free Enterprise System And Its Benefits	2	17	94%	-	6%	-
English III	2	59	76%	17%	7%	-
English IV	1	42	76%	12%	12%	-
Independent Study In Mathematics	1	9	67%	11%	22%	-
Independent Study In Technology Applications	1	5	80%	-	20%	-
Psychology	1	133	77%	8%	15%	-
Special Topics In Social Studies	2	40	83%	8%	10%	-
United States Government	3	159	84%	9%	6%	-
United States History Since Reconstruction	2	65	92%	5%	3%	-

Source: Analysis of TxVSN Documentation – Spring 2010

Note: Rows may not add to 100% due to rounding

*Students enrolled in course sections that end after the reporting period are assigned a grade of incomplete.

3.6 Summary

The extant data reviewed demonstrate that the TxVSN was very active in the 2009-10 academic year. The Network participated in numerous outreach activities and continued to recruit and register new providers and receiver districts. The data received on spring 2010 revealed that for the most part students are passing the courses in which they are enrolled. When reviewing the data across providers and receiver districts, and by course, the courses that proved to offer the most challenge to participants in spring 2010 were Driver Education and Driver Education and Safety. This finding gives some cause for concern as these courses also had the highest enrollment of all high school courses. Another finding from this analysis is that students in dual credit courses appear to be more successful (i.e., more likely to pass) than students in high school courses. This, however, is not surprising as it is expected that students who enroll in dual credit courses would more likely be at or above the academic level of their peers.

4. Current State of State-Led or Statewide Virtual Schools

This section provides a summary of initial information collected that will guide the analysis of research on other state-led or statewide virtual schools. A more complete analysis of what other states are doing will be presented in the next interim evaluation report in August 2011.

4.1 Trends in the Development of Statewide Virtual Networks

With a majority of states developing statewide e-learning networks, a variety of structures and course models have evolved, as have questions related to policy and best practices. A number of agencies are

collecting information and reporting on statewide networks. To begin to identify evolving structures, models, policies and best practices across the state systems, this report focuses on two recent studies, one from the Heritage Foundation and one from *Education Week*. During the next year, relevant information from additional reports (particularly new reports) will be incorporated, including a report on best practices from the Digital Learning Council. In addition, new information will be collected from large-state networks to determine types of growth patterns in large-state systems and promising practices, and findings will be incorporated into the next TxVSN evaluation report.

4.2 Characteristics of Structures and Models

A report from the Heritage Foundation by Daniel Lips (2010) noted these characteristics of online learning programs and the variations across states:

“Scope. Online programs can be either comprehensive or supplementary to a child's education. Some online learning programs are full-time. The students enrolled in a full-time online learning program do not attend a traditional brick-and-mortar school, but learn almost entirely online. Supplemental programs offer students the opportunity to take individual courses in an online setting to complement their instruction in a traditional school. For example, a student who wishes to take a class that is not offered by his or her school, such as an advanced placement course, could enroll in an online learning program in that subject.

Teacher interaction. Online learning can be delivered in multiple ways. Students can participate in online learning through either synchronous or asynchronous instruction. In synchronous instruction, students and instructors interact in real time. In asynchronous instruction, students learn at their own pace and on their own time schedules. Teachers evaluate their performance and provide feedback, such as grading performance on assignments and answering questions. In both settings, online learning programs generally require regular communication between teachers and students by phone, e-mail, instant messaging, and video conferencing.

Physical location. Some online learning programs allow students to learn exclusively from home, essentially on their own. Other online learning programs are housed in a physical location like a school. In addition, some schools offer "blended learning," which combines online learning with face-to-face instruction.

Jurisdiction. Online learning programs can be funded publicly or privately. Among the public programs, online learning programs can be funded and governed by the state or school district. Many states now offer statewide online learning programs or virtual schools, which allow students to enroll in individual classes. Some states have "cyber schools" or virtual charter schools that students can "attend" full-time. In addition, many school districts and schools offer their own online learning options within the traditional school setting. In these respects, online learning programs can be funded or governed by the levels of government that traditionally oversee American public education: states, school districts, and chartering authorities. However, these jurisdictions, which are largely based on geography, are beginning to change because online learning allows students to receive instruction across district, state, and even national boundaries.

Range of students served. Online learning programs can serve students of all ages and learning backgrounds. Most online learning programs focus on serving older or high school students. A survey of school district administrators about online learning reported that an estimated 64 percent of students participating in fully online programs are in grades 9-12. Elementary students (grades K-5) comprise 21 percent and middle school and junior high school students

(grades 6-8) account for the remaining 15 percent. The survey also revealed that online learning programs are serving a diverse range of student needs from advanced coursework to remedial education. For example, a majority of respondents agreed that each of the following were important reasons for online learning: Offering courses not otherwise available at the school; Meeting the needs of specific groups of students; Offering Advanced Placement or college-level courses; and Permitting students who failed a course to take it again.”

4.3 Current Issues

With more states developing online systems and increasing numbers of students participating in these networks, *Education Week* reported (September, 2010) on these important questions beginning to be addressed about e-educators.

- What quality standards exist for online teachers?
- How should they be compensated and evaluated?
- What is being done to prepare new educators for virtual teaching jobs or help experienced educators make the transition from face-to-face to online only instruction?

Related to these questions, the authors discovered several things.

- Experts say many states and national education groups are behind the curve in addressing the issue of teacher quality for the online classroom.
- Many state-sponsored online schools are setting standards around guidelines from iNACOL and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB).
- Experienced e-educators say leaving a regular classroom to teach in an online-only environment takes more than just expertise with technology.
- Schools combine virtual and face-to-face teachers to meet student needs.
- While the teacher training for online educators lacks consistency and structure at the state and national levels, long-running virtual school programs have learned much about what online teachers need to know to succeed.
- While some virtual schools have well-rounded professional development programs that give teachers the support they need, she said, many—especially smaller virtual schools and online learning programs— do not have the resources to provide teachers with adequate initial and ongoing training.
- Online instructors have more options in their arsenal than ever to help deliver and explain academic content to students—blogs and wiki pages, social networks, and videoconferencing software, to name a few. But even the most experienced online instructors can struggle with which tool to use, when, and how.
- Virtual education experts say graduate programs to train online teachers make the most sense, at least for now.
- Compensation plans for online teachers vary widely depending on the model and who is managing the system/school.
- There is a lack of consistency in compensation and no standards for online teacher pay across the country.
- Virtual schools are constantly collecting data on the actions their online teachers take, and how systems/schools are putting this data together to evaluate online teachers is beginning to come into focus.

4.4 Identifying Best Practices

The newly formed Digital Learning Council (DLC) is a non-partisan organization working group of 50 members with the U.S. Assistant Deputy Secretary of Education James H. Shelton, who heads the Office of Innovation and Improvement, as a liaison to the council. They will create a set of best practices that covers digital-learning issues, including online and virtual schools, classroom technology, equity, security and privacy, and digital content. The first phase of its work will be to develop the list of best practices for digital education. In the second phase, the DLC will encourage states to adopt these standards for best practices in virtual learning.

5. Next Steps in the Evaluation of TxVSN

The evaluation of the TxVSN is multi-faceted and comprehensive. As such, the project is organized into seven inter-related tasks: (1) Project Management, (2) Research on Other Virtual Schools, (3) Focus Groups with and Surveys of Stakeholders, (4) Design, Administration, and Analysis of Satisfaction Surveys, (5) Analysis of Student Achievement Data, (6) Case Profiles, and (7) Reporting. Completion of each task will provide Region 10 with the assurance that all evaluation requirements will be met fully. The evaluation questions that are intended to be addressed through the task are:

1. What measures are needed to compare the success of the Texas Virtual School with success in other state-led virtual schools?
2. What measures are needed to compare the success of online courses delivered through the TxVSN with those courses delivered in face-to-face schools in Texas?
3. What measures indicate student success and achievement?
4. What measures indicate the effectiveness of the professional development delivered to online instructors?
5. What measures indicate that course providers are delivering courses as submitted to and approved by course review?
6. What programmatic changes may be necessary to ensure student success is quantified through data?
7. What methods of communication between the TxVSN, provider districts, receiver districts, students, instructors, and other stakeholders ensure student success?
8. What is the satisfaction of students, provider districts, and receiver districts with current systems and processes?
9. What is the impact of the TxVSN on the academic achievement of participating students?
10. What adaptation to the TxVSN process and systems are needed to serve an increasingly larger and diverse student population?
11. What adaptation to the TxVSN processes and systems are needed to effectively serve students with special learning needs?

One of the first activities of this evaluation is to conduct research on how other state-led or statewide virtual schools are organized and managed. This research will help the TxVSN learn from the experiences of other virtual schools and allow it to set appropriate benchmarks for growth and improvement. This review will be organized around seven key themes: (1) structure; (2) organization/operation; (3) access; (4) coursework; (5) student support; (6) student achievement; and (7) student behavior, attitudes, and dispositions.

More details about the evaluation are included in the evaluation plan, which will be considered a working document. A major update to the submitted evaluation plan will be precipitated by the 82nd Texas Legislature's Regular Session starting in January 2011. Findings from the evaluation will be presented in a series of evaluation reports that will be published in August 2011 and August 2012.

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