

Bringing Students “Home”

How the Ohio Online Learning Program Model
Allows Public Schools to Remain Competitive



LINCOLN
LEARNING
SOLUTIONS

Contents

Introduction	3
Problem	3
Solution.....	3
Advantages.....	5
Conclusion	5
Works Cited	6

Introduction

As the demand for online and charter education options increases, public schools across the nation are tasked with finding innovative ways to retain student populations and meet evolving student needs. Acknowledging that education figures and cultures vary by locale, this paper examines the impetus for and creation of the Ohio Online Learning Program (OOLP), a tuition-free online curriculum program for use by public school districts. Flexible and customizable, this framework is designed to keep students “home” – home in the houses, classrooms, districts, and extracurricular activities to which they are accustomed (Wolfe, 2017).

Problem

In the early 2010s, public school districts in Ohio saw an exodus of students to charter schools, or “community schools.” Per the Ohio Department of Education, community schools are public schools of choice that are “independent of any school district” and “part of the state’s education program” (“Community Schools,” 2016). From 2010-2012, community school enrollments in Ohio rose from 93,699 to 108,448 students, an increase of nearly 16% (see table 1).

Table 1. Ohio community school full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment by fiscal year

FY	FTE Students
2010	93,699
2011	99,844
2012	108,448

Source: “Community School Funding.” *Ohio Department of Education* (2017).

With those students, state funding followed. In 2010, Ohio allocated approximately 7% of its total school funds to community schools. Two years later, community school funding represented almost 9% of the state’s total budget (see table 2).

Table 2. Ohio school funding totals for state and community schools (CSs) by fiscal year

FY	Actual State Total (\$)	CSs Transfer Total (\$)	Allocation of State Total to CSs (%)
2010	9,617,018,092	680,444,827.67	7
2011	9,575,971,065	723,280,663.25	7.6
2012	8,961,288,095	776,614,608.22	8.7

Source: “Finance & Funding.” *Ohio Department of Education* (2017).

In search of a solution for this student – and funding – migration, Ohio’s Cuyahoga County public schools turned to their local Educational Service Center (ESC), a legislated educational service agency charged with providing services to districts that benefit students and families. In turn, the Cuyahoga County ESC approached nonprofit educational solutions organization Lincoln Learning Solutions of Rochester, Pennsylvania, to collaborate on an online program focused on providing a quality curriculum to students and demonstrating accountability for student success.

Solution

Literature examining the draw of charter schools or online programs suggests that the marketplace competition of these options with public schools may create the potential for innovative practices or enhanced curriculum experiences across the board (Stoddard and Corcoran, 2007; Preston et al., 2011). Additionally, in theory, such enhanced curriculum experiences may include increased time spent on activities, “more student-level differentiation” and “a culture of high expectations” (Fryer, 2014).

While “[t]here is no consensus about whether, on average, charter schools are doing better or worse than conventional public schools at promoting the achievement of their students” (Furgeson et al., 2012), there is no doubt that perceived benefits of a more competitive, accommodating, innovative educational system exist.

Thus, before the start of the 2011-2012 school year, Cuyahoga County ESC and Lincoln Learning Solutions aimed to level the theoretical playing field and retain – or attract – students for county public schools. The collaborating organizations created and implemented a comprehensive, flexible online program designed to satisfy student desires for charter or online education options.

With three distinct curriculum options, the OOLP model provides students with the “best of both worlds” – online and brick-and-mortar environments. The OOLP features Totally Online, Blended Learning, and Targeted Curriculum learning paths for public school students. In all instances, students receive a diploma from the public high school to which they are enrolled.

<p>Totally Online</p>	<p>With the Totally Online option, public school students take one or all of their K-12 courses online while continuing to participate in extracurricular activities (e.g., athletics, clubs) provided by the district. This option allows students to determine the degree to which they wish to learn online or in a traditional classroom, and it provides them with flexibility in curriculum choice, scheduling, and setting. All online students are assigned a program-facilitating teacher or a student learning advocate to ensure their success and progress in the online environment.</p>
<p>Blended Learning</p>	<p>The goal of the Blended Learning option is to improve student performance and teacher efficiency. Its instructional model combines the best of the asynchronous student-directed setting with synchronous live instruction during the school day or week. This cost-effective option allows teachers to focus on face-to-face interactions with students who require additional attention. With this option, students can work ahead or review online material as frequently as desired. Like online-only students, blended learning students are assigned a program-facilitating teacher or a student learning advocate.</p>
<p>Targeted Curriculum</p>	<p>The Targeted Curriculum option allows students to explore advanced courses of study or revisit those courses for which full credit was not achieved previously. These targeted curriculum options provide students the opportunity for accelerated study or credit recovery in a fully online environment (Ohio Online Learning Program, 2016). Students in the targeted program also benefit from access to the services of a program-facilitating teacher or a student learning advocate.</p>

According to Lincoln Learning Solutions Senior Student Account Manager Marie Myrlie, enrolled students must remain motivated to complete the predominantly self-paced program. This is where, Myrlie suggests, student learning advocates – certified teachers who help to guide, motivate, and keep students accountable along their individualized learning paths – exhibit considerable value. “[School] counselors often do not have time to keep track of online students’ progress,” she said, noting that student learning advocates step in fill these shoes, monitoring student progress and reaching out to provide individualized solutions to student issues (2017).

Advantages

For public schools, the OOLP's curriculum options create distinct advantages in family, school, and finance. According to Lincoln Learning Solutions Inside Account Executive Rick Wolfe, the OOLP benefits students and their families, as students may earn a local diploma from their home districts, and families may find convenience in the flexibility the program provides (2017). Whether they take full-time or part-time online classes, students may continue to participate in the extracurricular activities (e.g., athletics, clubs, prom) provided by their district, and full online students may take part in one or more classes in a brick-and-mortar setting if desired. According to Myrlie, the program's flexible schedule also serves students and families who may require allowances outside of the traditional learning environment. "We have a decent amount of students with medical issues who find the program works well for them," she said. "They can work around their various appointments and the days when they're not feeling well" (2017).

For public schools themselves, programs such as the OOLP allow them to retain the students and the funding for their districts. The OOLP also enables public schools to expand their current curriculum offerings, providing students with hundreds of courses in subjects and styles to which they may not have access otherwise. Furthermore, districts may remain accountable for student success by monitoring student progress and seat time using the OOLP's robust learning management system and offering participating students access to the services of a designated student learning advocate (Wolfe, 2017).

Conclusion

Early this decade, the student and funding draws of charter and online schools were marked for public schools in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. In response to this competition, county districts employed their local ESC and educational solutions organization Lincoln Learning Solutions to create a program that would meet student needs and keep students "home."

Once established, the Ohio Online Learning Program reengaged those on-the-fence students, and districts reenrolled students and monitored student success. With program flexibility extending to districts, each chose its level of autonomy and interaction with the OOLP (Wolfe, 2017).

Today, the competition between public schooling and its alternatives continues, with Ohio school funding going to "612 public school districts, 49 joint vocational school districts, and approximately 370 public community schools" ("Overview of School Funding," 2017). Despite this market-oriented environment, what continues to set the OOLP apart in Cuyahoga County is its flexible and tailored curriculum and its use of a stout learning management system that closely monitors student activity and seat time. Additionally, the OOLP model uses student learning advocates, who intervene when necessary to ensure that students experience success along their academic pathways, and it offers insight into a workable curriculum model that can be replicated and utilized to fulfill needs of public schools across the country (Wolfe, 2017).

Works Cited

- "Community School Funding." *Ohio Department of Education*. Web. 1 Aug. 2017.
- "Community Schools." *Ohio Department of Education*. Web. 1 Aug. 2017.
- Cuyahoga ESC*. Web. 22 Nov. 2016.
- "Finance & Funding." *Ohio Department of Education*. Web. 1 Aug. 2017.
- Fryer, R. G. "Injecting Charter School Best Practices into Traditional Public Schools: Evidence from Field Experiments." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129.3 (2014): 1355-407. Web.
- Furgeson, et al. "Charter-School Management Organizations: Diverse Strategies and Diverse Student Impacts." *The National Study of Charter Management Organization (CMO) Effectiveness* (2012). Web.
- Wolfe, Rick. Personal Interview. 15 Sept. 2017.
- Myrlie, Marie. Personal Interview. 3 Jan. 2017.
- Ohio Online Learning Program*. Web. 1 Aug. 2017.
- "Overview of School Funding." *Ohio Department of Education*. Web. 1 Aug. 2017.
- Preston, et al. "School Innovation in District Context: Comparing Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools." *National Center on School Choice* (2011). Web.
- Stoddard, Christiana, and Sean P. Corcoran. "The Political Economy of School Choice: Support for Charter Schools across States and School Districts." *Journal of Urban Economics* 62.1 (2007): 27-54. Web.