

NSQ NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ONLINE PROGRAMS



VIRTUAL LEARNING
LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE



TABLE OF CONTENTS

04	Acknowledgments
05	Preface & Statement on Emerging Technologies
06	Introduction
07	List of the Fourteen Standard Categories
08	Standard A: Mission Statement
09	Standard B: Governance
10	Standard C: Program Leadership
12	Standard D: Transparency and Accountability
13	Standard E: Planning
15	Standard F: Program Staff
16	Standard G: Financial and Material Resources
18	Standard H: Program Evaluation
21	Standard I: Curriculum and Course Design
24	Standard J: Instruction
26	Standard K: Assessment and Learner Performance
28	Standard L: Equity and Access
30	Standard M: Instructional Staff Support
32	Standard N: Learner and Parent/Guardian Support
34	Standards and Indicators from The National Standards for Quality Online Programs

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ONLINE PROGRAMS

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For more information or to contact the NSQ Project
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The National Standards for Quality Online Programs has served as a benchmark for online programs, districts, and state agencies since its initial release in 2009, published by iNACOL, and its revised edition in 2019, published by the Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance (VLLA) and Quality Matters™ (QM). In 2023, responding to the evolving landscape of online learning following the pandemic, the three organizations overseeing the National Standards for Quality Online Learning including the Digital Learning Collaborative (DLC), now known as DLAC, QM, and the VLLA, organized volunteers of experts from the international online learning community to further refine this set of standards. These contributors, including both practitioners and researchers, represent diverse organizations committed to promoting and supporting high-quality online educational programs.

We extend our deepest appreciation to Dr. Christopher Harrington and Amy Michalowski, co-chairs of the National Standards for Quality Online Programs project, for their leadership, expertise, and dedication throughout the refresh process. We also recognize the invaluable contributions of the online learning leaders and practitioners representing 26 organizations from four countries. These organizations span districts, state agencies, statewide online learning programs, content and technology providers, foundations, and institutions of higher education.

This refresh of the National Standards for Quality Online Programs would not have been possible without the time, effort, and expertise shared by these dedicated professionals.

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PREFACE

The National Standards for Quality Online Programs is one of three standard sets within the National Standards for Quality Online Learning (NSQOL). The companion standard sets are the National Standards for Quality Online Courses and National Standards for Quality Online Teaching. Designed to complement one another, these standard sets have served as benchmarks for online learning programs, districts, and state agencies since 2007 when they were originally published by The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL). The openly licensed standard sets are utilized to evaluate and improve online courses, teaching, and programs. The standards are designed with flexibility, allowing leaders to adapt them to meet the unique needs of various program types. Several states have incorporated the NSQOL into legislation, state rules, or adopted them as criteria for assessing and approving online learning programs, instruction, and course content.

In 2018, under the direction of Quality Matters (QM) and the Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance (VLLA), the three standard sets underwent an extensive review and revision process, culminating in updated versions released in 2019. In 2021, Digital Learning Collaborative (DLC), now known as DLAC, joined QM and VLLA as co-stewards of the standards, ensuring they remain current and relevant to the evolving field of online learning.

In 2023, under the guidance of the NSQ Leadership Team, an evaluation of the standards began. In recognition of the post-pandemic changes in the online learning landscape, the evaluation began with an examination of current research in the field of online learning and NSQOL usage and satisfaction data gathered through surveys and focus groups. Project co-chairs Dr. Christopher Harrington and Amy Michalowski determined the NSQ Online Programs remained highly relevant, valuable, and comprehensive, and suggested that

the NSQ Online Programs would benefit from a refresh, rather than a full revision. The refresh process would focus on consolidation and clarification of indicators, reorganization of the standards to enhance their usability, and expansion of explanations and examples to increase understanding of the intent and meaning of the indicators.

Outreach to practitioners and researchers in online learning yielded a refresh team with experts from a wide variety of organizations, including statewide and regional online learning programs, state virtual schools, consortia, regional service agencies, state departments of education, district online and blended learning programs, full-time virtual schools, universities, private companies, and nonprofit organizations. The team included professionals from across the United States and representation from three international locations. The team is thanked for their dedication to the refresh process and has been included in the acknowledgment section of this document. After eighteen months of research, conversation, writing, and revision, the updated National Standards for Quality Online Programs are ready for publication.

The release of the 2025 National Standards for Quality Online Programs is an affirmation of the commitment of the VLLA, QM, DLAC, and project contributors to the continuous improvement of all three standard sets. Given the dynamic nature of online learning, the standards must be regularly updated to serve as meaningful benchmarks for schools, districts, statewide programs, and commercial suppliers of online learning.

For detailed information on the review process, a crosswalk comparing the 2019 and 2025 versions, a glossary and resources to support the implementation of the standards, please visit www.nsqol.org.

STATEMENT ON EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

The committees responsible for the review and updates to the National Standards for Quality Online Learning (NSQOL) acknowledge the likelihood that generative artificial intelligence (AI) will prove to be a powerful agent of change in the design, implementation, and use of digital learning at all levels. While this refresh of the NSQOL does not explicitly address AI and other emerging technologies, their implementation must align with applicable local, state,

and national policies and regulations, given the rapidly evolving landscape of guidance and practices in this area. As stewards of the NSQOL, we are committed to remaining responsive to advancements in the field and their implications for education. To support educators and institutions in navigating these transformative technologies, we will provide updated guidance and resources through the Resources section of the NSQOL website.

INTRODUCTION

The National Standards for Quality Online Programs provide a comprehensive framework to support schools, districts, state agencies, statewide online programs, and other educational organizations in improving the quality of online learning programs. These standards are designed to offer guidance while allowing maximum flexibility for a wide variety of users.

The 2025 edition introduces a realignment of the 14 standards from the 2019 edition, now organized into the following clusters:

- Mission, Governance, and Leadership
- Planning, Resources, and Evaluation
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Access and Stakeholder Support

This realignment aims to enhance the usability and coherence of the standards. The 14 standards included in the National Standards for Quality Online Programs are:

Mission, Governance, and Leadership

Standard A: Mission Statement

Standard B: Governance

Standard C: Program Leadership

Standard D: Transparency and Accountability

Planning, Resources, and Evaluation

Standard E: Planning

Standard F: Program Staff

Standard G: Financial and Material Resources

Standard H: Program Evaluation

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Standard I: Curriculum and Course Design

Standard J: Instruction

Standard K: Assessment and Learner Performance

Access and Stakeholder Support

Standard L: Equity and Access

Standard M: Instructional Staff Support

Standard N: Learner and Parent/Guardian Support

Each standard is accompanied by a set of indicators, explanations, and examples to support their implementation.

In addition to the realignment, the 2025 refresh includes several key updates:

- Expanded Standard L: Equity and Access – Incorporates findings from recent literature and best practices to address equity in online learning.
- Updates to Standard H: Program Evaluation – Reflects current trends and methodologies for evaluating online programs effectively.
- Consolidation of Indicators - Reflects the consolidation and clarification of indicators to be more succinct while still remaining comprehensive as a whole.
- Enhanced Explanations and Examples – Provides additional context for the indicators and concrete examples to illustrate implementation strategies.

The *National Standards for Quality Online Programs* are identified on the following pages.

THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ONLINE PROGRAMS ARE ORGANIZED INTO THE FOLLOWING FOURTEEN STANDARDS:

MISSION, GOVERNANCE, AND LEADERSHIP



Standard A: Mission Statement



Standard B: Governance



Standard C: Program Leadership



Standard D: Transparency and Accountability

PLANNING, RESOURCES, AND EVALUATION



Standard E: Planning



Standard F: Program Staff



Standard G: Financial and Material Resources



Standard H: Program Evaluation

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT



Standard I: Curriculum and Course Design



Standard J: Instruction



Standard K: Assessment and Learner Performance

ACCESS AND STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT



Standard L: Equity and Access



Standard M: Instructional Staff Support



Standard N: Learner and Parent/
Guardian Support

MISSION, GOVERNANCE, AND LEADERSHIP



STANDARD A: MISSION STATEMENT

A mission statement of a quality program clearly conveys its purpose and goals. It serves as the basis for the program's day-to-day operations, as well as a guide for its strategic plans for the future. Communication between, and buy-in from, stakeholders are a critical component of a mission statement.

A1

The mission statement clearly and concisely conveys the program purpose and educational focus to the target audience.

EXPLANATION

A clear mission statement that includes organizational purpose is essential in providing direction for individuals to follow as they serve their intended audience. The focus of the mission statement should be on learning, not the method of delivery.

EXAMPLES

A clear and concise mission statement aligns the focus of individuals within the program, so all members of the organization are working towards the same short- and long-term goals. A clearly stated mission articulates what the program is, who it serves, and what it hopes to accomplish, enabling others to understand the purpose of the program or organization. Regardless of modality, all programs should emphasize learning rather than delivery format in their mission statements.

Depending on program structure, the mission might be defined by a governing organization or school district. In this case, the program should have a voice in establishing the mission, and the goals of the program should align with the mission of the parent organization.

A2

The mission statement is made available to the public.

EXPLANATION

To aid in transparency and accountability efforts, a program or organization's mission statement should be publicly available and easily accessible.

EXAMPLES

A mission statement could be included on the organization's website, disseminated to all stakeholders and staff, and highlighted in communications such as newsletters and welcome and orientation messages.

A3

The mission statement is reviewed annually.

EXPLANATION

Annual review of the mission statement will aid the program in keeping it current and relevant for all parties involved.

EXAMPLES

The mission statement should be reviewed and reflected on as part of the program's annual goal-setting process to ensure projects are aligned with the mission. In addition to annual review, the mission statement should be evaluated as part of the program's strategic planning or accreditation cycle, at a minimum of every five years.

Key personnel who will be responsible for reviewing the mission will vary, based on program type. Program leaders will always be part of this process, and depending on the type of organization, the review process should include district leadership or the appropriate governing authority, to ensure the program mission is aligned with the needs of the parent organization.

STANDARD B: GOVERNANCE

A quality program will have a clear governance structure with transparent roles and responsibilities designed to ensure long-term success and sustainability. Governance members will be knowledgeable about K-12 online learning and will have a collaborative relationship with program leaders.

B1 Governance members are well-informed about K-12 online learning.

EXPLANATION

It is critical that board members are knowledgeable about education, the program they are governing, how the program works, and who it serves.

EXAMPLES

The governing body must include members who are knowledgeable about K-12 education and who can ensure the program meets applicable state and national regulations. Governance members who do not have a background in education must be provided professional development opportunities to enhance their understanding of K-12 online learning. Information shared with governance members must be timely, accurate, and aligned with program priorities. All governance members must be provided with an onboarding that outlines the program, its goals, and target population.

B2 Governance responsibilities include policy development or approval and budget allocation approval to ensure the program's vision, mission, and strategic plan are met.

EXPLANATION

Governing board members must be engaged with program leaders to ensure responsible allocation of funds; that program policies align with the program's vision, mission, and strategic plan; and that the program's budget is sufficient to support these efforts.

EXAMPLES

Governance structures may vary based on whether a program is a part of a larger organization. Regardless of program implementation, there must be clear evidence that the governing body is engaged with the budget process and policy approval and that the program has a budget that is adequate to support strategic plans and annual goals.

B3 Roles and responsibilities of the governance and leadership teams are clearly defined and comply with all state and national regulations.

EXPLANATION

Explicitly stated guidelines for the roles of both governing board members and program leaders will help members understand their place within the team and the function they serve in supporting the program. Programs should publicly share information about their governing board. Transparency helps stakeholders understand important details about a program, for example, whether programs are private or public and non-profit or for-profit organizations.

EXAMPLES

Roles of the governing board and program leaders should be described on a website, in an operations guide, or in written handbooks. Governance structure and responsibilities will vary based on program type. For example, a district-based program may have a web page that is linked from the district, enabling visitors to access district leadership and school board information. A stand-alone entity might have articles of incorporation or bylaws, as required by state regulations. Regardless of program type, stakeholders should clearly understand the governance structure and should have access to information about the responsibilities of program leaders and governance members, upon request.

B4

Governance members and program leaders collaborate to ensure successful implementation of vision, mission, strategic plan, and goals.

EXPLANATION

It is essential that the governance and leadership teams have a collaborative relationship that is focused on program goals and strategic priorities. Governing boards must create or approve the policies and regulations that support the learning community and ensure that program leaders are following those policies. Governance members should review program outcomes and quality metrics on an annual basis, at minimum.

EXAMPLES

Collaboration between governance members and program leaders can take a variety of forms, including meetings and phone conversations, collaborative document editing, subcommittee efforts, etc. Annual sharing of program outcomes or quality indicators, with time for feedback and reflection from the governing body, is critical. In the case of a program that is part of a larger organization or public school system, the governing body must create or approve policies that encompass all programs with the parent organization and must be apprised of learner performance and program outcomes on an annual basis, at minimum.



STANDARD C: PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

The leadership of a quality online program is accountable to the program's governance body and is responsible for setting and executing annual operational goals that align with the program's strategic plan and support of the program's vision and mission statements.

C1

Program leaders establish annual goals that are aligned with the strategic plan, implement action plans designed to meet goals, and monitor and communicate progress on goals to stakeholders.

EXPLANATION

Quality organizations establish annual goals and monitor progress to ensure continuous improvement. Goals for program improvement should be based on successes and areas of growth. Stakeholders should be made aware of progress towards goals.

EXAMPLES

Documentation of the annual planning process should exist, with clear evidence that progress against goals is measured and considered as part of the annual goal-setting process. The process should be collaborative and involve multiple levels of staff within the program. Programs that are part of a district or larger organization should complete an independent planning process that includes elements such as a needs assessment and program or school improvement plan.

C2

Program leaders promote a collaborative environment for learning and work.

EXPLANATION

Leadership should work to ensure that both on-site and remote employees are engaged in their work and connected to the program's vision and mission. The leadership team should provide the resources, tools, and organizational policies necessary for a productive and collaborative environment. Day-to-day operations and longer term planning must be present so that employees understand how their efforts meet short-term goals and fit into the strategic plan.

EXAMPLES

There are many ways to establish a culture of collaboration. Strategies include establishing cross-team workgroups to focus on program goals or ad hoc projects. Regular meetings can be used to establish a focus on collaboration, reflection, and improvement. Teachers might be organized in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) to focus on instructional practices and learner outcomes.

C3

Program leaders verify that measures are in place to ensure the quality, integrity, and validity of information used to evaluate the program and measure learner success.

EXPLANATION

Programs should be reviewed using a variety of qualitative and quantitative measures. Every effort must be made to ensure valid and reliable measures are in place to monitor the progress of the program.

EXAMPLES

Leadership might choose to analyze program outcomes using learner performance data, learner surveys, parent/guardian surveys, feedback from site-based support staff, learner attendance and engagement data, normed assessment data, or external review protocols. Data elements should be defined for consistency in evaluation from year-to-year and to allow for explanations of calculated metrics to be shared with stakeholders, as needed. Supplemental programs should not be penalized for lack of access to complete learner performance information and should establish program outcomes that utilize available learner information.

C4

Policies and procedures are reviewed and updated annually.

EXPLANATION

Policies and procedures are living documents that should grow and adapt with a program. Annual review ensures these documents and policies are consistent and effective.

EXAMPLES

The program must have a documented process to review policies on an annual basis. This process must include input from employees across the program. Stakeholder feedback should be considered as part of the review process, though it is not necessary to specifically request input on policies and procedures. Program leaders should ensure that policies do not create unintended barriers impacting learners' ability to access and complete their online education.

Policy adoption and approval processes must include governance bodies as appropriate. Programs that are part of a district or larger organization must demonstrate that program leaders have input into organizational or district policy decisions.



STANDARD D: TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Quality online programs provide potential learners and their parents/guardians with readily available information about program policies and outcomes. Program leaders provide regular and timely information on progress towards attainment of goals, alignment with policies and standards, and achievement of learner learning outcomes to all stakeholders.

D1

Accurate information regarding program policies and outcomes is made available to prospective and current stakeholders.

EXPLANATION

Learners, schools, and parents/guardians have the right to make informed decisions about selecting a program to meet their needs. Accurate information about the program's vision, mission, accreditation status, courses, learning outcomes, services, policies, fees, and strategic plan is a critical factor in the decision-making process.

EXAMPLES

The program's vision, mission, values, goals, and achievements must be transparent and available to stakeholders, so they can compare programs to determine the best fit for them. Parents/guardians should be provided information about the program, successful online learner practices, and supportive learning environments.

Program outcomes and evaluation reports related to the strategic plan should be made available to all stakeholders annually. Outcomes of the program should include standard industry measures such as pass rates, exam scores, performance on nationally benchmarked exams, etc. It is highly recommended that the program or the district/parent organization be accredited by a nationally recognized agency.

D2

Program leaders establish metrics for course quality, learner outcomes, and, if applicable, graduation requirements.

EXPLANATION

Program leaders must identify metrics that will be regularly evaluated and communicated to stakeholders.

EXAMPLES

Programs will document alignment of content to state or national frameworks, including alignment of learning objectives and assessments. Courses meet the requirements of sufficient length and breadth for course credit to be granted, through Carnegie unit determination or a competency-based metric. Course quality can be demonstrated in various ways, including approval for NCAA initial eligibility, Quality Matters approval, AP[®] audit approval, or another standardized quality metric.¹ When applicable, diploma requirements are equivalent to the requirements in the state where the program operates.

D3

Program leaders complete an annual evaluation of metrics related to course quality, learner outcomes, and, if applicable, graduation rates.

EXPLANATION

Programs must prepare learners adequately for post-secondary education and careers. Stakeholders must be confident in a program's ability to help learners earn credit and learn the skills they need to be successful in college, careers, and life.

EXAMPLES

Programs will document annual alignment of content to state or national frameworks, including alignment of learning objectives and assessments. Course outcomes will be measured through pass rates, completion rates, final exam performance, and/or another standardized assessment. Program leaders analyze graduation rate and communicate with alumni to determine whether the program helped lead to post-secondary success.

1. AP[®] is a registered trademark of College Board, which is not affiliated with and does not endorse the National Standards for Quality Online Learning.

PLANNING, RESOURCES, AND EVALUATION



STANDARD E: PLANNING

A quality program engages in regular strategic planning in order to reflect upon and improve program effectiveness.

E1

A strategic plan is developed and updated regularly to address long-term actions.

EXPLANATION

Program leaders should regularly engage with all stakeholders, including teachers, learners, board members, and community partners, to gather comprehensive data that informs the strategic plan. This data collection should include historical trends, baseline information, and projections to enable data-driven decision-making. The strategic plan should be reviewed and updated on a regular cycle to ensure it remains aligned with the program's long-term goals and the changing needs of the school community. Final approval of the plan should be secured from the program's leadership and governance bodies.

EXAMPLES

Frequency and depth of reviews will vary based on program type. At minimum, a strategic plan should be significantly updated at least every 3-5 years. Administrative review and reflection should occur on an annual basis, at minimum, in alignment with development of organizational goals. The method of gathering stakeholder feedback can vary. For example, an online program's leadership team might meet twice each year with teachers, learners, and community partners to analyze data, such as learner performance metrics and technology usage trends, and adjust the strategic plan. Changes are implemented in the following school year to provide sufficient time for faculty preparation. In some programs, the leadership team might reflect on strategic plan objectives as part of the annual data-review and goal-setting process, to ensure organizational objectives align with the strategic plan. Of utmost importance is evidence that documents the recurring review of and reflection on the strategic plan.

E2

The strategic plan addresses the resources necessary to support program priorities and achieve desired outcomes.

EXPLANATION

The strategic plan should include reference to the resources required to support the program's priorities, ensuring that both learners and faculty have access to the necessary tools, curriculum, technology, and support services. This includes allocating human and financial resources for professional development, academic support services, and the procurement of educational technologies. The plan should be regularly updated to reflect the evolving needs of the program and to ensure that resources are used effectively and efficiently.

EXAMPLES

Strategic plan formats will vary, and not all will include direct mention of fund allocation. All strategic plans should include consideration of the funding necessary to achieve strategic goals. In some cases, the strategic plan might allocate funds for purchasing new virtual reality tools and interactive software to enhance the online learning experience and support immersive instruction. In this case, consideration for ongoing professional development workshops to help instructors effectively use these new technologies should be included. The program should plan for upgrading its learning management system and expansion of its digital library to ensure learners and faculty have access to the latest learning materials and tools. The plan should include a designated budget for training new instructors on emerging technologies and best practices for virtual teaching.

E3**Program goals are aligned to the strategic plan and updated annually.****EXPLANATION**

The goals of the program should be designed as actionable steps that directly contribute to the achievement of the long-term objectives outlined in the strategic plan. Program leaders should collaborate with faculty and program staff to gather data and monitor progress toward these goals, making adjustments as needed to ensure goals remain aligned with the strategic plan.

EXAMPLES

In any type of program, leaders must document annual goal-setting processes and include reference to how annual goals align with strategic plan objectives. There are many protocols that will result in strong goals, though it is highly recommended that programs use SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goals and that learner performance or retention is included in at least one goal. As an example, program leaders set a SMART goal to increase learner retention by 10% within the next academic year by implementing a new mentorship initiative and providing additional academic support services. Progress toward this goal is reviewed quarterly using retention data and learner feedback to make timely adjustments. In a separate example, a SMART goal is established to achieve a 15% improvement in online course completion rates by the end of the school year through targeted faculty training and the introduction of interactive course content. Data on course completion rates are analyzed monthly to measure progress and adapt strategies as needed.

E4**Program goals are shared and supported throughout the organization.****EXPLANATION**

Transparency in communicating program goals is essential to fostering a shared commitment to achieving them. Goals should be communicated clearly and consistently across the program's faculty and staff, ensuring that everyone understands their role in the process. This transparency helps build momentum and support for the goals, leading to more effective collaboration and progress.

EXAMPLES

Depending on program type, there are a number of ways that this Indicator can be met. For example, a program leader might hold a virtual town hall at the beginning of the school year to review the previous year's achievements and outline new goals, such as expanding advanced course offerings by 20%. The goals and updates are then shared in monthly newsletters and team meetings to keep all staff informed and aligned. Alternately, program leaders can share reports that outline program success and goals, and then update the faculty and program staff at bi-weekly meetings that include progress monitoring and updates on the goals. Program leaders and managers should reflect on team and program goals at least quarterly.



STANDARD F: PROGRAM STAFF

A quality online program has appropriate levels of qualified, well-trained, and supported staff who have the resources needed to achieve personal and program goals.

F1

Sufficient qualified professional, administrative, and support staff are available to achieve the program's mission and annual goals.

EXPLANATION

It is essential that the appropriate human resources (number and qualifications) are available to ensure the program achieves its mission and goals. Program staff must be qualified and have the level of experience needed to execute job responsibilities. Faculty will hold the necessary certification or licensure that is applicable to their content area of instruction.

EXAMPLES

Program type and structure will impact how program leaders meet this Indicator. An organizational chart should exist and each role must have a job description that includes qualifications, credentials, and desired experience. Staff levels should be sufficient to support anticipated enrollments and include departments such as technology, operations, learner support, curriculum and instruction, and outreach and partnerships. Supplemental programs may not be required to have counseling and dedicated special education staff, depending on program funding and the agreement made with a learner's local school. Quality programs will conduct an annual review of faculty qualifications, ensuring all instructors hold the required certifications for their subject areas. Programs that outsource staffing through vendor relationships should have documented expectations for qualifications, credentials, and staffing levels.

F2

Ongoing training and support are provided to the staff to carry out the vision, mission, and goals of the program.

EXPLANATION

Continuous professional development and support are essential for staff at all levels to effectively contribute to the program's vision, mission, and goals. Training should not only focus on understanding and aligning with the program's mission but also on helping staff achieve their personal and team objectives, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and professional growth.

EXAMPLES

Training and professional development can be provided by program staff or through external professional organizations. Program type might impact how much training is mandated for teachers, though it is expected that all staff members have annual goals that are aligned to the program's mission. These goals will include necessary professional development goals and will be reviewed periodically (at least once during the year) for progress and adjustments. Faculty training should focus on emerging instructional trends and updates to the learning management system. Program leaders should seek feedback on the relevance and effectiveness of training, to refine and improve future training opportunities.

F3

Clearly defined individual and team roles and responsibilities are evident.

EXPLANATION

Each person within the organization should understand how he or she contributes to the success of the organization, with a focus on collaboration, and with all team members working toward common goals.

EXAMPLES

Program leaders will establish and maintain an organizational chart with clearly outlined job descriptions, so that all members of the staff understand how their role contributes to the overall work of the program. Regular cross-team meetings allow team members to better understand how their tasks align with broader program goals and to identify opportunities for collaboration. It is suggested that cross-team meetings should be held quarterly, at minimum. In addition, standard operating procedures (SOPs) and workflows should be documented and shared across the program, ensuring that everyone is aware of their specific duties and how they contribute to the team's success.

F4

Evaluations of program staff occur on a regularly scheduled basis and use clear and consistent policies, measures, and procedures.

EXPLANATION

Regular evaluations of program staff are critical to maintaining high standards of instructional quality and program effectiveness. These evaluations should be based on clear, consistent policies and performance standards, and should provide actionable feedback to faculty and staff. Program staff should be fully aware of the evaluation criteria and understand how their performance will be assessed. When standards are not met, faculty and program staff should receive guidance on how to improve and meet expectations.

EXAMPLES

The program has a clearly defined performance evaluation process that includes setting individual goals at the start of the year, mid-year check-ins, and end-of-year reviews. This process ensures that program staff receive regular and timely feedback on their performance relative to established standards. Faculty evaluations should align with clearly defined instructional standards that support program outcomes. There are a variety of approaches that can be included along with formal evaluations, including peer evaluations or self-assessments. All evaluation protocols should identify areas for professional growth to ensure organizational goals are met and instructional quality is high.



STANDARD G: FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL RESOURCES

A quality online program plans for and expends financial and material resources using sound business practices to accomplish the program's vision and mission.

G1

Resources are managed according to local, state, and/or national budget regulations and accounting principles.

EXPLANATION

Effective financial management is essential for the success and sustainability of the program. Resources must be managed in strict accordance with local, state, and national budget regulations and accounting principles. This includes regular financial reviews by the governance and leadership team, as well as annual independent audits to ensure transparency and accountability. These practices help maintain the program's financial health and build trust among stakeholders.

EXAMPLES

A comprehensive budget plan is developed for each fiscal year, detailing how resources will be allocated across various departments to meet the program's goals. This plan is regularly reviewed and adjusted based on financial performance and emerging needs. The program conducts annual independent audits and shares the results with stakeholders, ensuring transparency and adherence to financial regulations. Programs that are part of a district or parent organization must be able to demonstrate input into the budgeting process and accountability for the management of program resources.

G2

Resources are adequate and allocated to help ensure sustainability over time, according to the program's vision, mission, and strategic plan.

EXPLANATION

To achieve long-term sustainability, it is critical that the program's resources are not only adequate but also strategically allocated in alignment with the program's vision, mission, and strategic plan. This involves careful planning and prioritization to ensure that financial and material resources are used effectively to support both current operations and future growth. The leadership team must regularly assess financial resource allocation to ensure it continues to support the program's objectives over time.

EXAMPLES

The leadership team conducts an annual review of the program's financial resource allocation to ensure alignment with strategic priorities, such as enhancing technology infrastructure. This review informs the development of the next year's budget.

To support future growth, the program reallocates a portion of its budget to fund the development of new courses and the enhancement of its virtual learning platform, based on enrollment trends and learner feedback. Regular assessments are conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of these investments in achieving the program's vision and mission.

G3

Program budget and resource allocation are determined by program leaders using projections established from trends in the educational and business environments.

EXPLANATION

The program's budget and resource allocation decisions should be based on careful analysis of budget projections that take into account trends in both the educational and business environments. This approach allows the leadership team to anticipate changes in funding, costs, and resource needs, and to make informed decisions that support the program's strategic goals. By staying attuned to external trends, the program can adapt its financial planning to remain competitive and sustainable.

EXAMPLES

Program type will impact how the program meets this Indicator. Regardless of the budget model, there should be evidence that program leaders monitor changes in educational policies and funding at the state and national levels, adjusting the budget and resource allocation plans to ensure continued compliance and financial stability. As an example, using regional economic forecasts and learner enrollment projections, the program might reallocate budget resources to prioritize curriculum development in high-growth subject areas. This strategic adjustment demonstrates anticipation of demand and investment in areas that align with educational trends.



STANDARD H: PROGRAM EVALUATION

A quality online program recognizes the importance of program evaluation and demonstrates a commitment to both internal and external evaluations. Internal evaluations are completed on an ongoing basis, for the purpose of tracking learner progress and identifying strengths and areas in need of improvement. External evaluations provide an objective perspective that adds credibility and validates internal findings. This dual approach creates a comprehensive framework for continuous improvement and accountability.

H1

Metrics that guide internal evaluation are clearly defined by program leaders and use valid data sources that include measures of learner performance.

EXPLANATION

Well-defined metrics are essential for tracking program quality and identifying criteria that assess success and establish improvement objectives. Metrics can address a variety of program goals or quality benchmarks related to satisfaction, academic performance, skill development, enrollment trends, etc. The program will use a variety of valid data sources which must include normed learner performance measures, such as national or state examination results. Required disaggregation will be defined by program leaders, in alignment with local, state, or national reporting requirements or in support of strategic plan objectives.

EXAMPLES

Program leaders are responsible for establishing the data elements used for the purpose of internal evaluation. Ideally, metrics will include a variety of benchmarks that track performance of learner academic success and program health. There should be evidence that program leaders share metrics with program staff and governance members. Learner performance indicators must be included in the metrics. Performance should include standardized test results, such as AP[®] exam scores, SAT[®] scores, state assessment results, or other normed academic measures.¹ Data elements may include any other qualitative or quantitative measures that relate to learner performance, governance, management, satisfaction, or responsiveness to stakeholders. It should be noted that supplemental programs might have limited access to learner demographic or external assessment information. These programs should use information available to them, based on their relationship with the learner and their local school.

H2

Results of regular internal evaluations inform management decisions and continuous improvement plans.

EXPLANATION

Internal evaluations are conducted on an annual basis, at minimum. Results of the evaluations are used by program leaders to identify areas of success and target areas for short- and long-term program improvement. This process ensures the program is responsive to needs and continuously evolving to achieve higher levels of learner success.

EXAMPLES

Clear evidence must exist that program leaders are reviewing benchmarks using defined metrics on at least an annual basis and that the results of the evaluation are used to define annual goals and longer-term strategic planning. Ideally, some data sets are reviewed multiple times per year, so that results can inform adjustments throughout an academic year. As an example, a program reviews learner performance data on a quarterly basis, including standardized test results, course pass and completion rates, and learner survey data. Based on the findings, targeted interventions are implemented, such as minor revisions to course materials, provision of tutoring, or professional development to support teacher needs. Longer term plans might include refined instructional standards, review of course standards and learning objectives, or larger content revision projects. The approach will vary based on program type and metrics, but clear documentation of how internal evaluations are used in program improvement is essential to meet this Indicator.

1. AP[®] and SAT[®] are registered trademarks of College Board, which is not affiliated with and does not endorse the National Standards for Quality Online Learning.

H3**Course review protocols are aligned with the National Standards for Quality Online Courses.****EXPLANATION**

A regular process for reviewing and evaluating courses is essential and must include a timeline for reviews and protocol for documenting evidence of reviews. The course review should align with the National Standards for Quality Online Courses and will include items such as currency of content, quality of learning objectives, alignment of content with relevant curriculum standards, evaluation of whether assessment methods support learning objectives, accessibility and quality of resources and course activities, and adherence to design standards.

EXAMPLES

Frequency of course reviews will vary, though it is highly recommended that programs review courses multiple times in the first year a new course is offered. Many programs stagger in-depth course reviews, due to staff constraints, but it is expected that these in-depth reviews occur at least every five years. Program leaders are not required to create a protocol that uses every indicator from the National Standards for Quality Online Courses, but they must ensure the Standards are holistically addressed, at minimum, and that evaluation of learning outcomes is a part of course reviews. Programs should be gathering feedback and conducting limited reviews of courses on a more frequent basis, using learner performance data and feedback to determine if the courses support the desired learning outcomes and meet curriculum expectations. All course reviews should inform in-time curricular revision or redevelopment plans, as appropriate.

H4**Periodic external evaluations are completed by objective parties with experience in online learning.****EXPLANATION**

Periodic external evaluations conducted by highly qualified and impartial parties ensure the overall quality of an online learning program. External evaluations can validate internal evaluation protocols and assess whether a program is meeting annual and strategic goals. External evaluations can be focused on specific elements of a program or can be a more holistic process, such as an accreditation.

EXAMPLES

This Indicator can be met by maintaining accreditation or by engaging with an organization, consortium, or consultant that has experience in online learning. In the case of accreditation, programs can achieve accredited status through one of the U.S. Department of Education's recognized regional accrediting agencies, or another agency with expertise in evaluating quality online programs. Research projects that focus on a specific element of learner performance or program implementation might also be used to meet this Indicator. In one example, a program might hire a consultant with expertise in online learning to review the effectiveness of its internal evaluations and provide an objective assessment of program metrics. Alternately, every two to three years, a program invites a team of experts from a reputable online learning organization to conduct an informal review of its strategic plan implementation and overall progress toward mission-driven goals.

H5**Findings of external evaluations are used to develop annual goals and long-term improvement plans.****EXPLANATION**

A quality online program uses the findings from external evaluations conducted by qualified and objective experts to create and implement annual goals and a long-term improvement plan. This approach ensures that the program is continuously improving based on credible evaluation results and current research.

EXAMPLES

There are a variety of ways that a program can meet this Indicator based on the type of program, requirements of accreditation, and ability to engage with a consultant to conduct research or program evaluations. What is critical is that program leaders document how results of external evaluations are used to inform annual goals and long-term improvement plans. In one example, a program contracts with a certified educational consulting firm and uses the results of the review to develop an improvement plan to address identified gaps in learner engagement and support services, including implementing a new virtual tutoring program. A program may choose to focus on professional development, learner support, or any other area of need. Of critical importance is evidence that the feedback from an evaluation is used to develop an improvement plan with a timeline for implementation and that results are monitored for efficacy and impact.

H6

Evaluation results are communicated to program stakeholders.

EXPLANATION

Communicating evaluation results regularly and clearly to program stakeholders is essential for maintaining high-quality services, ensuring accountability, and fostering support for the program. Sharing these findings helps stakeholders understand the program's performance, promotes the use and demand for its services, and informs future program improvements and investments.

EXAMPLES

There are a number of ways an online program can meet this Indicator including, but not limited to, the following: publication of a detailed annual report that is sent to all stakeholders; summarizing key findings from recent evaluations and outlining specific areas for improvement and planned actions; regular webinars that provide updates on progress and gather input from stakeholders; a virtual town hall meeting to present results and discuss implications for future program enhancements; or inclusion of a summary of findings and action steps in a program newsletter or on the website.

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT



STANDARD I: CURRICULUM AND COURSE DESIGN

A quality online program will adopt and implement instructional design methods that enable effective online instruction for both institutionally developed courses as well as licensed content from other sources.

I1

Course offerings are presented in a clear, descriptive, and easy to navigate format that provides sufficient information for decision making including: course level, prerequisite requirements, cost of required materials, synchronous meeting requirements, and where a course is sourced.

EXPLANATION

Course information must be clear so that learners, parents/guardians, and local school personnel can select appropriate courses that meet a learner's educational goals and academic requirements.

EXAMPLES

Catalog presentation will vary, but it is critical that course offerings are presented in a manner that is clear for anyone to review prior to enrolling. Learners, parents/guardians, and/or school personnel should understand required materials and costs prior to enrollment. At a minimum, offerings should be sortable or searchable by a variety of identifiers, such as subject area, course level, and grade-level availability. The learner and their parent/guardian should know, prior to registration, whether attendance at synchronous meetings is required. In the case of vendor-supplied content, the program makes clear where content has been sourced.

I2

Course and lesson level learning objectives are presented in a clear, organized format.

EXPLANATION

It is essential that course-level learning objectives are clearly stated, and there is connection between course and lesson level learning objectives.

EXAMPLES

There are a variety of ways that a program can meet this Indicator including a detailed syllabus, a table of objectives aligned with lesson titles, a weekly or unit-based overview table that connects objectives and activities, or a narrative presentation of learning objectives as they relate to individual activities. It is not required that this information be included in a course catalog, though some programs might include course-level objectives in a course description. Presentation should be consistent throughout a course, and the program should establish standards for how this information is conveyed to learners and/or parents/guardians.

I3

Course content aligns with grade level and/or subject level content standards.

EXPLANATION

Alignment with appropriate content standards is essential for ensuring learner readiness for grade-level advancement, sequential coursework, and post-secondary learning.

EXAMPLES

The program documents alignment of course materials with appropriate content standards. Programs providing publicly funded education should align to State learning standards. National standards may be used by private programs or when there are not relevant State standards. A holistic alignment document does not need to be made publicly available; it should be provided upon request.

14

A clear definition of high quality instructional materials exists. Materials used in the program are consistent with the definition and enrich learning.

EXPLANATION

Criteria for quality instructional materials must be clearly defined to ensure staff who develop or review course materials are consistent in their approach. Criteria should be comprehensive and address accessibility, alignment with course learning objectives, currency of course materials, capability for assessment and personalization, representation of multiple viewpoints, and the need to be objective and impartial. Documentation of instructional material reviews should be captured and reviewed by program leaders.

EXAMPLES

The program establishes criteria and an instructional materials review process for evaluating instructional materials. Public education programs must rely on their State's definition of high quality instructional materials, when available. Private programs or public programs in states without definitions of high quality instructional materials should use a different set of guidelines for defining high quality instructional materials, such as the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines or the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA) Guide to Quality Instructional Materials. Materials should meet current WCAG standards for accessibility for all learners. As of 2024, this is WCAG 2.1 level AA. If site-based support is needed for accessibility, the program must make that clear to the learner, parent/guardian, and local site support prior to enrollment.

15

Technology is evaluated on a regular basis to ensure the technology supports program goals and enhances learning experiences.

EXPLANATION

Technology refers to the platforms, elements in courses, applets, tools, applications, interactives, and resources that learners interact with during their educational experience. The frequency of evaluation can vary based on the type of technology being reviewed, but there should be a clear plan that includes a timeline for evaluation of major platforms and process for receiving feedback on resources shared within course lessons. At minimum, major technology platforms and tools should be evaluated no less than every three years. Evaluation protocols should include focus on accessibility and learner privacy, to ensure compliance with local and national regulations.

EXAMPLES

The program should have a defined process for identifying and reviewing new technologies that are relevant for online instruction as well as reviewing current technologies being used to ensure they are not obsolete. The process should view technology from the perspective of how the technology might enhance learning and/or improve instructor efficiency. Data privacy and accessibility must be evaluated as part of ongoing review practices. There are a variety of resources that support programs in meeting this Indicator, such as 1EdTech's TrustEd Apps Directory, the National Center on Accessible Educational Materials' guidance for selecting technologies that are accessible for learners with disabilities, and data privacy registries such as the Learner Data Privacy Consortium.

16

Courses provide opportunities for interaction that support relationships amongst peers and with teachers.

EXPLANATION

It is essential that courses are designed to facilitate interaction among learners and/or between learners and their teachers. These opportunities for connection increase learner interest and reinforce that their teacher is invested in their academic experience and success.

EXAMPLES

Depending on the type of program being offered, this Indicator may be met through structured, regular interaction between a teacher and learner, or through class activities that require interaction between learners. Teachers may choose a variety of strategies to support learning including a welcome letter to introduce themselves and set a tone for the course, regular check-ins and reminders, personalized and asset-based feedback on assignments, or synchronous conversations. Course activities could include open-ended discussion prompts, group assignments, synchronous learning time, or other collaborative activities.

17**Courses contain a variety of activities that include options for in-depth learning.****EXPLANATION**

Courses that provide varied and authentic learning experiences will better prepare students for learning in multiple situations. The focus on the process of learning supports students in learning within multiple contexts including the world of work and post-secondary education.

EXAMPLES

The program includes instructional design principles that embed learning opportunities where learners practice expressing and demonstrating what they know and can do through multiple means and representation in authentic contexts. Creating artifacts and presentations, participating in open-ended discussions, completing and reflecting on simulations, and participating in discussion-based assessments are some examples of ways that learners can demonstrate in-depth learning. When possible, apprenticeships offer ideal settings for authentic learning opportunities and post-secondary preparation.

18**Course development process includes criteria for inclusion of asynchronous and synchronous learning opportunities.****EXPLANATION**

Course design processes must take into consideration the age, level, and need of learners who will enroll in the program. Though there is not one preferred method of instruction, there should be alignment between modality and course purpose. Regardless of the selected mode, there should always be purposeful interaction between learners or between the teacher and learners.

EXAMPLES

There are many considerations that will influence how much learning is synchronous and asynchronous. The program must demonstrate that course development personnel are guided to consider whether and how to include synchronous learning opportunities in an asynchronous program. Options can vary and might include live class lessons, discussions, office hours, synchronous lectures, show and tell activities, study groups, or other group activities that are completed together.

19**Courses meet copyright law and fair use guidelines.****EXPLANATION**

Programs must ensure that copyright law is followed for all course materials, whether created by teachers or program staff or procured from vendors.

EXAMPLES

When copyrighted materials are used, the program provides proper citing of materials within the context of the material, consistent with copyright law. Programs that utilize open education resources verify terms of use prior to inclusion in courses.



STANDARD J: INSTRUCTION

A quality online program takes a comprehensive and integrated approach to ensuring excellent teaching for its learners.

J1

The program establishes clear expectations for teaching practices that are guided by evidence-based practices and aligned with the program's mission and educational goals.

EXPLANATION

Teachers must be provided with clear, measurable, and specific teaching practices along with training to understand and meet the expectations. Expectations must be grounded in the mission and goals of the organization and should be reviewed and updated based on current research in the field.

EXAMPLES

Teacher expectations must be well-documented and easily accessible. Ample training should be provided to ensure teachers understand expectations and are able to meet benchmarks. Special consideration could be given to the onboarding process for new teachers, taking into account if a teacher has previous online teaching experience. The program must reflect on expectations on a regular basis and evolve practices with research in the field. Ideally, alignment with state or national instructional frameworks will be explicit.

J2

Instructional leaders evaluate multiple sources of data to ensure teacher expectations support the program's mission and educational goals.

EXPLANATION

Programs need to reflect on teacher performance, learner success, and feedback to ensure program goals are being met. Ideally, when reviewing learner success, multiple measures should be used to evaluate performance, such as achievement and growth. Evolution of teacher expectations in response to these criteria will improve outcomes and satisfaction over time.

EXAMPLES

The program reviews and modifies instructional practices based on teacher performance as well as learner outcomes and feedback from appropriate stakeholders, such as learners, faculty, parents, administrators, or support staff. Instructional leadership should regularly review teacher performance metrics to ensure the teaching standards are supporting learner success.

J3

Teachers reflect on learner performance and personal instructional practice, setting goals for continuous improvement.

EXPLANATION

It is essential that teachers consider learner performance (achievement and growth) and reflect on how their instructional practices support learner success.

EXAMPLES

There are a variety of ways in which a program can meet this Indicator, based on the type of contractual relationship the program has with teachers. It is essential that teachers are guided to reflect on learner performance and feedback as they consider how their practices align with teaching expectations and set goals for improvement. Programs may have formal continuous improvement protocols, or could provide access to reflection and personal professional development through micro-credentials, professional learning communities, evaluative feedback, or other strategies. It is essential that teachers are guided to reflect on critical skills or improvement at various times throughout the academic year and not just as a one-time reflection of practice after the academic year is over.

J4**Instruction is inclusive and supports all learners.****EXPLANATION**

Instruction is inclusive when every learner is provided an appropriate opportunity for independence, participation, and progress. Inclusive teaching practices create a welcoming environment where learners are valued, regardless of ability or background.

EXAMPLES

In an inclusive classroom, teachers will present themselves in a welcoming, unbiased manner, with the goal of putting learners in a position of feeling valued. There are a number of ways that teachers can create an inclusive environment, including supporting learners with special education accommodations, scaffolding instruction to support struggling learners, and addressing perspectives from varied cultures and backgrounds. Ideally, teachers and program leaders reflect on the participation of learners in classes as an indicator of success in creating an inclusive environment.

J5**Teaching standards include expectations for providing timely, effective feedback to learners.****EXPLANATION**

Feedback is an integral part of the learning process. It is essential that teachers provide timely, meaningful, and asset-based feedback to learners. Feedback should focus on the details of content and performance and help learners improve their understanding.

EXAMPLES

Teaching standards include an expectation that teachers provide timely, actionable feedback to learners. In addition to setting the standard, programs must ensure teachers understand how to provide quality feedback and should give teachers feedback on this practice as part of the mentoring or evaluation protocols. One option is to provide teachers with a document that outlines elements of effective feedback. The list below outlines some qualities of effective feedback.

- Helps clarify what is considered to be good performance.
- Facilitates the development of self-assessment in learning
- Delivers high quality information to students about their learning.
- Encourages teacher and peer dialog around learning.
- Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem.
- Provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance.



STANDARD K: ASSESSMENT AND LEARNER PERFORMANCE

A quality online learning program values positive learner outcomes and takes a comprehensive, integrated approach to measuring and monitoring progress toward defined learning objectives.

K1

Multiple methods of assessment are used to determine learner progress.

EXPLANATION

The use of multiple methods of assessment can ensure that learners have the opportunity to demonstrate and express what they know and can do through means that maximize their abilities, increasing the likelihood of valid and reliable results.

EXAMPLES

Depending on the type of program (full-time, part-time, supplemental) there will be a variety of ways to meet this Indicator. Programs can build courses that provide multiple types of activities to be completed each week, or might provide flexible options in a single assessment to enhance access, support learner performance, and reduce possible perceived threats. Using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in assessment design can ensure assessments are accessible and understandable for all learners (by avoiding physical, sensory, and cognitive barriers and providing assessments in learners' first language).

K2

Formative assessments provide ongoing feedback to improve learning and inform teaching strategies.

EXPLANATION

Formative assessments are used to help learners understand what topics might require support and to inform teachers of the extent to which learners are making progress. When evidence indicates that a learner is experiencing difficulty, the teacher can provide targeted interventions or support.

EXAMPLES

There are many systems that can be used to monitor learner progress. To meet this Indicator, programs must utilize formative assessments to provide information for enrichment, to improve individual learner awareness of progress, or to inform remediation and intervention strategies. Learners are encouraged to reflect on progress and access support when struggling to meet learning objectives. Teachers must monitor learner progress and use that data to inform feedback, outreach, or instruction. Programs may use third party benchmark or progress monitoring assessments that are typically administered three times per year as part of their overall formative assessment system.

K3

Assessments and other activities that measure learner performance are aligned to learning objectives.

EXPLANATION

In an aligned course, the learning objectives, activities, and assessments are carefully designed to ensure learners achieve the intended outcomes and are assessed on the specific skills and knowledge they are expected to acquire. Courses should align with appropriate grade-level or content standards. By aligning assessments with learning objectives, teachers can effectively track learner progress toward meeting these standards.

EXAMPLES

Alignment with learning objectives can be done during course development and documented as part of the course development process. Ideally, learners are made aware of how work aligns with course and learning objectives through a syllabus, checklist, narrative description, or weekly overview.

EXPLANATION

It is important that learners are provided explicit information about academic honesty, including use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools for learning. Learners must be held accountable for the integrity of their work, and the teachers should be proactive about discussing concerns with learners if there are any questions about academic integrity.

EXAMPLES

Course materials and program handbook policies should clearly outline consequences for violation of academic integrity standards. This information should be contained in an academic policy or contract, an online learner orientation, or other course materials. Learners must acknowledge that they understand academic integrity expectations, through documentation within a course or through use of a form that is signed by learners and their parent/guardian. Course materials should include explicit information about how learners can avoid plagiarism and what constitutes acceptable use of AI. Since the capability of generative AI is rapidly evolving, programs may need to update related policies on a frequent basis. Strategies that ensure integrity of course assessments and validity of learner work include proctored exams, implementation of discussion-based assessments or other synchronous assessment opportunities, and use of plagiarism detection tools along with professional development for teachers to use the tools appropriately.

ACCESS AND STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT



STANDARD L: EQUITY AND ACCESS

A quality online program's policies and practices support learners' ability to access the program. Accommodations are available to meet a variety of learner needs.

L1

Policies clearly state learner eligibility criteria for the program and are communicated to stakeholders.

EXPLANATION

Adopted policies should be clearly articulated, inclusive, and accessible to all stakeholders, including learners, parents/guardians, and community partners. These policies should explicitly state who is eligible to participate in the program and should be communicated in multiple languages to reach a wide range of communities.

EXAMPLES

There are varied methods that can be used to meet this Indicator. Of utmost importance is that eligibility information is made available through various channels, including program guides, the program's website, learner handbooks, multilingual webinars, and community outreach events. Personalized communications, such as emails, phone calls, and meetings with home school support staff, can be used to ensure parents/guardians understand the eligibility requirements and can easily access the necessary information. Whenever possible, but minimally whenever required by national or state laws, communications should be provided in multiple languages.

L2

Program staff collaborate with learners and other invested stakeholders to personalize programs in alignment with local policies and laws.

EXPLANATION

Schools must not only comply with local, state, and national laws governing learners with disabilities, but also actively work to create a personalized learning experience that meets the unique needs of each learner, including those with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and other accommodations. This requires ongoing collaboration with learners, parents/guardians, home school support staff, and other relevant stakeholders. Accommodations and supports for all learners, such as adaptive technologies, multilingual resources, and remediation and acceleration opportunities, should be regularly reviewed and adjusted to ensure they are effectively meeting learners' needs.

EXAMPLES

Program staff will collaborate with local learning support teams and/or parents/guardians, to develop and implement IEPs, 504 plans, and English learning plans for learners who speak languages other than English, ensuring that all necessary accommodations, such as translation services and adaptive technologies, are provided. Program staff should communicate with local learning support staff and/or parents/guardians to review the effectiveness of accommodations and make necessary adjustments to ensure each learner receives the support they need. The level and type of collaboration with parents will depend on whether the program provides supplemental or full-time academic services and the details of the agreement between the program and local school. If a program contracts for instructional services, the contract must clearly outline responsibilities for development and support of IEPs, 504 plans, and other academic support documentations.

L3

All learners have access to program resources, technologies, and support systems.

EXPLANATION

All learners have the opportunity to fully engage in the program regardless of race, gender, age, location, income, disability, or language proficiency. For publicly funded programs, this involves providing essential resources such as computers, internet access, hotspots, and basic home utilities when needed, as well as offering multilingual and culturally responsive support. Schools should ensure that all learners, including those with IEPs and other accommodations, have the tools and support they need to participate fully in the learning experience.

EXAMPLES

All programs must document required materials and any specialized supports that are required for learner success. For programs that receive public funding, it is critical that all learners are able to access the program, so it might be necessary to provide access to a computer and internet connectivity, including offering personal Wi-Fi hotspots to those in need. In addition, the program should ensure that multilingual technical support is available for parents/guardians who require it. Some programs might establish partnerships with community organizations and local businesses to provide free or low-cost hardware, internet access, and other resources to learners from low-income families or those in remote areas, ensuring they can fully participate in the online program. The process to request support or assistance should be clearly articulated to learners and their parents/guardians, to facilitate prompt resolution of any issues.

L4

Curriculum and instructional practices reflect a variety of cultural perspectives and experiences.

EXPLANATION

The program's curriculum and instructional practices should intentionally incorporate a wide variety of cultural perspectives and experiences to ensure that all learners see their identities and backgrounds represented in their learning. This includes integrating content that reflects a wide range of cultures, languages, histories, and viewpoints, as well as using instructional practices that are welcoming and responsive to the needs of all learners. This approach promotes a learning environment that values and validates the experiences of each user.

EXAMPLES

The curriculum includes texts, multimedia resources, and case studies from a variety of cultures and languages, ensuring that learners from different backgrounds can see themselves reflected in course materials. Teachers receive professional development on culturally responsive teaching practices and regularly incorporate these strategies such as using examples and analogies that resonate with learners from different cultural backgrounds, into their instruction.

L5

Systematic processes and procedures are used to identify and remove barriers to participation in the program.

EXPLANATION

The program should establish and maintain systematic processes and procedures to proactively identify and remove barriers that may prevent learners from fully participating in the program. This is critically important for programs that receive state or national funding. These processes should include regular assessments of learner access, engagement, and success, with a focus on identifying issues related to technology, language, disability, socioeconomic status, and other factors. The goal is to ensure that all learners, regardless of their circumstances, can fully engage with the program and achieve their educational goals.

EXAMPLES

Publicly funded programs must document evidence that there is a process to gather feedback and identify barriers to participation. This could include conducting regular surveys and focus groups with learners, families, and home school support staff to identify barriers to participation, such as language difficulties, technology access issues, or other challenges. In another example, a dedicated team within the program reviews data on learner access and engagement, particularly among historically marginalized groups, and implements targeted interventions such as providing additional technology resources, offering multilingual support, and adjusting program delivery methods and communication to better meet learners' needs. Programs that do not receive public funding should make every effort to minimize barriers to participation and carefully track engagement and performance trends, to increase all learners' opportunity for success.

L6

Course design uses research-based design principles that meet the needs of all learners.

EXPLANATION

To ensure appropriate access and support for all learners, courses should be designed using research-based principles that accommodate a wide range of learning preferences and individual needs. This approach involves providing multiple ways for learners to engage with content, demonstrate their knowledge, and receive appropriate support, fostering full participation and success for all learners.

EXAMPLES

Courses are designed using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, offering multiple formats for content delivery, such as videos, interactive simulations, and text-based resources, to meet the needs of all learners. Additionally, learners can choose from various assessment methods, like presentations, essays, or quizzes, to best demonstrate their understanding. There are other research-based design principles that can be used to create courses that include adaptive learning tools, allowing content to be customized to each learner's pace and comprehension level. Additionally, built-in support features, like real-time feedback and progress monitoring, ensure that every learner receives the personalized assistance needed for success.



STANDARD M: INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF SUPPORT

A quality online program supports instructional staff (instructional leaders, teachers, coaches, guidance and career counselors, and support staff) by providing mentoring, technical assistance, and timely professional development.

M1

The program provides and requires that all new teachers participate in induction and mentoring programs.

EXPLANATION

Teachers benefit from pairing with a mentor teacher and participating in professional development specifically tailored to online learning.

EXAMPLES

There are a variety of approaches that can be taken to meet this Indicator as long as there is a structured protocol for training and mentoring new teachers and the program provides opportunities for professional development related to online teaching. The protocol can include a variety of options, including an induction training course, orientation modules, and training for specific tools. All teachers new to the program should be assigned an advisor, mentor, or lead teacher for support and guidance.

M2

Teachers are provided regular feedback regarding their performance and learner achievement/progress.

EXPLANATION

It is essential that teachers receive regular feedback regarding whether their performance meets the program's instructional standards. Administrators must conduct observations and share feedback based on observed teacher behaviors, communication patterns, and learner performance. Teacher activity and communications should be monitored to ensure consistent feedback and learner support.

EXAMPLES

The program provides teachers with instructional standards or expectations that are aligned with the program's mission and goals. Standards should be measurable and should include a variety of observable instructional practices, such as announcements, course messages, documented communication, asset-based language, culturally appropriate responses, instructional feedback, responsiveness to learner questions, and synchronous meetings, as required by the program. Based on program type, the frequency of evaluation may vary. Full-time online programs should model evaluation protocols in the state or region where they are established. Supplemental programs should ensure at least annual review of performance, based on instructional expectations.

M3

Professional development opportunities aligned to the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching are provided to teachers, academic coaches, and instructional leaders.

EXPLANATION

It is essential that professional development opportunities are available to support the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching. Teachers, academic coaches, and instructional leaders should have consistent and timely opportunities to explore best practices and improve their skills.

EXAMPLES

The program provides a wide variety of professional development opportunities to enhance the skills of teachers, academic coaches, and instructional leaders. PD opportunities should be offered throughout the year and should be aligned to the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching or another recognized resource for quality instructional practices. Examples of professional development opportunities include synchronous or hybrid PD at the beginning of a school year, synchronous or recorded training sessions on instructional tools, asynchronous PD courses or microcredentials, webinars, or professional learning communities. The program tracks teacher engagement with professional development opportunities and creates or provides new resources based on teacher feedback, learner performance, or program goals.

M4

Professional development opportunities that are focused on how to support learners in an online learning environment are provided to career coaches, academic mentors, school counselors, and support staff.

EXPLANATION

Supporting learners in an online environment utilizes different tools and approaches than would be used in a brick and mortar setting. Training and resources must be provided to ensure staff have the skills needed to support learner wellness and guide learners to a successful online learning experience.

EXAMPLES

Evidence supports that the program recognizes the value of support staff and provides professional development opportunities in various formats, such as webinars, asynchronous courses or microcredentials, synchronous meetings or coaching, or training offered by groups such as the American School Counselor Association. The program must include training in a variety of topics, including readiness for online learning, supporting online learning skills (time management, communication, basic technology skills), identifying at-risk learners, and supporting learner wellness.

M5**Timely and effective technical support is provided to all users.****EXPLANATION**

The program clearly defines the resources available for technical help and provides a help desk for support, including a phone number to reach the support team. End users are made aware of expectations for response time on support issues.

EXAMPLES

The program provides comprehensive support options, including technical documentation and a help desk that will assist with technical issues. Contact information for the help desk and expectations for response time must be published and easily accessible. If support services are provided by a third party, program leaders must ensure the service provider meets expected response times.

**STANDARD N: LEARNER AND PARENT/GUARDIAN SUPPORT**

A quality online program provides support services to address the various needs of learners at different levels within the organization. The levels of support are appropriate and adequate for learner success.

N1**Onboarding experiences, including technology support and strategies to increase success in the online environment, are provided to learners and parents/guardians.****EXPLANATION**

Prior to starting an online course, learners are provided course information, directions for navigating the course, an introduction to course tools, and tips for being a successful online learner. Parents/guardians or learning coaches should be given materials to help them understand program expectations and successfully support learners.

EXAMPLES

Onboarding materials can take a variety of forms. Minimally, programs must have a structured orientation course or module that provides course navigation, teacher communication, tips for course success, and other important course information. Programs should capture evidence of completion of orientation materials and gather feedback on efficacy from learners. In addition to an orientation course, additional onboarding resources should be shared with learners and parents/guardians, including recorded or live webinar sessions, instructions for how to seek help if there are questions, and tips for success and how to encourage and support learners.

N2**Academic services and advising that addresses academic and developmental needs are made available to learners.****EXPLANATION**

Course selection and program progression must ensure learner goals are attainable. The program should have flexibility to adjust the course of study over time as the learner develops. Learners must have access to academic services that assist with basic requirements and motivate them towards successful completion of the course or program.

EXAMPLES

The program must provide or ensure provision of academic services for learners such as academic advising, tutoring, or organizational support. Services provide learners and parents/guardians with information, guidance, and resources to obtain the maximum success in the educational experience. Depending on the program type, these services are provided directly by the program, through a vetted service provider, or in the case of supplemental programs, by the learner's local school.

N3**Accessibility support services comply with special education policies and procedures.****EXPLANATION**

Resources and support are available to meet the educational needs of learners with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), 504 Plan, or equivalent accommodation plan.

EXAMPLES

The program has clearly outlined policies and protocols to support learners who require accommodations and the capacity to provision equipment to support learner success. In the case of supplemental programs, it is clear what services are provided by the program and what services remain the responsibility of the learner's local school.

N4**A learning management system serves as an access point for all learning and assessment content.****EXPLANATION**

The learning management system provides a central, integrated space for educational resources, including content resources, assessment tools, grading tools, and administrative tools.

EXAMPLES

The program has clear requirements for the learning management system (LMS) and a documented process for selection of the appropriate LMS. Learners are provided streamlined access to the LMS and are provided information about the use of the LMS through onboarding materials.

N5**Clear standards outline program expectations for teacher communication.****EXPLANATION**

The program establishes guidelines for the frequency, type, and quality of teacher communication with learners and parents/guardians. The guidelines include the need for timely responses to inquiries as well as timely access to critical information about learner progress.

EXAMPLES

Program type will dictate the most effective methods of communication. Expectations will vary by grade-level and whether a program is full-time or supplemental. Supplemental programs might communicate with a school representative or learning coach, rather than a parent/guardian, to ensure alignment with local policies. Expectations must include response times and communication protocols. The expectations should be published in a program handbook or manual that is available to learners and parents/guardians. Communications can take place in email, in a course discussion board, on the phone, or in a synchronous session. Important topics of communication include learner progress, expected pacing, and responses to learner and parent/guardian inquiries.

STANDARDS AND INDICATORS FROM THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ONLINE PROGRAMS

MISSION, GOVERNANCE, AND LEADERSHIP



STANDARD A: MISSION STATEMENT

A mission statement of a quality program clearly conveys its purpose and goals. It serves as the basis for the program's day-to-day operations, as well as a guide for its strategic plans for the future. Communication between, and buy-in from, stakeholders is a critical component of a mission statement.

- A1** The mission statement clearly and concisely conveys the program purpose and educational focus to the target audience.
- A2** The mission statement is made available to the public.
- A3** The mission statement is reviewed annually.



STANDARD B: GOVERNANCE

A quality program will have a clear governance structure with transparent roles and responsibilities designed to ensure long-term success and sustainability. Governance members will be knowledgeable about K-12 online learning and will have a collaborative relationship with program leaders.

- B1** Governance members are well-informed about K-12 online learning.
- B2** Governance responsibilities include policy development or approval and budget allocation approval to ensure the program's vision, mission, and strategic plan are met.
- B3** Roles and responsibilities of the governance and leadership teams are clearly defined and comply with all state and national regulations.
- B4** Governance members and program leaders collaborate to ensure successful implementation of vision, mission, strategic plan, and goals.



STANDARD C: PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

The leadership of a quality online program is accountable to the program's governance body and is responsible for setting and executing annual operational goals that align with the program's strategic plan and support of the program's vision and mission statements.

- C1** Program leaders establish annual goals that are aligned with the strategic plan, implement action plans designed to meet goals, and monitor and communicate progress on goals to stakeholders.
- C2** Program leaders promote a collaborative environment for learning and work.
- C3** Program leaders verify that measures are in place to ensure the quality, integrity, and validity of information used to evaluate the program and measure learner success.
- C4** Policies and procedures are reviewed and updated annually.



STANDARD D: TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Quality online programs provide potential learners and their parents/guardians with readily available information about program policies and outcomes. Program leaders provide regular and timely information on progress towards attainment of goals, alignment with policies and standards, and achievement of learning outcomes to all stakeholders.

- D1** Accurate information regarding program policies and outcomes is made available to prospective and current stakeholders.
- D2** Program leaders establish metrics for course quality, learner outcomes, and, if applicable, graduation requirements.
- D3** Program leaders complete an annual evaluation of metrics related to course quality, learner outcomes, and, if applicable, graduation rates.

PLANNING, RESOURCES, AND EVALUATION



STANDARD E: PLANNING

A quality program engages in regular strategic planning in order to reflect upon and improve program effectiveness.

- E1** A strategic plan is developed and updated regularly to address long-term actions.
- E2** The strategic plan addresses the resources necessary to support program priorities and achieve desired outcomes.
- E3** Program goals are aligned to the strategic plan and updated annually.
- E4** Program goals are shared and supported throughout the organization.



STANDARD F: PROGRAM STAFF

A quality online program has appropriate levels of qualified, well-trained, and supported staff who have the resources needed to achieve personal and program goals.

- F1** Sufficient qualified professional, administrative, and support staff are available to achieve the program's mission and annual goals.
- F2** Ongoing training and support are provided to the staff to carry out the vision, mission, and goals of the program.
- F3** Clearly defined individual and team roles and responsibilities are evident.
- F4** Evaluations of program staff occur on a regularly scheduled basis and use clear and consistent policies, measures, and procedures.



STANDARD G: FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL RESOURCES

A quality online program plans for and expends financial and material resources using sound business practices to accomplish the program's vision and mission.

- G1** Resources are managed according to local, state, and/or national budget regulations and accounting principles.
- G2** Resources are adequate and allocated to help ensure sustainability over time, according to the program's vision, mission, and strategic plan.
- G3** Program budget and resource allocation are determined by program leaders using projections established from trends in the educational and business environments.



STANDARD H: PROGRAM EVALUATION

A quality online program recognizes the importance of program evaluation and demonstrates a commitment to both internal and external evaluations. Internal evaluations are completed on an ongoing basis, for the purpose of tracking learner progress and identifying strengths and areas in need of improvement. External evaluations provide an objective perspective that adds credibility and validates internal findings. This dual approach creates a comprehensive framework for continuous improvement and accountability.

- H1** Metrics that guide internal evaluation are clearly defined by program leaders and use valid data sources that include measures of learner performance.
- H2** Results of regular internal evaluations inform management decisions and continuous improvement plans.
- H3** Course review protocols are aligned with the National Standards for Quality Online Courses.
- H4** Periodic external evaluations are completed by objective parties with experience in online learning.
- H5** Findings of external evaluations are used to develop annual goals and long-term improvement plans.
- H6** Evaluation results are communicated to program stakeholders.

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT



STANDARD I: CURRICULUM AND COURSE DESIGN

A quality online program will adopt and implement instructional design methods that enable effective online instruction for both institutionally developed courses as well as licensed content from other sources.

- I1** Course offerings are presented in a clear, descriptive, and easy to navigate format that provides sufficient information for decision making including: course level, prerequisite requirements, cost of required materials, synchronous meeting requirements, and where a course is sourced.
- I2** Course and lesson level learning objectives are presented in a clear, organized format.
- I3** Course content aligns with grade level and/or subject level content standards.

- I4** A clear definition of high quality instructional materials exists. Materials used in the program are consistent with the definition and enrich learner learning.
- I5** Technology is evaluated on a regular basis to ensure the technology supports program goals and enhances learning experiences.
- I6** Courses provide opportunities for interaction that support relationships amongst peers and with teachers.
- I7** Courses contain a variety of activities that include options for in-depth learning.
- I8** Course development process includes criteria for inclusion of asynchronous and synchronous learning opportunities.
- I9** Courses meet copyright law and fair use guidelines.



STANDARD J: INSTRUCTION

A quality online program takes a comprehensive and integrated approach to ensuring excellent teaching for its learners.

- J1** The program establishes clear expectations for teaching practices that are guided by evidence-based practices and aligned with the program's mission and educational goals.
- J2** Instructional leaders evaluate multiple sources of data to ensure teacher expectations support the program's mission and educational goals.
- J3** Teachers reflect on learner performance and personal instructional practice, setting goals for continuous improvement.
- J4** Instruction is inclusive and supports all learners.
- J5** Teaching standards include expectations for providing timely, effective feedback to learners.



STANDARD K: ASSESSMENT AND LEARNER PERFORMANCE

A quality online learning program values positive learner outcomes and takes a comprehensive, integrated approach to measuring and monitoring progress toward defined learning objectives.

- K1** Multiple methods of assessment are used to determine learner progress.
- K2** Formative assessments provide ongoing feedback to improve learning and inform teaching strategies.
- K3** Assessments and other activities that measure learner performance are aligned to learning objectives.
- K4** The program utilizes strategies to ensure the integrity of course assessments and validity of learner work.

ACCESS AND STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT



STANDARD L: EQUITY AND ACCESS

A quality online program's policies and practices support learners' ability to access the program. Accommodations are available to meet a variety of learner needs.

- L1** Policies clearly state learner eligibility criteria for the program and are communicated to stakeholders.
- L2** Program staff collaborate with learners and other invested stakeholders to personalize programs in alignment with local policies and laws.
- L3** All learners have access to program resources, technologies, and support systems.
- L4** Curriculum and instructional practices reflect a variety of cultural perspectives and experiences.
- L5** Systematic processes and procedures are used to identify and remove barriers to participation in the program.
- L6** Course design uses research-based design principles that meet the needs of all learners.



STANDARD M: INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF SUPPORT

A quality online program supports instructional staff (instructional leaders, teachers, coaches, guidance and career counselors, and support staff) by providing mentoring, technical assistance, and timely professional development.

- M1** The program provides and requires that all new teachers participate in induction and mentoring programs.
- M2** Teachers are provided regular feedback regarding their performance and learner achievement/progress.
- M3** Professional development opportunities aligned to the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching are provided to teachers, academic coaches, and instructional leaders.
- M4** Professional development opportunities that are focused on how to support learners in an online learning environment are provided to career coaches, academic mentors, school counselors, and support staff.
- M5** Timely and effective technical support is provided to all users.



STANDARD N: LEARNER AND PARENT/GUARDIAN SUPPORT

A quality online program provides support services to address the various needs of learners at different levels within the organization. The levels of support are appropriate and adequate for learner success.

- N1** Onboarding experiences, including technology support and strategies to increase success in the online environment, are provided to learners and parents/guardians.
- N2** Academic services and advising that addresses academic and developmental needs are made available to learners.
- N3** Accessibility support services comply with special education policies and procedures.
- N4** A learning management system serves as an access point for all learning and assessment content.
- N5** Clear standards outline program expectations for teacher communication.