Recommended Standards for Distance Education
NCPSA, ver. 2.2

NCPSA Standards for IT and Distance Learning

Described herein are six broad based standards and specific indicators of best practices for teaching and learning in an online environment. These are derived from available research and established good practice in the field of education. NCPSA recognizes that each genuine school, even a virtual school, is a living entity, defined in character by the community around its teachers, administration, parents and students. The standards and indicators delineated here are the architecture on which a school can build its courses of study even as a school organization follows inevitable growth, change, and innovation. They are broad-based statements that provide direction for quality student learning and organizational effectiveness.

1. **Vision, Purpose, and Commitment**
   Quality schools have a mission statement that clearly defines the distinctive vision and purpose of the institution.

   1.1. The school has a clearly stated mission that communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and effectiveness of the school.

   1.2. The school's mission guides the curriculum and learning process.

   1.3. Distance education program is consistent with the school's mission and goals.

   1.4. The mission and goals of the school are clearly articulated to stakeholders.

   1.5. The school's administration structure, budgets, policies, procedures reflect the mission of the school and support its goals.

   1.6. The school examines and evaluates its mission goals regularly.

   1.7. The school has a process to regularly reexamine its student learning outcomes as they relate to the schools mission

2. Governance

The school provides governance and organizational structure that supports the school in fulfilling its mission.

2.1. The school assures adequate human resources, technology, physical plant facilities, and budget to support its mission and goals.

2.2. Establishes a governance structure that is consistent with and supports the mission of the school.

2.3. Has clearly defined roles for each level of governance, ie., board, executive, administration, leadership, etc.

2.4. Ensures compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal safety and health standards and regulations.

2.5. Establishes and implements clear, well-understood processes by which curriculum evolves from conception to administrative and faculty authentication to implementation.

2.6. All online/distance courses have the same academic rigor compared to the same courses offered in a traditional face-to-face classroom.

2.7. Establishes clearly defined, articulated, and communicated processes for class credit and credit transfer.

2.8. Provisions are made for protection of confidentiality and privacy in services involving personal information.

3. Teaching and Learning/Curriculum

Quality online education is dependent on many essential factors such as:
a) Quality curriculum design
b) Imaginative, engaged, and qualified staff
c) A comprehensive delivery system agent

3.1 Develops and implements curriculum based on clearly defined expectations for student learning.

3.2 Promotes active involvement of students in the learning process, including opportunities for them to explore application.

3.3 Designs and uses instructional strategies, innovations, and activities that are research-based and reflective of best practice.

3.4 Offers a curriculum that challenges each student to excel, reflects a commitment to equity, and demonstrates an appreciation of various points of view.

3.5 Allocates and protects instructional time to support student learning.

3.6 Implements interventions to help students meet their educational goals.

3.7 Ensures an atmosphere of eager learning.

3.8 All online/distance courses have the same academic rigor compared to the same course offered in a traditional face-to-face classroom.

3.9 Programs and courses are developed by academically qualified persons responsible for curriculum development

3.10 Programs and courses are developed, delivered, and evaluated to be complete and coherent.

3.11 Facilitators, if used, are academically prepared and sufficiently trained to allow them to be beneficial to students and to support the learning process.

3.12 In designing electronically offered curricula, the school provides a plan for the student to access all courses necessary to complete the program.

3.13 The student has access to all needed supplementary materials, research materials, technology, and services to allow them to be successful.

3.14 Students for a particular class/course are able to meet the time structures, constraints, and schedule of the class.

3.15 Advisors and faculty ensure student awareness, understanding, and capacity to meet the evaluative criteria for the course.

3.16 That there are mechanisms in place to ensure adequate and appropriate teacher-student interaction (both synchronous and asynchronous) to maximize student learning and to allow for student questions.

3.17 Teacher response to student assignments, tests, and questions are timely and appropriate.

3.18 A secure, accurate, and complete student records; system, both academic and financial, is maintained in accordance with state and federal regulations.

3.19 Uses a secure, stable, and comprehensive learning management system that is available to all students.

3.20   The institution is responsible for quality assurance for all aspects of the program. e.g. If the institution is using "third party" products, ad hoc instructors, purchased modules, specialized software or outsourcing aspects of the program, the institution must ensure the integrity of the program and the performance of the "subcontracted" agents or products. (See *Best Practices for Distance Education in K-12 Schools*, point 2d.)

4.   **Faculty Support**
Since faculty is essential to quality online education, investment in human resources and faculty support is fundamental to the goal of quality student learning.

4.1   In the development and implementation of electronically delivered courses, issues such as faculty workload, compensation, ownership of intellectual property, and faculty evaluation are mutually agreed upon and based on policy.

4.2   The institution provides appropriate training, technological support, and professional development for faculty and support personnel.

4.3   The institution provides appropriate support services specifically related to distance education.

4.4   The course architecture permits the online teacher to add content, activities, and assessments to extend the learning opportunities.

4.5   The teacher meets the professional teaching standards established by the association and/or the state licensing agency or the teacher has academic credentials in the field in which they are teaching and has been trained to teach online.

4.6   Long-range planning, budgeting and policy development processes reflect the facilities, staffing, professional development, equipment and other resources essential to the viability and effectiveness of the distance education programs offered through, or supported by the institution.

4.7   Faculty members are assisted in the transition from classroom teaching to online instruction and are assessed during the process.

4.8   All staff, tutors, and facilitators are suitable for their positions and process appropriate qualifications and experience.

4.9   Are there open and fair methods for the faculty to provide evaluation and comments on the program, training, staff development, etc.

5. Student Services
The school has the resources and services necessary to help students succeed in a distance learning environment.

5.1 The school ensures that the student has the appropriate background, skills, technological expertise and the appropriate technology to reasonably expect student success.

5.2 There is adequate helpdesk and tutorial services available.

5.3 The school communicates with the student and/or parents the expectations, technologies, support services (library services, tutoring, help desk, etc.), and time estimates for program completion.

5.4 Assists the student in understanding independent learning, collaborative experiences, as well as the nature and potential challenges of learning in the program's technology-based environment.

5.5 Information is readily available to students on how to enroll, what courses are available, and that all information is sufficient, fair, and accurate.

5.6 The school has procedures and policies for preregistration, admission, financial aid, etc. and this information is readily available and clearly explained.

5.7 The institution must address needs of the individual with disabilities when planning for and delivering distance education programs and courses.

5.8 All policies, procedures, and costs that relate to distance students are available online and clearly explained.

5.9 The institution provides adequate involvement of the distant student as part of the academic community by providing services such as counseling, testing, social, and mission-oriented services, i.e. spiritual or service learning, to all students.

5.10 Students have a method to evaluate the program, delivery, and structure of the courses and/or program and the institutions provides an adequate means to resolve student complaints.

5.11 A student manual or school catalog for all courses and programs is provided. This includes accurate and clearly stated information about admissions, progression, completion criteria, dismissal, grievance procedures, and any applicable licensing requirements.

5.12 Student orientation is provided to the distance education program and online learning.

5.13 A complete syllabus for each course delineates course specific information needed by students.

6. Evaluation and Assessment

The school establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student learning and achievement.

6.1 The school establishes performance measures that for student learning that yield information that is reliable, valid, and bias free.

6.2 The school develops and implements a comprehensive assessment system for assessing progress toward meeting the expectations for student learning.

6.3 Student assessment data is used for making decisions for continuous improvement of teaching and learning processes.

6.4 Systematic analysis is conducted of instructional and organizational effectiveness and this information is used to improve student performance.

6.5 Procedures and policies are in place for establishing student identity, assuring security of test instruments, administering the examinations, assuring secure and prompt evaluation, and integrity of student work.

6.6 Personal information is protected while providing appropriate dissemination of evaluation results.

6.7 Overall program/course effectiveness is determined by such measures as:
- The extent to which student learning matches intended outcomes.
- Student retention/completion rates, including variations over time.
- Student, parent, and faculty satisfaction, as measured by regular surveys/evaluations and by formal and informal review processes.
- Student competence in fundamental skills such as communication, comprehension, and analysis.
- Cost effectiveness of the program to its students, as compared to campus-based alternatives.
- Equitable relationships and evaluation results between distance education students and on-site students.