

First Things First

The most important question you have to answer is whether your student is well suited to an online learning environment.

Profile of a Successful Student

Instructors with years of online teaching experience agree that students who have a successful, satisfying experience learning online share several critical characteristics:

Good Time Management:

Can your student create and maintain a study schedule throughout the semester without the face-to-face interaction with a teacher?

Effective Communication:

Can your student ask for help, make contact with other students and the instructor online, and describe any problems she/he has with learning materials using email, texting, and/or the telephone?

Independent Study Habits:

Can your student study and complete assignments without direct supervision and maintain the self-discipline to stick to a schedule?

Self-Motivation:

Does your student have a strong desire to learn skills, acquire knowledge and fulfill assignments in online courses because of an educational goal? Can she/he maintain focus on that goal?

Academic Readiness:

Does your student have the basic reading, writing, math and computer literacy skills to succeed in the class?

Technologically Prepared:

Does your student know how to open, create and/or save a document; use various technology tools (e.g., dictionary, thesaurus, grammar checker, calculator); and identify various file formats (e.g., doc, xls, pdf, jpg)? (from Michigan Educational Technology Standards for Students 2009).

Counselors and teachers often use the *MVU Online Readiness Rubric* on page 11 to help students understand what is required of a successful online learner. If you identify areas in the rubric where your student is lacking, you can determine what needs to be addressed to best support them in those areas.

See *Is Online Learning Right for Me?* on page 12 for more guidance.

The Stanford Research Institute's publication *Supporting K-12 Students in Online Learning: A Review of Online Algebra 1 Courses* examined the accessibility of online learning for students, especially those who were at risk of failure. The report cautions that students who have failed a face-to-face class may have challenges that will affect their success in an online course, too. For example, many students do not realize that they will have to be even more accountable for their time, performance, and productivity in an online course.



Making the Decision

As a parent, your role in helping your student decide if this is the most effective way for him/her to learn is extremely important. According to the State School Aid Act, you must give your permission for your student to take online classes. Before you sign off, you need to have determined if your student is well suited to online learning. Using the rubric and the skills mentioned in the previous section as a starting point for the conversation is the first thing to do. Once you decide your student is likely to be successful, you have additional issues to consider.

Technology

- ✓ What are the technical requirements for the courses your student wants/needs to take?
- ✓ Can you provide the technology your student needs or will the school district?
- ✓ Are there well-defined steps for getting tech support?

Learning Environment

- ✓ Does the school or provider offer an orientation for parents, students, and mentor?
- ✓ What kind of feedback and support does the instructor provide?
- ✓ What kind of assistance does the mentor provide?

Considering the Course

- ✓ Does the course meet academic requirements?
- ✓ Has the course been approved for credit by the school of record?
- ✓ Are there prerequisites for online courses? Has your student met the prerequisites?
- ✓ Can students take courses without being enrolled in a local school?
- ✓ Does the course meet NCAA Eligibility Requirements for potential Division I and II student athletes?
- ✓ How rigid are the course assignment due dates?
- ✓ Are the test dates flexible or rigid?
- ✓ What is the time commitment (daily and length of term)?
- ✓ Does the course have e-texts or are textbooks required? If textbooks are required, who pays for them?
- ✓ How do students receive their final grades?
- ✓ When can a student drop the course if he/she finds it too difficult or encounters challenges?