

Archived Information

ENDNOTES

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5. Committee for Education Funding. *Education Budget Alert for Fiscal Year 2000*. Pons, Michael ed. p.9. Washington, D.C. 1999.
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MOVING FROM PROMISE TO PRACTICE

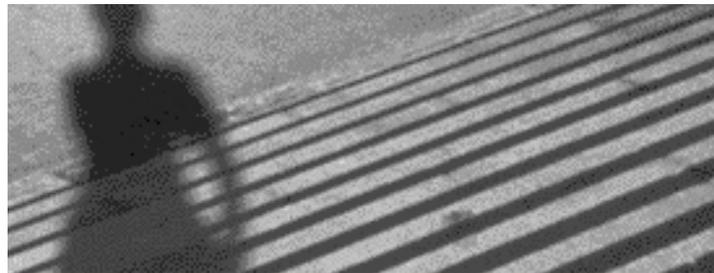
A CALL TO ACTION

The question is no longer *if* the Internet can be used to transform learning in new and powerful ways. The Commission has found that it can. Nor is the question *should* we invest the time, the energy, and the money necessary to fulfill its promise in defining and shaping new learning opportunity. The Commission believes that we should.

The issue before us now is *how* to make good on the Internet's promise for learning. It is time we support education's new trailblazing heroes. It is time we collectively move from promise to practice.

Based on the findings of this report, the Web-based Commission believes a national mobilization is necessary, one that evokes a response similar in scope to other great American opportunities—or crises: Sputnik and the race to the moon, bringing electricity and phone service to all corners of the nation, finding a vaccine for polio.

The very idea of the World Wide Web is one of connections. Our ability to use the Internet to reshape learning requires actions that are also interrelated and interconnected. The Commission saw first-hand the policies that most influence technology use in education derive from bottom-up, interconnected grass-roots efforts far more than from top-down dictates. The nation needs to tap into this energy and use it to shape education policy for the Internet age.



The nation should embrace an “e-Learning” agenda as a centerpiece of our federal education policy.

The idea of connectedness also applies to the reality of our current learning environment. The core barriers to effective Internet use identified by the Commission cannot be addressed in isolation. They are inextricably linked. As such, they pose an even greater challenge that can be resolved only through a widespread mobilization effort.

That effort, therefore, must work to assure:

- **Universal broadband access at home, at school, and at work in support of learner-centered, anytime, anywhere, any pace educational opportunity**
- **High quality, on-demand, and continuous professional development and support for educators and administrators at all levels**
- **A new education research agenda that is well-funded and focused on how people learn in the Internet age**
- **Online educational content that is widely available, affordable, and meets the highest standards of educational excellence**
- **Relief from regulatory and administrative requirements that do not accommodate innovations in learning**
- **Reliable safeguards to protect online learners and ensure their privacy**
- **Sustained funding—via traditional and new sources—that meets the challenge of learning transformation**

These are difficult challenges, but working together, we can overcome them.

The Congress and Administration can seed the field, taking the lead by reviewing and adapting education and telecommunications law and regulations to reflect, incorporate, and support new designs and advances in web-based education and innovation.

States, which traditionally have the most considerable impact on the conduct of education at all levels, can initiate a new era of collaboration with each other and their educational institutions and local districts.

Communities and the Private Sector can build new powerful partnerships leading to innovative designs in learning services and applications that meet high standards for quality, ease of use, and cost efficiency.

A National Call to Action

The bipartisan, congressional Web-based Education Commission calls on the new Congress and Administration to embrace an “e-learning” agenda as a centerpiece of our nation’s federal education policy.

This e-learning agenda should be aimed at assisting local communities, state education agencies, institutions of higher education, and the private sector to maximize the power of the Internet for learning.

In the next two years, the 107th Congress and new Administration are required to revise the major laws guiding federal involvement in K-12 education. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act will, in large part, determine federal education priorities and the tens of billions of spending that go with them for the next five years. Congress and the Administration will also consider new funding authority for education research. They are likely to revisit the issues of safeguarding children online, copyright law in the digital age, advertising in education, and other “rules of the road” issues related to the Internet. Finally, Congress and the Administration will begin preparations for revising the student financial assistance laws as part of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

The opportunity has never been better for establishing meaningful public policy aimed at maximizing the power of the Internet for learning as a fundamental element of education at all levels. We urge the Congress and President to seize this opportunity and to focus on ways in which these public laws can be modified and changed to support, rather than undermine, the technology that is so dramatically changing education.

We call on federal and state governments to make the extension of broadband access for all learners a central goal of telecommunications policy.

We urge federal and state policymakers to adopt a policy framework that will help accelerate broadband deployment in education quickly and effectively. The E-rate program, which has brought 21st Century telecommunications into the nation’s schools and libraries, has provided a dramatic boost. Individual state efforts have shown promise and success. Policymakers in state and local jurisdictions should consider complementary efforts focused on educational applications of broadband access.

Federal and state policymakers should also consider legislative changes designed to achieve speedy deployment of broadband technologies at our nation’s educational institutions, particularly for those communities of learners on the other side of the “Digital Divide.” Better collection of data on current access levels, costs, and availability of broadband services around the nation will facilitate this goal.

Greater Internet access for education enables the private sector to build the base of skilled workers it needs to operate in the global economy and to expand its market for enhanced telecommunications goods and services. This opportunity brings with it responsibilities for

helping to build and support this capacity. Policymakers should seek out new partnership opportunities focused on high quality services, affordable rates, and sustained upgrades and improvement in access.

We call on policymakers at all levels to work with educational institutions and the private sector to support the continuous growth of educators through the use of technology.

Educators are the ultimate knowledge workers. We know that more and different training will be necessary if teachers, administrators, and faculty members are to integrate the advances of technology into the curriculum and into their teaching. To do so will require a major new direction and commitment from policymakers, from the private sector, and from educators themselves.

Congress has begun to focus on building the institutional capacity to assure that the next generation of teachers uses technology as effortlessly and effectively as workers in other industries. We encourage continuing support for these efforts, along with initiatives and models that make just-in-time, just-what's-needed training and support available to educators. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act offers the opportunity to make this happen and to incorporate the best thinking and practices identified by this Commission. In addition, the Higher Education Act reauthorization down the line will provide another vehicle to articulate the federal role in professional development.

Partnerships that bring together the federal government, state and local agencies, the private sector, and educational institutions offer the promise of assuring continuing teacher empowerment and growth with technology. Federal funding through such important efforts as the Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers for Technology program primes the pump for these collaborations.

States can share in the development and distribution of e-learning courses, programs, and materials for teacher education and professional development. They can also work together to adopt common frameworks for building the competencies and performance assessments of new teacher expertise and build policies that allow for cross-state teacher certification.

The nation's universities, and the colleges of education within them, should make the development of highly skilled 21st Century educators their most important priority; and they should fund and support teacher and administrator preparation programs accordingly.

We call upon the Federal government to create a comprehensive research, development, and innovation framework for learning technology.

A commission appointed in 1997 by President Clinton (the President's Commission of Advisors on Science and Technology) called for a rigorous empirical research program at a level equal to at least 0.5 percent of the nation's aggregate spending on K-12 education. This has not happened and with the passage of time the urgency of this goal is even more critical.

To achieve this goal, the Commission recommends:

- Establishing a benchmark goal for federal R & D investment in web-based learning, consistent with similar benchmarks in other industry segments. A possible approach could be the creation of a “Synergy Superfund,” a continuous funding source to advance necessary public-private partnerships to build the fast turn-around of technological breakthroughs with applications for learning.
- Focusing on high payback targets of educational opportunity where present links between learning theory and technological innovation appear particularly promising. These include such areas as new forms of assessment of learning, early reading content, and the conceptual stumbling blocks that impact understanding and achievement in mathematics and the sciences.
- Supporting the creation of learning communities and tools for collaborative knowledge building and dissemination among researchers, teachers, and developers. Funding and regulatory support for public-private partnerships, and cross-institution and cross-agency collaboration in R & D could make it possible to bring promising ideas to practice quickly and efficiently by using the Internet as a research and dissemination tool.
- Supporting a sustained effort to track the use of the Internet in education and how the Web is transforming learning. A particular focus should be on the effectiveness of the policy actions implemented to address the key barriers to web-based education.

We call upon the public and private sectors to join forces in developing high quality content and applications for online learning.

There is an increasing body of good content for e-learning, but it presents only a small glimmer of what is possible. And it is difficult for the consumer to sort the wheat from the chaff, to make sense of all the “clutter” on the Web. Compounding this problem is a risky private capital market for development, particularly at the preK-12 level.

At the federal level, the Commission recommends that:

- Congress articulate content development priorities and seed funding for development of web-based content and applications in high need areas (e.g.; adult literacy; English as a second language; and teacher preparation). It should also encourage collaboration and partnerships between the public and private sectors in the development and distribution of high quality online courses, learning tools, and materials.
- Federal agencies and programs should adopt technical standards for the design of online courses and the meta-tagging of digital content. These should include universal design standards for access for those with disabilities.

For the education community, the Commission recommends:

- Continuing the current voluntary system of accrediting higher education institutions and programs. However, the range of programs and new providers suggests the need for better clarity for the consumer regarding what accreditation means. The joint development of a “consumer’s guide to accreditation” by the federal government and the higher education community would be an important contribution.
- Creating mechanisms for users to share their commercial and noncommercial resources and experiences regarding online courses and programs. Experimentation with online user reviews for content similar to that found on commercial sites (e.g., Amazon.com) could empower the informed choice of educators.
- Articulating frameworks for what constitutes good online courses and encouraging private sector education providers to develop their courseware in concert with these frameworks.

For the states, the Commission recommends convening state and regional education accreditors and organizations to build common frameworks and requirements for online learning programs, courses, and certifications comparable to those required for onsite programs.

We call on Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, and state and regional education funding and regulatory authorities to remove barriers that block full learner access to online learning resources, courses, and programs while ensuring accountability of taxpayer dollars.

Witnesses spoke forcefully and effectively about how federal, state, and local education regulations written for an earlier education system no longer work in today’s borderless, timeless “anywhere, anyplace” learning environment.

There are some areas where federal action may be appropriate. The Commission recommends a full review and, if necessary, a revision of the 12-hour rule, 50 percent rule, and incentive compensation requirements that are creating barriers to students enrolling in online and distance education courses. We call on the Department of Education, Congress, the higher education community, and the private sector to continue to work together in devising alternatives for measuring student financial assistance eligibility to accommodate online learning opportunity.

The Commission also encourages states to:

- Work with organizations such as the National Governors’ Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Education Commission of the States, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the State Higher Education Executive Officers, and the National Association of State Boards of Education to convene and provide incentives for collaboration among educators, content providers, and regulators that span state or regional boundaries.

- Recognize and support efforts to increase cross-state regulatory and administrative cooperation modeled after the Southern Regional Education Board and the Western Interstate Cooperative in Higher Education. Such efforts should be encouraged to develop policies that address the transfer and awarding of academic credit earned online; faculty workload, compensation, and online content ownership issues; financing of distance learning; quality assurance in distance learning; online student services (e.g.; library resources, admissions, advising); and programs that reach underrepresented student populations.

The Commission endorses the U.S. Copyright Office proposal to convene education representatives and publisher stakeholders in order to build greater consensus and understanding of the “fair use” doctrine and its application in web-based education. The goal should be agreement on guidelines for the appropriate digital uses of information and consensus on the licensing of content not covered by the fair use doctrine.

We call upon the education community and parents, working with the private sector, to develop and adopt appropriate privacy and protection safeguards to assure that learners of all ages are not exploited while participating in learning activities.

Because of the open nature of the online learning environment, there will always be some risk. To minimize this risk, efforts should be made to help schools, districts, and parents come to reasonable solutions that protect vulnerable individuals while encouraging the positive exploration the Web makes possible.

The Commission believes that filtering and blocking software alone is of limited value in this regard. Instead, the Commission recommends:

- Encouraging developers and educators to collaborate in creating noncommercial, high quality educational zones that could be easily accessed by educators, parents, and children.
- Promoting efforts involving states, districts, and schools that will result in education programs that empower students to use the Internet safely, wisely and ethically. Educational programs should be built around appropriate use policies that set clearly understood and locally derived standards. These programs should reach out beyond students and include parents, teachers, and administrators.

The Commission believes that the Children’s Online Privacy and Protection Act (COPPA) provides important protections for young children. Nevertheless, all students, especially teenagers not covered by COPPA, need to understand threats to privacy and the implications of inappropriate disclosure of information. The education market should speak with one voice in demanding that young people and their families have access to information already collected and the opportunity to correct, prevent, or curtail the use of their personal information.

We also have seen that, if the Web is to be used to its fullest powers for personalized, interactive learning, the collection of some identifiable student information online may be nec-

essary. Parental permission may be better directed as an “opt-out” rather than “opt-in” requirement for student participation in online learning activities. This suggests that some adjustments to COPPA may be necessary to allow educational exemptions from current verifiable parental consent requirements.

Finally, we call on the federal government, states, localities, and the private sector to adequately fund web-based learning opportunity.

The Commission encourages the Congress and Administration to consider several options brought before us that could provide sustained funding for web-based education. These could include: tax incentives to encourage educational investments in areas of high need and high cost in order to provide affordable capacity; additional public-private partnerships between education institutions, the public sector, and business; increased federal and state appropriations; and the creation of a learning technology trust fund to sustain momentum in web-based learning opportunity over the long-term.

The Commission encourages local and state education agencies to aggregate their market strength in order to bring advanced broadband technologies to preK-12, postsecondary, and adult education at considerably lower costs. We also believe that states can encourage deployment of broadband access through their support of similar tax incentives and targeting of funding in high-need areas.

In addition, states have a special opportunity to create and fund networks that can be linked to the Internet2 backbone and bring state-of-the-art technology applications to educational institutions.

The question is no longer if the Internet can be used to transform learning in new and powerful ways. The Commission has found that it can. Nor is the question should we invest the time, the energy, and the money necessary to fulfill its promise in defining and shaping new learning opportunity. The Commission believes that we should. We all have a role to play. It is time we collectively move the power of the Internet for learning from promise to practice.

