SRI International releases report on costs and benefits of online learning programs

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A new SRI International report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education provides guidance to educational leaders as they work to implement successful, cost-effective online learning programs for secondary schools.

The report, Understanding the Implications of Online Learning for Educational Productivity, summarizes past research on the cost and outcomes associated with online learning programs in higher education and offers strategies for implementing such programs effectively in K-12 settings.

Educational policymakers and administrators across the country face shrinking budgets and increasing pressure to improve student performance. Many are looking at how online learning programs can benefit their students.

"In preparing this report, we really learned a great deal about the specific benefits that online learning programs are most likely to achieve, and are most ready for testing in rigorous comparative research," said Marianne Bakia, Ph.D., senior policy analyst at SRI International's Center for Technology in Learning and lead author of the report. "In addition, the report provides analytic tools for district and school administrators to evaluate claims about the cost-effectiveness of online learning courses and programs so that they can become knowledgeable consumers of online materials."

The report recommends that educators broaden access to quality online resources and experiences to increase educational opportunities for students in remote locations or in schools or districts with low-enrollment.

To improve the quality of online education, researchers recommend engaging students in active learning using research-based principles and established best practices; personalizing instruction based on students' interests, preferred pace of learning, and performance; and automating routine tasks to allow teachers to focus on complex, interactive activities in the classroom.

The report also suggests that online learning can lower education costs by making better use of teacher and student time, using home or community spaces in addition to traditional school buildings, and through the reuse and large-scale distribution of materials. Although studies have consistently found that online learning programs have reduced costs compared to traditional instruction, the report finds that online learning programs may have higher start-up costs associated with equipment and curriculum development.

More information: The full report can be found at ctl.sri.com/news/ImplicationsOnlineLearning2.pdf

Provided by SRI International

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