

What Makes the K¹² Curriculum Tick?

John Holdren, K¹²'s senior vice president for content and curriculum, examines the importance of a research-based curriculum and appropriate technology use.

At K¹², we take pride in the curriculum and online tools we've built. Before we can expect a family, a school or a district to invest in our products and services, we know we have to invest serious effort and significant resources to ensure consistent high quality and effective delivery. In building our curriculum, we're guided by a number of principles.

Let me introduce you to two:

1. Follow proven educational approaches based on solid research.

Some features of a K¹² education—especially the technological tools—are new and innovative. But much of what we do is tried and true, based on years of experience and solid research.

We've conducted research on the roles of parents and teachers in a child's learning. We've examined the common misconceptions that can derail a student's learning, and ways to avoid these misconceptions. We've researched which instructional methods work best for students of various ages and proclivities, including the use of different kinds of media, technology and materials. And we've taken special care to sift the trendy, subjective fad of the moment from the solid, peer-reviewed cognitive science.

To ensure quality, we follow a rigorous series of proven processes:

- Careful development of scope-and-sequence documents for each course, based on analyses of state standards, reports of national curricular commissions and relevant international frameworks.
- Articulation of learning objectives as specific knowledge and skills, the mastery of which can be demonstrated or observed in specific ways.
- Expert review of course content to ensure accuracy.
- Skilled instructional design to make effective use of media and online tools, and to harmonize online and offline learning experiences.
- Training and support for teachers delivering online instruction to help them succeed in the virtual environment.

2. Use technology appropriately for learning.

K¹² is often referred to as an online school, but that's not quite the whole story. Yes, we have online tools and resources, and we employ the computer for what it does well, such as games, audio, animations and planning and progress tools.

But the computer and online connection form only a small part of the **total learning environment** that K¹² has designed for educators, families and students. Other key components in this learning environment include books—*lots* of books—some carefully selected from published materials, some that we've written and published ourselves. We provide math manipulatives, science lab materials, music CDs, art prints, paints, clay and much more.

Much learning, especially by the youngest children, takes place away from the computer, because young children learn by doing—by drawing, finger-painting, planting seeds and watching them grow, running and jumping, counting things in their hands, dancing and clapping time or talking with adults and hearing stories read aloud.

Both the online technology and the offline resources we provide are intended to support the key players in the learning environment: the students, teachers and parents. The technology, powerful in itself, exponentially empowers the caring adults and professional teachers who are committed to giving students every educational advantage they can to ensure success.

These are just two of the principles that guide us as we build the curriculum here at K¹². I encourage you to explore it for yourself. The proof is in the practice.

