

FAQ: Potential Advantages and Challenges of Online Schooling

Choosing a school for your child is one of the most important decisions every parent faces. An online K-12 education is just one of many options, and like all choices, there are advantages and challenges to take into account. We hope by providing the information below we can help address some questions you may have about the K12 online programs.

Q: In general, what are the advantages and challenges of attending an online school?

Advantages: Some of the key advantages students have found in attending online schools is the flexibility it affords them and the ability to learn in a non-classroom environment that may be more suitable for some students who are not succeeding in traditional schools. Like any public school, the online public schools served by K12 are also tuition-free, thus available to any student looking for an alternative, subject to any state limitations such as enrollment caps.

Traditional public schools follow a rigid schedule of daily lessons. In contrast, with the online public schools served by K12, students have the flexibility to determine how much time is necessary to spend on each day's lessons. Although students must master their lessons and pass their exams, they can work at their own pace each day to maximize their chances for succeeding.

Another advantage is increased direct parental engagement in your child's daily classes, which is central to the K12 program and more limited in traditional brick and mortar schools. Some students also find that learning in the home environment with the help of a Learning Coach allow them to be more focused on their courses and provides fewer distractions to the learning process than the traditional brick and mortar classroom.

Online learning also eliminates the need to travel back and forth to school, thus permitting more time for other social and developmental activities. This is especially valuable in the K-8 years when students have more opportunity to complete their coursework in the hours that work best for their schedule.

In addition, because the online public schools served by K12 offer a consistent curriculum, your student will be able to maintain a progressive education regardless of where your family moves within the state, as long there is an online school offering the K12 curriculum in your new home area.

Challenges: Attending school online requires both time online as well as time offline to successfully complete required lessons. However, some students find the amount of time required to be in front of a computer daunting. The amount of time your child spends on his or her computer is in part dependent on the grade he or she is in. K-8 students spend less time in front of a computer while students in grades 9-12 spend significantly more time working online.

Our online courses also require students to work independently offline with their texts books and other educational materials. This work requires the oversight of a dedicated Learning Coach, especially when students are in the early elementary years. Without the time commitment of a dedicated adult, students may be less likely to be successful in an online learning environment.

Interactions with teachers and other students most often take place online through virtual classroom sessions (a/k/a “class connects”). These virtual classroom sessions allow the teacher to present lessons on an online whiteboard and enable the teachers and students to speak to each other through voice over IP technology (VoIP). Teachers and students also communicate through email and phone calls. Students used to a traditional school setting may have to adjust to not having a teacher standing in front of them for immediate feedback. On the other hand, teacher management of unruly students or other distractions occurring in traditional classrooms is removed, so that the online teacher can address each student’s need on a dedicated basis.

Q: Is using the K12 online school platform difficult?

Advantage: Students access the online learning system through a unique user name and password. Once logged into the online learning system, students have almost everything they need for their online schooling, including course calendars, online lessons, course progress tracking, supplemental tools, and class connect access, all available in the same place.

Challenge: Tackling new technology and going to public school outside a traditional classroom can be frustrating at first, like learning to ride a bike, especially for students and learning coaches with limited computer skills. However, K12 does not leave you to figure out the platform on your own; we provide assistance to both our students and their Learning Coaches through our Strong Start and Learning Coach University programs. In addition, our technology support team is always just a phone call away. K12 also provides online self-help support, where students and learning coaches can go to find solutions to the most common issues encountered when using the online school system. Even with this support, some students and Learning Coaches never acclimate.

Q: I will be teaching my child for the first time; as my child’s Learning Coach what can I expect?

As your child’s Learning Coach, you will play a far greater role and more responsibility in your child’s education than if your child attended a bricks and mortar school. A Learning Coach supports the student in the learning process while they are enrolled in the K12 program. Coaches are responsible for ensuring their student is on track with assignments and coursework as well as communicating with their teachers throughout the school year. Learning Coaches play an active role, especially in the early grades.

Advantage: Learning Coaches find one of the aspects they like most about being a Learning Coach is the additional time with their child and their daily interactions as they support their child’s pursuit of his or her educational goals. K12 does not leave you to master the Learning

Coach role and responsibilities on your own. The K12 Learning Coach University offers a large selection of live sessions, workshops, and events that provide support for your role as the Learning Coach all year long. Sample Topics include: Using K12's Curriculum Effectively; Managing Your Time; Using Microsoft/Open Office Tools; Math and Writing Skills Refresher Series; School Effectively at Home Series; Avoiding Burnout; and Preparing for State Testing.

Challenge: Learning Coaches often find making the necessary time commitment and effort to be a challenge. Your role as a Learning Coach will also change as your child grows. In the early elementary years (grades K–5), Learning Coaches must be prepared to spend 3 to 6 hours per day working with their student on lessons. In the middle-school years (grades 6-8), Learning Coaches spend approximately 2-4 hours with their student and in the high school years (grades 9–12), Learning Coaches spend approximately 1 to 2 hours with their student.

Parents who do not speak English or have limited English language fluency may find taking on this new role of Learning Coaches especially challenging. However, K12 pairs the family with an English Language teacher as well as the student's general education teacher and the English Language teacher works with the student daily in simultaneous instruction to help the student where the Learning Coach cannot.

For learning coaches who have never home schooled and whose students have been in the traditional brick and mortar school setting, it can take some time to get used to having their students at home all day, while still getting other household tasks completed. The K12 Learning Coach University can help learning coaches better organize their school days so that the time spent on schooling can be focused and productive, and there is still time to complete other tasks in the home.

Some learning coaches also struggle with being an authoritative figure to their students during the school day. Students who do not want to take direction from their Learning Coaches may fall behind in school work if they refuse to complete their lessons. Learning Coaches can also feel frustrated if they feel like they are "fighting" with their students all day to get their students to complete the school work. Students who are most successful in the online environment are ones who are independently motivated to learn and, especially in the younger grades, who are willing to take direction from their learning coaches.

Q: How structured is the online school day?

Advantage: In short, it is far less than in a traditional school setting. The flexibility of your student's class schedule is dependent in large part on your student's grade level, and on how much additional support from teachers that your student needs to be learning at grade level. For K-8 students who are successful with grade level work, most of the lessons can be done on a flexible schedule, meaning that students and parents can choose what time of the day they would like to complete lessons. Due dates for lessons are somewhat flexible, as long as students are staying on track for course completion. For students needing additional teacher support, there will be scheduled live class connect sessions throughout the week that students must attend. The high school program is a combination of self-paced work and scheduled lessons, activities, and exams. Student must attend class

connects and do school work daily to stay on track, but the daily schedule can be flexible, allowing for lessons at different parts of the day and schooling can take place at home, in a library or on vacation as long as there is internet connection.

Challenge: While there is flexibility of when and where during the day your student does his or her coursework, all students are expected to complete schoolwork each day and attend virtual classroom sessions as scheduled by their teachers and to achieve a year's academic growth in a year's time. When students are not learning at grade level and need additional support from teachers, there will be more time requirements as to when a student must attend live lesson sessions. These sessions may be as little as a few hours a week, or as much as 20-25 hours a week, depending upon how much direct teacher instruction a student requires. In addition to complying with state attendance requirements, all students must also comply with all state testing requirements. The state testing location may not be near your house and as such you may have to travel to take state proctored tests.

Q: Will my student's teacher be available to teach my child, answer his or her questions and address my child learning needs?

Advantage: Online teachers are available to your student via the online class sessions they lead as well via phone and email to answer any questions or concerns your student might have. In addition, the teachers are specially trained to teach online, which involves a different skill set than teaching a classroom full of students. As noted previously, K12 students' parent (or other adult) play a much more active role in their child's education so children in essence have more adults actively working with them to achieve their educational goals.

Challenge: Immediate access to teachers is potentially less available in an online environment. In addition, parents are often concerned that their student will not have sufficient face-time with their online teacher(s).

While teachers strive to respond to all emails and voicemails within 24 hours on school days, emails and phone calls may not be responded to immediately, which means that students and learning coaches must be able to be flexible and find other courses to work on in the case that they need to hear back from the teacher before they can move on in a particular course.

Q: How will my child's socialization be impacted by attending school online?

Part of every child's educational experience is not only the academic lessons he or she masters but also the socialization skills acquired through daily interactions with peers and teachers.

Advantage: One of the big reasons parents often turn to online schooling is to rescue their children from the often negative social environment at schools, which often includes bullying and ostracizing children who are not part of a select self-determined group. With online schooling, this type of detrimental socialization is mostly eliminated. But learning online does not mean a child's socialization development stops. Socialization skills are acquired in every aspect of a child's life wherever and whenever he or she is interacting

with others. So when your child is playing on the playground, going on school-sponsored museum visits or taking part in one of the many other field trips or extra-curricular activities that are part of the K12 educational experience, he or she is also developing socialization skills.

Challenge: Not attending a classroom on a daily basis could impact that one way in which a child develops socializing skills. As pointed out above, attending school online will eliminate or greatly reduce the impact of the negative socialization that often is a part of a child's school environment. Learning at home may impact a child's socialization in general because he or she spends less time interacting in person with peers in the classroom setting. However, many online students are involved in activities surrounding sports, religious institutions, or volunteer activities, and the Learning Coaches of these students often find that there is plenty of opportunity for students to be social and to learn social skills outside of the school environment. For some students, being alone in a home setting during the day can feel isolating, and these students desire a return to a traditional school setting where there is constant face to face interaction with other students and with teachers.