

## **5 Things To Look For In An Online School**

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Within the last decade, the number of online learners has skyrocketed. In 2001, about 40,000 children in grades K-12 were learning online in the United States. That number is now over 1 million. In Colorado alone, the number of students learning online grows by 20-40% a year.

The number of districts, schools and institutions that offer online learning opportunities seems to be growing at a blazing pace as well. It can be difficult for parents and students to evaluate all the options available to them. Here are five things to look for when trying to find the best online learning opportunity.

### **Enrollment Options**

At the heart of online learning is flexibility and choice. When looking for an online school, find one that offers multiple enrollment options, such as full time, and part time enrollment as well as supplemental course offerings. Currently, you may only be interested in full-time enrollment, but situations change over time. Enrolling in an online school that only provides one enrollment option may require you to withdraw when your enrollment needs change. An online school that provides multiple enrollment options is a sign of a school that values choice and flexibility. Finding a school that provides multiple start times for courses throughout the year is an added bonus.

### **Academic Support**

A successful learning experience for a student requires a supportive team that will surround the student. Does the online school you are looking at only provide support from a teacher once the student has reached out for help? Proactive support from highly qualified and highly caring teachers is a must. Online schools that provide support from guidance counselors, librarians or technology specialist, and advisors are committed to ensuring your student will experience success. Also ask the school what type of professional development and training their teachers receive.

### **High Expectations**

High expectations lead to high performance. This is not only true for students but it also applies to the staff of an online school. Inquire about how the school establishes high expectations. Also ask what type of support structures are in place to help students and teachers achieve those high expectations.

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Experience**

Online learning should be a 21<sup>st</sup> Century experience. Shy away from online schools that simply provide their students with an online textbook to read. Quality online schools will provide students with exciting and engaging learning experiences using tools such as video, instant messaging, text messaging, blogs and Web conferencing. By using these and other similar tools, students will have the opportunity to learn in an environment that is as digitally rich as the rest of their life.

### **Rigor, Relevance and Relationships**

The “new” Three R’s. An online school can provide your child rigor by using the same high quality and expectations found at a traditional school. A student’s interest and performance in an online course will be increased when the content and the tools used by the teacher are relevant. Opportunities for students to develop life-long friendships and partnerships should be provided inside and outside of the class.