Best Practices for Students Completing Online Courses Remotely

Kellie J. Yoh
Lead Counselor
William B. Travis High School

Abstract

This action research project investigated students taking online courses through the Compass Program in Fort Bend ISD. Students working remotely online (N= 19) were tallied for completion rates, with all students in Compass courses surveyed in regards to their online experience. Only six remote online students received credit for their online course. Based on student responses, teacher encouragement during an online class period was most helpful in order to assist students in completing their Compass course. It was concluded that best practices for online Compass students is to complete an online readiness orientation and have an online class period in their schedule with teacher assistance when at all possible.

Background/Context

Online education is providing opportunities that never before existed for diverse populations of students, helping them to achieve more than ever before. Through the internet, there are countless ways to assist students in their education, whether a student seeks original credit or credit recovery in order to graduate. This research project focuses on best practices to support remote, online learners and ways to assist students in gaining credits toward graduating on time. Online learning for many students has the potential to make certain that no child is ever left behind.

The purpose of this action research project will be to investigate what specific interventions assist remote online users (not enrolled in an online class during the day) in completing their online Compass course, when compared to those enrolled in a Compass online class period during the school day. Specific interventions will be utilized with a sample of remote online student users, and completion rates of all Compass online students at Travis High School will be compared. It is proposed that such influences as a

positive school environment, faculty support, and technological skills may influence student success rates in online learning.

The research question of this study is to explore interventions that effect completion rates of remote, online users. This study will also help to determine the best practices to support online users. The student population to be observed include high school students who are working remotely (off campus), online to recover credits through the online Compass program. In this sample, there are twelve females and eleven males (for a total of twenty three students), in grades 9, 10, and 11, of Anglo, African American, and Hispanic backgrounds. All students are full time students at William B. Travis High School in Fort Bend ISD, and most are at risk of not graduating with their cohort class. Students started their online course in the fall of 2012, but have not been provided external support. These students do not have a class period during the regular school day but work on their online course at home. Students can access computers at school or other locations at their convenience. The students involved in the study will be contacted during regular school hours initially, as well as via email.

The importance of this study is to find interventions that will assist remote, online learners in completing courses for graduation. As a counselor researcher, it is important to provide students with support and tools that help them succeed. Online learning may improve school efficiency to assist students in need of a more personalized learning program. This action research study will contribute to the body of knowledge in regards to best practices for successful online education. Benefits to Fort Bend ISD may include an increased number of students who will successfully complete their high school courses for graduation.

Research on Online Learning

A National Center for Educational Statistics study revealed that online courses helped to reduce scheduling conflicts and accommodated non-traditional students that struggled in a formal classroom setting (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Students who have not been traditionally served online are now utilizing online courses to recover credits or finish their education. Through the Compass online program and school support, students that may not have graduated in the past, or who have graduated late, may now have the achievement of a high school diploma with their cohort class.

Online credit recovery programs help to provide access to an education, providing means to regain credits on the student's time frame. Differences in learning styles, ability level, and personalities can make the traditional school environment difficult for many students who eventually become unsuccessful. All too often educators strive to fit the child to the current educational system, when online learning may be better suited to fit the educational system to the child.

Arora (2009) states that "the current online learning landscape is evolving in ways that engage more students in more ways, promote active learning, and improve student outcomes. p. 31." Students of the 21st century need different educational tools and approaches to learning than students of the past. Technology is an integral part of the lives of students today, allowing for access to resources abound. Personalized interaction and flexibility gained through online learning appeals to students with multiple needs. Expanding educational options through online learning provides equal learning opportunities for all learners.

Research has consistently shown that effective schools share certain essential characteristics. According to Edmonds (1982), "to be effective a school need not bring all students to identical levels of mastery, but must bring an equal percentage of its highest and lowest social classes to a minimum mastery." Helping at-risk students to achieve their high school diploma through online learning, as well as accelerated students to get ahead using online courses addresses this essential characteristcs.

What is Online learning?

Online learning is any type of education that refers to Internet or computer-based instruction (Watson, Gemin, Ryan, & Wick, 2009). There are different types of virtual programs: state-sanctioned, state level, college/university based, consortium and regionally based, local education agency-based, virtual charter schools, and for-profit providers. Credit recovery is often referred to as a type of online learning, in that students can utilize Internet programs to regain credits in courses in which they have previously been unsuccessful. Students today, many of whom are at-risk of not graduating, can access course materials online and have the opportunity to regain course credits in order to complete their credits for a high school diploma.

Statistics of Online Learning

According to the North Central Regional Education Laboratory (NCREL), students perform equally as well, if not better, academically in online learning. According to the Sloan Consortium, more than 1 million students took online classes in 2007-8, while only 32 states run virtual schools (United States Department of Education, 2005). By 2010, over 6 million total students are now enrolled in at least one online

course (Allen, Seaman, & Pearson, 2011). A survey by Allen, Seaman, and Pearson (2011), stated that 51.1% of students feel that online learning is satisfactory when compared to face to face classes, while 16.6% felt online classes were superior. The kindergarten through twelvth grade, edu-industry venue is a $300 million dollar market estimated to grow at an annual pace of 30% annually (International Association for K-12 Online Learning, 2009) and 72% of school districts with distance education programs plan to expand offerings in the coming year. (United Stated Department of Education, 2005). Research suggests that by 2014, 10% of all courses will be computer based, and by 2019 about 50% of courses will be delivered via online (International Association for K-12 Online Learning, 2009). In school districts across the United States, 80% of school districts stated that "the course was otherwise unavailable" as the main reason for offering online courses (Picciano & Seaman, 2009).

The average freshmen high school graduation rate for United States is 74.9% (United Stated Department of Education, 2010). According to Steinberg and Kinchloe (2004), "students in urban areas are two times as likely to leave before graduation, and dropouts are 30-60% in some U.S. urban schools" (p.55). Only 51% of African American students and 52% of Hispanic students in the U.S. graduate. According to the Silent Epidemic report (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006), 88% of students who dropped out of school had passing grades. The National Center for Educational Statistics study by Setzer & Lewis (2005) revealed that online learning was effective for growing school districts that lacked adequate structural resources, college level programs such as Advanced Placement, and qualified teachers. In addition, the study also found that online courses helped to reduce scheduling conflicts, assisted to meet the needs of high poverty

or rural students, and accommodated non-traditional students who struggled in a formal classroom setting.

Statistics of Drops Outs

In a report entitled, "Ending the Silent Epidemic: A Perspective of High School Dropouts," challenges and statistics were described for those who do not complete high school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). It was noted by Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) that almost one third of all students, and half of all black, Hispanic, or Native American student fail to graduate from high school. Of the students surveyed in the report, 47 % stated that classes were not interesting and 69% stated they were not motivated to work hard in school. According to the study, a person without a high school diploma would make one million dollars less over a lifetime when compared with a college graduate, and $9,200 less annually (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). It was noted that dropouts were more probable to be unemployed, living in poverty, a single parent, on government assistance, in poor health, and had children who would dropout of school. Society endures a social burder for students without a high school diploma, for an unskilled work force with decreased productivity that may eventually lead to public assistance needs, or worse involvement in criminal activities.

Compass Learning Program

The Compass Learning program was adopted by Fort Bend ISD, July, 2010. The online provider touts that they have been in business for forty three years and facilitates the latest in educational initiatives (www.compasslearning.com). Compasses courses are aligned with Texas state standards and continuously researches student engagement, as well as learning processes. This e-learning supplier states that they enable students to

regain credits needed for graduation, ultimately reducing the number of high school dropouts.

According to the Compass profile, their online courses are felixble and students can move through them at their own pace. Compass describes that students best sutited to their courses are those who may be deficient in credits needed for graduation, or who have partial or completely failed a face to face course. Credit recovery often refers to a student taking a course they have previously attemtped but were not successful, as compared to courses a student takes for the first time or for original credit (NCES, 2011). Compass is a type of credit recovery program that focuses on helping students graduate on time by completing high school. Compass advertises that students are engaged in their learning process and parents can easily monitor progress and assignments, which helps them stay informed. "With Compass Learning as a credit recovery option, students are less likely to dropout when they know they can focus only on concepts they haven't mastered to recover credit and graduate." (www.compasslearning.com)

Reported Advantages of Online Learning

Distance learning via the Internet makes courses available that would not otherwise be accessible at all campuses. The wide range of online course choice also adds tremendous opportunity to students with diverse needs. Students are able to access real-time instruction with online technology that provides for the varying learning styles (Aurora, 2009). Introverted students may be more comfortable interacting online in comparison to the traditional classroom setting. Online learning can be personalized, as e-learning instructors support students via one on one interaction. Schools need to

realize the growing demand for online courses and begin to take advantage of all that distance learning and the Internet has to offer for various types of students.

There are numerous advantages to online learning. Some of the conveniences of online learning include being able to complete an education from the comfort of your own home, no transportation issues or parking hassles, elimination of certain expenses such as childcare, and the ability to work on courses at the time of day that best suits the student. Online learning is believed to not only save money on space and transportation, but also improves student performance (Dillion, 2009). Berge and Clark (2005) identified four major benefits of virtual schooling that includes expanding educational access for all students, improving student skills and outcomes, providing high-quality learning options, and giving students more educational choices.

Online learning allows for many learning styles, which levels the education playing field and subsequently increases student motivation and self-esteem (Arora, 2009). Students who have not been traditionally served online are now utilizing online courses to recover credit or finish their education. Online courses allow opportunities for students who need more time to complete a course, home school access, or even adult learners to finish their high school diploma. Students who are reluctant are afforded 'think time' through asynchronous functions of online learning, and shy students are more likely to participate, becoming involved in conversations more than in a traditional classroom. Virtual schooling can even facilitate students in the opportunity to also find employment, while finishing their high school diploma due to flexibility in scheduling. Online courses can provide space for students when schools have maxed out their capacity, or serve the growing population of home schooled students.

> Fulton (2002) states that online learning is beneficial to students who are not otherwise able to attend their brick-and-mortar schools, such as students who were hospitalized or homebound, students who had been removed from schools because of suspension, assignment to alternative programs, or incarceration, or students who traveled due to their participation in athletic events or parental status (i.e. children of politicians or diplomats who split time between a number of locations).

Fulton (2002) also suggests that an online education may be a viable option for students who are not successful in traditional classrooms due to behavioral issues. These sorts of problems may distract from the education of other students in a traditional classroom. Keeler (2003) states benefits of online schools as "decreasing the amount of time spent on discipline issues, flexibility in scheduling (both students and teachers), and time saved in administrative tasks associated with registration, attendance, and grading." Teachers are able to assist students and target areas of need without singling out anyone or embarrassing them in an online setting. In the future, it may be possible to have online customization for every student to have an individualized education plan (IEP), such as required now in traditional schools for students with disabilities.

Reported Disadvantages of Online Learning

There are naysayers of online learning, both with and without merit. According to Roblyer (2004), there are "claims and counter claims that swirl around issues of funding, credit, certification, and whether or not the whole idea of learning without a teacher and student being in the same room is socially desirable or morally acceptable." Online learners do face a reduced external motivation to stay on task, making it easy to fall

behind, possibly leading to never completing a course. Weekly study schedules, virtual office hours, as well as chat group formation and course agreements provided to the learner may help with accountability and completion (Shank, 2007). Just as there are good and bad courses or classroom teachers, there will likely be the same trend in online learning. Many feel that if a student is not motivated to pass face to face classes, then they will not be motivated to pass an online class. The American public is ultimately skeptical of the quality of virtual schools.

There are also factors that can make online courses difficult in comparison with traditional face-to-face courses. Online texts can be difficult to read since many prefer paper to a computer screen and time management is critical. There are students who do not relate well to others or don't follow netiquette, as well as the group that allows one team member to do the majority of work for others (Engvig, 2006). Intensive work loads that include copious reading and time commitments to prove course participation can mislead students into thinking online courses will be easier than a traditional setting. Online facilitators also can give unclear guidelines or instructions, lack empathy, and leave students feeling unsupported without feedback. Technology can cut down on the amount of human interaction, especially through body language. The missing body language due to lack of face-to-face contact can effect a learner's online experience. Frustration with technology that doesn't perform, or is non-user friendly can make students wary of taking online courses. As a teacher, being able to look at a student's face may give critical indicators as to the level of understanding.

In addition, there are notable differences between adult and child learning. Clark, Lewis, Oyer and Schreiber (2002) found that the students most successful in virtual

schools include highly motivated, self-disciplined, and independent learners with good abilities in reading, writing and technology. These characteristics are common among adult learners, where most of the research in online learning has been focused. Vygotsky (1962) showed that learning for children involved social processes based on a zone of proximal development, which essentially means that much of what a child learns comes from higher level interactions with others around them. Adults have developed certain skills that children are in the process of acquiring. Younger students also do not have the autonomy that adult learners have developed, thus needing more structure that distance education settings such as online courses, may not provide for younger students (Moore, 1973). With appropriate scaffolding from online teachers, students may be able to perform tasks that they are incapable of completing on their own. Support and guidance not only provides assistance, but also instills the skills necessary for independent problem solving in the future.

Best Practices of Online Learning

There are significant differences from traditional pedagogy that educators must be aware of when trying to help students to be successful in online learning. A learner agreement helps students to understand the responsibility, and asks for a front end commitment that provides clarity before ever beginning a course (Shank, 2007). Orientation sessions can give the new online learner a good picture of course requirements. Educational Success Prediction Instruments (ESPI) can also be used to determine the aptitude of students embarking in online courses (Ferdig, DiPietro, & Papanastasiou, 2005; Roblyer & Marshall, 2002). Using and expanding on the

development of ESPRIs will allow educators to keep identifying "successful learner attributes" (Rice, 2006).

Students need up front and straight forward instructions when embarking on an online course. Many online providers require parent contact by the online teacher, at the beginning of the course, monthly, and when a course goes inactive, or something is out of the ordinary for coursework. It is important to provide good communication and clear guidelines to help students feel supported in their online experience. Grading procedures and participation requirements should be stated up front so students understand online course expectations. Course design needs to be navigable, and contingencies for technology failures should be anticipated. Instructors of online courses should be accessible online and via telephone when nonparticipation is detected. Facilitating a sense of community online will also help the student's buy-in to online learning. Varying assignments for students to include a variety of tasks, other than just utilizing online activities, assists in changing the monotony of working on the computer.

Comparison of Traditional Classroom and Online Learning

According to research and evaluation studies on effectiveness of online K-12 learning, online classrooms appear to be equal or better than the traditional classrooms. Students show an equivalent or better performance in well designed online learning courses when compared with taking high quality classroom courses (Cavanaugh, 2009). Most full length online courses facilitate the three higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, whereas shorter, training modules lend themselves to the lower levels of knowledge, comprehension, and application. While

many feel an online course may be a point and click adventure, many students perceive online courses to in fact be harder that traditional face-to-face courses.

Findings by Cavanaugh (2001) suggest that hybrid courses that comprise both face-to-face and online methods have greater retention and outcomes than purely online courses. Outside of teachers and students, it was also noted that parents and distance learning advisors may play a vital role through helping students stay on track with course requirements, and deciding if online learning is an appropriate choice for course completion (Oliver, Osbourne, Patel, & Kleiman, 2009). Blended learning often provides comprehensive student support online, as well as face to face contact (Watson & Gemin, 2008). Both venues of education, face to face and online, can be combined together for an enhanced learning experience.

Summary

Online learning has the potential to dramatically change education in the United States in a powerful way. While still in its early stages, the impact it can have to help at-risk student in particular may facilitate a reduction in high school dropouts to produce a more educated society. Statstics support the development of more online learning programs to better meet the needs of a changing student culture. While there are many advantages of online learning, it does present new educational issues that must be addressed. There are noted best practices for successful Internet learning and educators must adapt teaching practices to support students in their learning endeavors. Pros and cons of curricula presented in the classroom or via the Internet can often be resolved through a hybrid course utilizing the best of both arenas. Funding for online education

may be affected by seat time, although the benefits of offering courses online may steer policy in new directions.

Method

Sample

The sample for this study included 23 students (male and female) at William B. Travis High School in Richmond, Texas. Participants included all demographics, grades 9th-11th, including students that participate in the Federal 504 Program, Limited English Proficient (ELL) and some utilize special education services. Many students were off grade level (due to failing courses) and considered at-risk of not graduating. All students in the study needed to recover credits and were contracted to work on the Compass online courses remotely (outside of school), and did not have a class period in their schedule in order to work on their online classes. Students met initially with the researcher and agreed to allow their data to be part of the action research project and agreed to complete the survey at the end of the semester. Other students that did have a Compass class period also agreed to complete the online survey which allowed for more information to be obtained on the students' online experiences.

Measures

The instrument utilized in this study was a survey that was adapted from an HISD online course student questionnaire. The survey language and questions were grade appropriate and straightforward. Questions on the survey included Likert-type questions, as well as open-ended questions. The survey was sent out via email to all student participants in Compass learning, whether working remotely or on campus. Students

were sent reminder emails to encourage them to fill out the survey. Completion rates (for remote students) were also calculated based on online courses started and finished with a passing grade.

Design

For this study, a mixed methods research design was utilized that included the use of a survey to gather data. The independent variable in the study includes the various intervention methods used as reminders for the students working remotely online, while the dependent variable is the completion rates of remote users. Research limitations include sample size and the fact that not all students who started the online courses are even still enrolled at Travis High School, which will affect the data outcomes.

Procedure

Each counselor at THS met with students in need of recovering credits and signed the students up to complete a Compass course with a contract and guidelines. If a student did not have room in their regular, day schedule to include a Compass as a class, students were allowed to work on the online course remotely. Student names were then sent to the researcher who met face to face with each remote user at the beginning and end of the study (2012-13 school year). Each remote user was given a calendar to track their progress and make plans to work on their online course, and observations were collected by the researcher at each meeting. Both the students and parents were sent email reminders at two different times during the year to encourage students to keep working on their online course and check for questions. A hardcopy note was also sent to each student in order to serve as a reminder and support course completion. Teachers that remote users indicated were influential in their lives were also sent a note to ask them to

encourage students to work on their online course. Parents of the remote students were contacted by the researcher to remind them to try to motivate their child to finish the online course. At the end of May, all Compass students were sent the online student survey requesting that they provide information in regards to their online experience. Data was collected via a Goggle document to be further analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data will be compiled on an Excel spreadsheet for organizational management after obtained from the Google document survey. Data obtain from the survey, as well as the completion rates will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and measures of central tendency. Inferential statistics will also be utilized to determine if the sample population can be generalizable to the larger population.

Analysis and Findings

The sample for this study included N=19 students working remotely online in mainly core subjects. Less than half (6 students-32%) of the students working remotely online completed their course (Figure 1). Students that did complete the online course remotely were evenly split between (3) males and (3) females. Most students (13 students-68%) did not complete the online course.

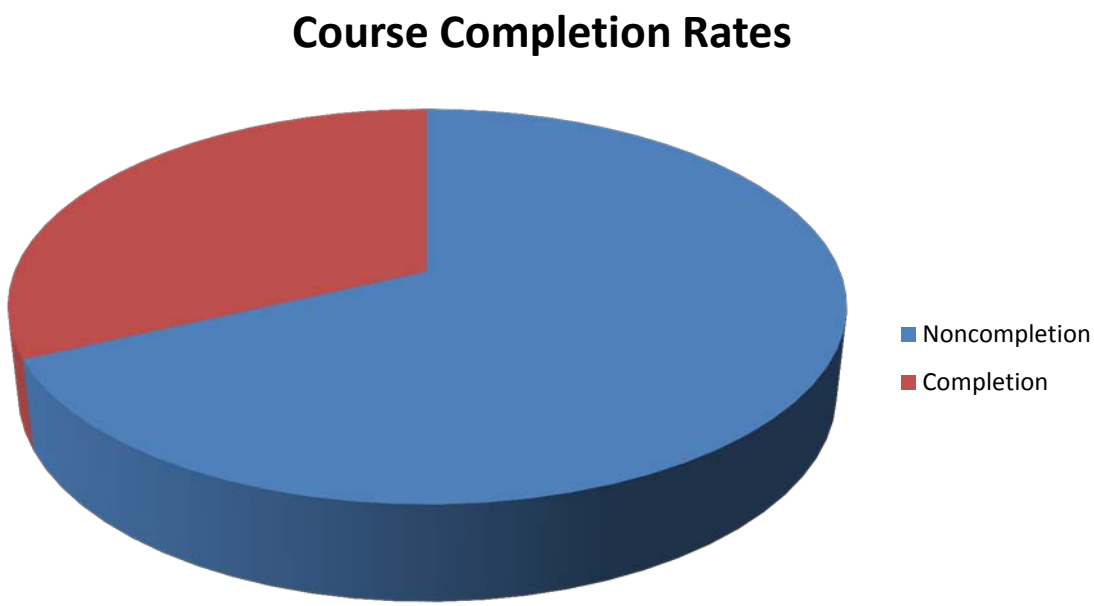

Figure 1. **Student completion rates for online remote Compass courses**

In conference with the remote online students, various reasons were given for non-completion. The most frequent answer the students stated was that their Internet at home was not working or they were having computer problems. Many also never started the class to even find out if they could accomplish the course. Some stated that they were having difficulty logging in, got discouraged, and just gave up. Other students either decided to take a face to face class, or felt they needed to concentrate on their scheduled face to face classes. One student stated that he decided not to complete the course since he found out the NCAA was not going to approve the credit.

Survey Results

Students that were taking Compass classes were surveyed in regards to their Compass online course experience. The sample for the survey included N=19 students that were working remotely or had a period in their schedule to work on the online class.

Online courses taken included an even mix of core classes, with eight twelfth grade students, six eleventh grade students, and 5 tenth grade students participating in the survey. For the large majority of students, this was their first time to take an online course (11 students-58%). Of the sample, 26% (5 students) had taken one other online course, 10% (2 students) had taken 2 other online courses, and only one student had taken more than 2 other online courses. Most students either spent 6-7 weeks to complete their online course, or did not finish all together. The next group of students took 8-12 or 12 or more weeks to complete their course. Most students (53%) stated they spent 1-2 hours per week working on their online course at school, while 42% stated they worked 1-2 hours at home on their online course. The majority of students, 47%, received a grade of B in their online course, 21% received a grade of C, 11% a grade of D, and 21% received no credit due to non-completion. No A's were received by students who completed the survey on their online Compass experience.

Several questions on the survey included Likert-type responses, on a scale of 1-5 with low end designated as strongly agree, and high end strongly disagree (Table 1). Using the mode as the descriptive central tendency, students strongly agreed that the Compass course was user friendly and they would take another online course. Students revealed that they answered mainly neutral on whether they enjoyed the course, managed their time well, the course kept them interested, and if they would tell a friend to take an online course. Students strongly disagreed that they liked the subject before taking the online course and they had technical difficulties.

Table 1

Answers to Likert-type questions on Student Online Course Completion Survey. (N=19)

Statement	*Mean*	*Mode*	*SD*
I enjoyed taking this online course	2.74	3	1.15
I feel I managed my time well	2.58	3	1.22
I found this course to be user friendly	2.32	1	1.30
I liked this subject before I took the course online	3.86	5	1.49
The material presentation kept me interested	3	3	1.15
I had technical difficulties with my online course	3.68	5	1.25
I would take another course online	2.68	1	1.49
I would tell my friend to take a course online	2.63	3	1.38

Students also provided information in regards to ways they felt they could have done better in their online course (Figure 2). Students stated overwhelmingly that they could have done better if the course was more interesting.

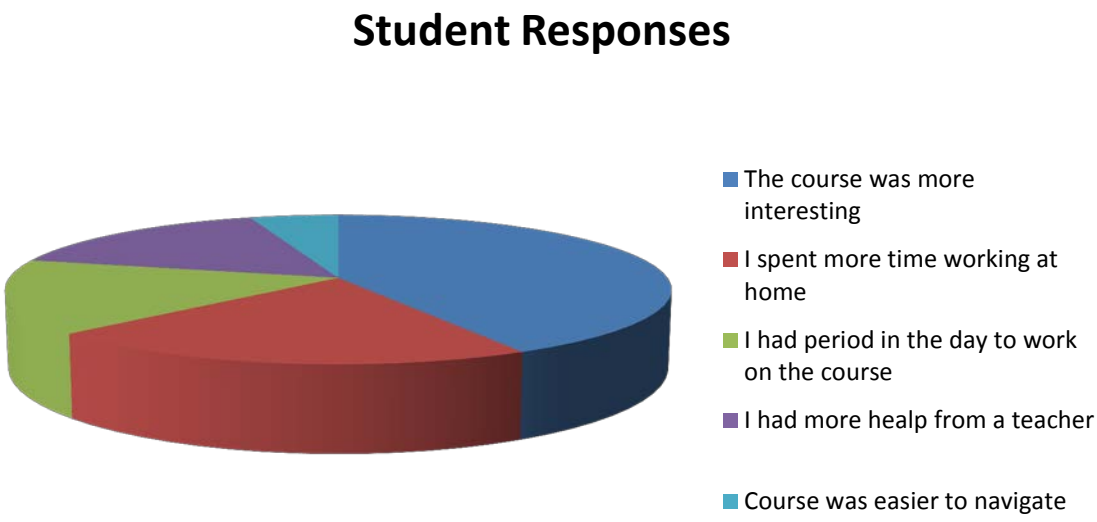

Figure 2. **Student statements for improvements in the online course IF**

Students also gave information about what was most helpful in assisting them to complete their online course (Figure 3). Amazingly, students answered that teacher encouragement was the most prevalent factor that helped them to complete their online course.

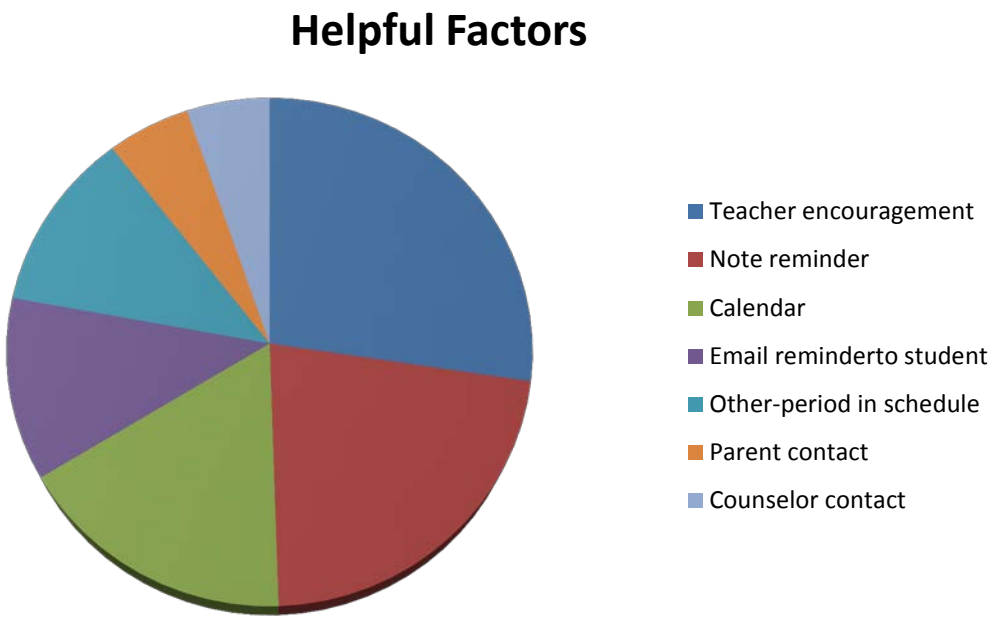

Figure 3. **What was most helpful to students in order to complete the online course**

Lastly, students were asked what feedback they could provide in order to help other students be successful in their online course. Most students opted not to answer this open ended question. One student stated that online courses were by far the best way to recover credits and it is important to stay focused and not to 'slack.' Several stated the online courses were boring. It was also suggested that the Compass program should allow students to retake quizzes without having to rewatch a video first.

Conclusion

The concept for this study evolved as a result of the 2011 dissertation, *Exploring Online Learning for At-Risk Students to Complete a High School Diploma*. Data for that study was collected from several online districts, as well as the Texas Virtual School Network. In 2011, not much data had been collected in regards to online learning and

was relatively new to most K-12 students. While conclusions were difficult to make, it was clear that online learning was beneficial for some that gained credits in order to graduate. Students now have many more options to recover credits for graduation, but just as with face to face classes, do not always complete required courses for many reasons.

Significance

As a counselor researcher, this study was significant in that educators are always seeking ways to help all students succeed. As with anything, one size does not fit all and online learning certainly falls into that category. If it helps even one student however, most educators would be willing to give it a try. There are ways to improve success and this study focused on those factors. With more and more research, hopefully students can be given the best chance of succeeding and learning in an online course.

The results in this study did reveal a fair amount of detail. According to the students, the power of teacher encouragement is large in the spectrum of helping students complete their online course. The researcher contacted influential teachers of remote online students, in hopes that they would encourage students to complete their online course. These students did not express that the teacher was truly influential, although it was the students in the Compass course during the regular school day that did feel the teacher was most helpful in completing their online course. It appears that students with a period to work on the online course each day have a much better chance of completing their online course than those that work remotely. While the idea of working on a course at your own pace, at your own leisure is enticing to some; the fact is that a strong teacher and time allotted each day appears to be a good indicator for online course success.

A hard copy note reminder was described as helpful for many of the remote students, possibly to prompt them to work on their online class. Students are conditioned for structure in school, while outside school may have less discipline in their studies. Students trying to recover credits may not have the discipline to stay focused long enough to see an entire course through to completion. However, there are students that realize the error of their previous ways (in losing credits), and have learned to not only be success in online courses, but their face to face classes too.

Reflections & Limitations

In reflection, the study produced information that can be useful to educators. The power of a good teacher that has the ability to help students stay on track and assist them when needed is invaluable in online learning. This actually could be considered blended or hybrid learning, as students are able to rely more on themselves and less on the teacher. It is important for some adult (be it parent, teacher, or counselor) help the student with organizational skills in order to complete an online course. Online courses require advance planning and most students need to utilize some sort of calendar to keep up with course demands. A counselor calling students in to check on their course progress did not fair productive in course completion, as rated by counselors and students.

As with any research, there are limitations to this study as well. It would have been more beneficial to have the same students complete the online survey as in remote sample. However, this was not really possible for many reasons. The sample kept decreasing by the day, due to students that withdrew, decided to take a face to face class,

or were bumped to senior grade level. Seniors were not included in the study due to the fact that graduation is a obvious motivating factor as students get closer to graduating. Lastly, the small sample size may not be representative of the larger student population.

Recommendations for Action

Online course readiness orientation. Students who begin an online course need to be provided clear expectations of the requirements and demands. A mere written contract with the student seems to be insufficient. It appears that the development and requirement of an online course orientation should be considered. A 'readiness' scale may also be helpful in determining which students are truly ready and willing to do the work an online course requires from students. While the idea of an online course seems easy to many students, some do not take is seriously and waste the opportunity and resources in the process.

Remote user requirements. The first option for any student should be to take the online class at school, during the school day with a certified teacher who can assist them as needed. If this option is not available, student should still have the option to take the online course remotely. However, there should be several stipulations in order for student to be successful online. First, an open lab should be provided at school, before during lunch and after school for students to come in and get help. There may even need to be an hourly requirement considered for some who have a low percentage of the course completed. A Compass mentor teacher should be assigned and paid to assist remote students in ways such as sending reminder notes, weekly email with progress reports (to students and parents), as well as random questions that students need help with

in order to complete their course. Having a teacher resource will help provide students with more accountability to finish and earn credit in Compass Learning.

Scholarship with fees for non-completion. Finding money to recover credits can be an issue for lower socioeconomic students. However, some students feel there is no responsibility as they have nothing at stake to actually complete the course. This holds true for many programs, such as fee waivers for students to take the SAT test. Many students who utilize fee waivers simple do not show up for the test as a result of not having to pay for the exam. For Compass learning, educators certainly wouldn't want to deny a student the chance due to the lack or funds, but also need to reiterate the importance of this opportunity and resource. A scholarship can always be given, with the stipulation that there is a fee for non-completion. Failing a course would not be considered non-completion. Currently, the only provision students are told is that other Compass courses will not be available to them if they do not complete the course. Students more than likely need more stake in the outcome other than the idle threat of not being able to take further online courses.

Further Research

Based on this research, there are several items that could be addressed for further studies. The development and testing of an online readiness orientation would be very useful to help students be more successful in completing their courses. The Compass teacher should also be involved in training in order to give the most effective assistance to online students. It would also be interesting to correlate grade point average (GPA) and online course completion rates.

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Appendix

Online Course Survey

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?fromEmail=true&formkey=dFJFbWZ2czBIQUNzc1h5ckMtRjVyS2c6MQ

Directions: Please provide the following about your online Compass course experience so that we may gather information to help future students be as successful as you have been online!

Last Name *

First Name *

Name of the course you attempted/completed online * Don't forget to put an "A" for first semester, or "B" for second semester if applicable

What is your current grade level? * As classified by THS

- ( ) 9th
- ( ) 10th
- ( ) 11th
- ( ) 12th

How many online courses have you taken before? *

- ( ) this was my first course online
- ( ) 1 other online course
- ( ) 2 other online courses
- ( ) 3 other online courses
- ( ) more than 3 other online courses

How many weeks did it take you to complete the online course? * Take your best guess if you are not sure

- ( ) 3-4 weeks
- ( ) 4-5 weeks
- ( ) 6-7 weeks
- ( ) 8-12 weeks
- ( ) 11-12 weeks
- ( ) more than 12 weeks
- ( ) I didn't finish the course

How many hours a week did you spend working on your online course AT SCHOOL? * Take your best guess if you are not sure

- ( ) 0 hours
- ( ) 1-2 hours
- ( ) 3-4 hours
- ( ) 5-6 hours
- ( ) more than 6 hours

How many hours a week did you spend working on your online course AT HOME? * Take your best guess if you are not sure

- ( ) 0 hours
- ( ) 1-2 hours
- ( ) 3-4 hours
- ( ) 5-6 hours
- ( ) more than 6 hours

What grade did you receive in your online course? *

- ( ) A
- ( ) B
- ( ) C
- ( ) D
- ( ) no credit

I enjoyed taking this course online *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Agree	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	Strongly Disagree

I feel that I manage my time well *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Agree	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	Strongly Disagree

I found the online course to be user friendly *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Agree	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	Strongly Disagree

I liked this subject before I took the course online *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Agree	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	Strongly Disagree

I felt like the way the material was presented online kept me interested *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Agree	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	Strongly Disagree

I had technical difficulties with my online course *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Agree	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	Strongly Disagree

I would take another course online *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Agree	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	Strongly Disagree

I would tell my friends to take a course online *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Agree	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	Strongly Disagree

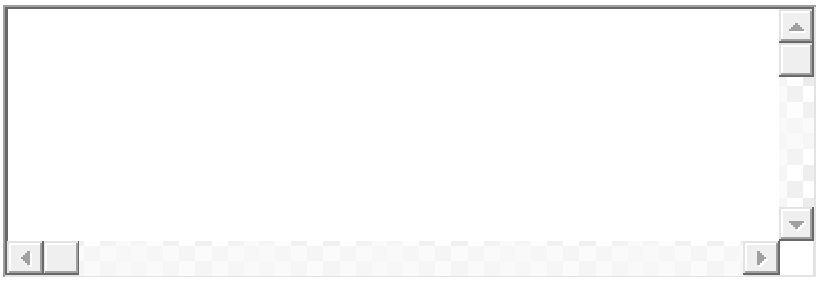
I could have done better IF * check all that apply

- [ ] I had a period in the day to work on my course online at school
- [ ] the online course was easier to navigate
- [ ] I had more help from a teacher with my online course
- [ ] I had more help from a counselor
- [ ] the course was more interesting
- [ ] I spent more time working at home on my online course
- [ ] Other:

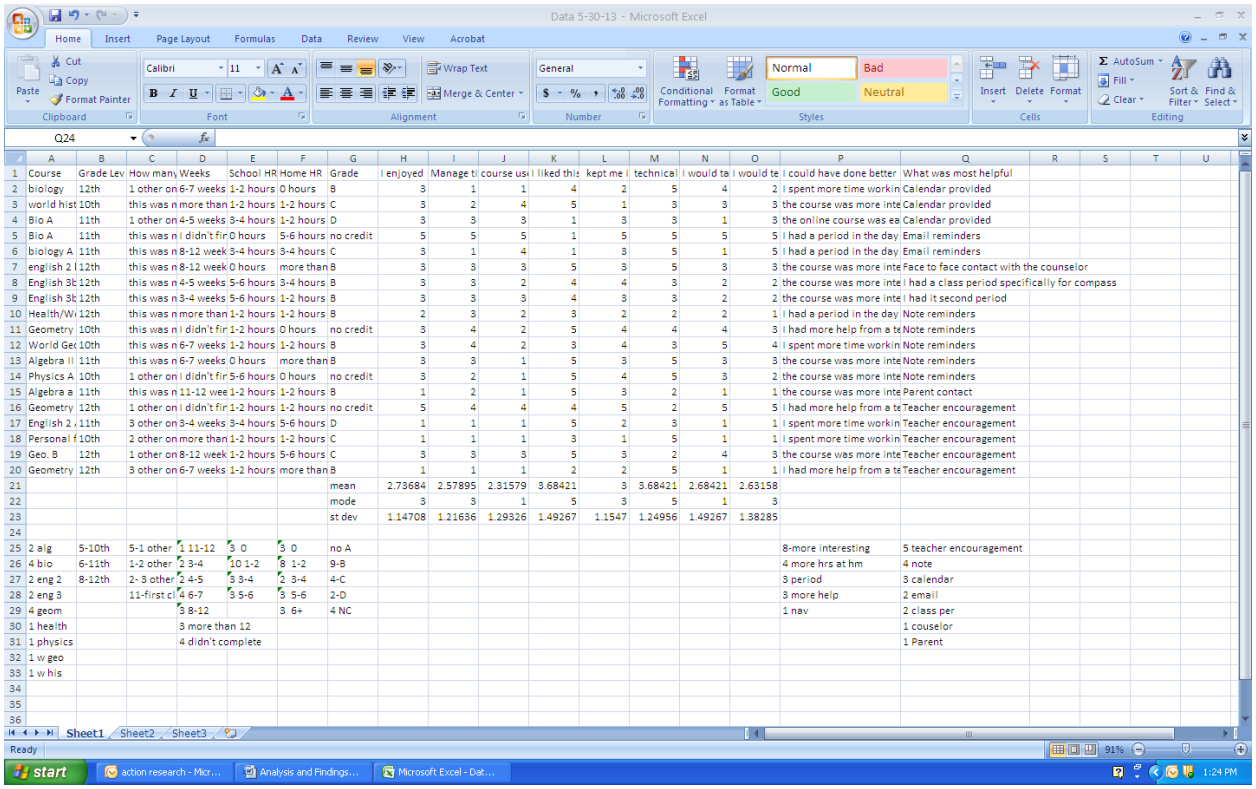
What was most helpful in order to complete your online course? *

- ( ) Calendar provided
- ( ) Email reminders
- ( ) Note reminders
- ( ) Face to face contact with the counselor
- ( ) Parent contact
- ( ) Teacher encouragement
- ( ) Other:

Please give us any other feedback you feel is important so that we may help others be successful in their online experience.



Spreadsheet of Survey Data



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
1	Course	Grade Lev	How many	Weeks	School HR	Home HR	Grade	I enjoyed	Manage ti	course use	I liked this	kept me i	technical	I would ta	I would te	I could have done better	What was most helpful				
2	biology	12th	1 other on	6-7 weeks	1-2 hours	0 hours	B	3	1	1	4	2	5	4	2	I spent more time workin	Calendar provided				
3	world hist	10th	this was n	more than	1-2 hours	1-2 hours	C	3	2	4	5	1	3	3	3	the course was more inte	Calendar provided				
4	Bio A	11th	1 other on	4-5 weeks	3-4 hours	1-2 hours	D	3	3	3	1	3	3	1	3	the online course was ea	Calendar provided				
5	Bio A	11th	this was n	I didn't fir	0 hours	5-6 hours	no credit	5	5	5	1	5	5	5	5	I had a period in the day	Email reminders				
6	biology A	11th	this was n	8-12 week	3-4 hours	3-4 hours	C	3	1	4	1	3	5	1	5	I had a period in the day	Email reminders				
7	english 2	12th	this was n	8-12 week	0 hours	more than	B	3	3	3	5	3	5	3	3	the course was more inte	Face to face contact with the counselor				
8	English 3b	12th	this was n	4-5 weeks	5-6 hours	3-4 hours	B	3	3	2	4	4	3	2	2	the course was more inte	I had a class period specifically for compass				
9	English 3b	12th	this was n	3-4 weeks	5-6 hours	1-2 hours	B	3	3	3	4	3	3	2	2	the course was more inte	I had it second period				
10	Health/Wi	12th	this was n	more than	1-2 hours	1-2 hours	B	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	1	I had a period in the day	Note reminders				
11	Geometry	10th	this was n	I didn't fir	1-2 hours	0 hours	no credit	3	4	2	5	4	4	4	3	I had more help from a te	Note reminders				
12	World Ge	10th	this was n	6-7 weeks	1-2 hours	1-2 hours	B	3	4	2	3	4	3	5	4	I spent more time workin	Note reminders				
13	Algebra II	11th	this was n	6-7 weeks	0 hours	more than	B	3	3	1	5	3	5	3	3	the course was more inte	Note reminders				
14	Physics A	10th	1 other on	I didn't fir	5-6 hours	0 hours	no credit	3	2	1	5	4	5	3	2	the course was more inte	Note reminders				
15	Algebra a	11th	this was n	11-12 wee	1-2 hours	1-2 hours	B	1	2	1	5	3	2	1	1	the course was more inte	Parent contact				
16	Geometry	12th	1 other on	I didn't fir	1-2 hours	1-2 hours	no credit	5	4	4	4	5	2	5	5	I had more help from a te	Teacher encouragement				
17	English 2	11th	3 other on	3-4 weeks	3-4 hours	5-6 hours	D	1	1	1	5	2	3	1	1	I spent more time workin	Teacher encouragement				
18	Personal f	10th	2 other on	more than	1-2 hours	1-2 hours	C	1	1	1	3	1	5	1	1	I spent more time workin	Teacher encouragement				
19	Geo. B	12th	1 other on	8-12 week	1-2 hours	5-6 hours	C	3	3	3	5	3	2	4	3	the course was more inte	Teacher encouragement				
20	Geometry	12th	3 other on	6-7 weeks	1-2 hours	more than	B	1	1	1	2	2	5	1	1	I had more help from a te	Teacher encouragement				
21							mean	2.73684	2.57895	2.31579	3.68421	3	3.68421	2.68421	2.63158						
22							mode	3	3	1	5	3	5	1	3						
23							st dev	1.14708	1.21636	1.29326	1.49267	1.1547	1.24956	1.49267	1.38285						
24																					
25	2 alg	5-10th	5-1 other	1 11-12	3 0	3 0	no A									8-more interesting	5 teacher encouragement				
26	4 bio	6-11th	1-2 other	2 3-4	10 1-2	8 1-2	9-B									4 more hrs at hm	4 note				
27	2 eng 2	8-12th	2- 3 other	2 4-5	3 3-4	2 3-4	4-C									3 period	3 calendar				
28	2 eng 3		11-first cl	4 6-7	3 5-6	3 5-6	2-D									3 more help	2 email				
29	4 geom			3 8-12		3 6+	4 NC									1 nav	2 class per				
30	1 health			3 more than 12													1 couselor				
31	1 physics			4 didn't complete													1 Parent				
32	1 w geo																				
33	1 w his																				
34																					
35																					
36																					