



White Paper

Online Learning and Virtual Schools

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Online Learning and Virtual Schools

A Focus on EdOptions Academy from Edmentum

Executive Summary

EdOptions Academy is a fully accredited virtual school with more than 12,000 annual student enrollments in 37 states and 297 schools and districts. The Academy provides a full range of school courses and services that are similar to a traditional brick-and-mortar school but are delivered in a virtual or blended environment. The overall mission of EdOptions Academy is to provide high-quality, student-centric educational options that have the flexibility to meet a wide variety of educational needs for students. Highly qualified, licensed, and certified teachers, school improvement plans, accreditation, and research-based practices are the core of the program. Over 75% of the Academy's teachers have master's degrees, including three who also hold a Ph.D. About 30% of the teachers are certified to teach Advanced Placement* courses, and 10% are National Board Certified. The director of the Academy is a certified school administrator with more than 17 years in public school administration in both a traditional and virtual school setting.

This paper describes the administrative, instructional, and curriculum components of the Academy with preliminary data on course completion rates, average final test scores, and the average time needed to complete a course. This information on EdOptions Academy students was collected during the 2012–2013 school year.

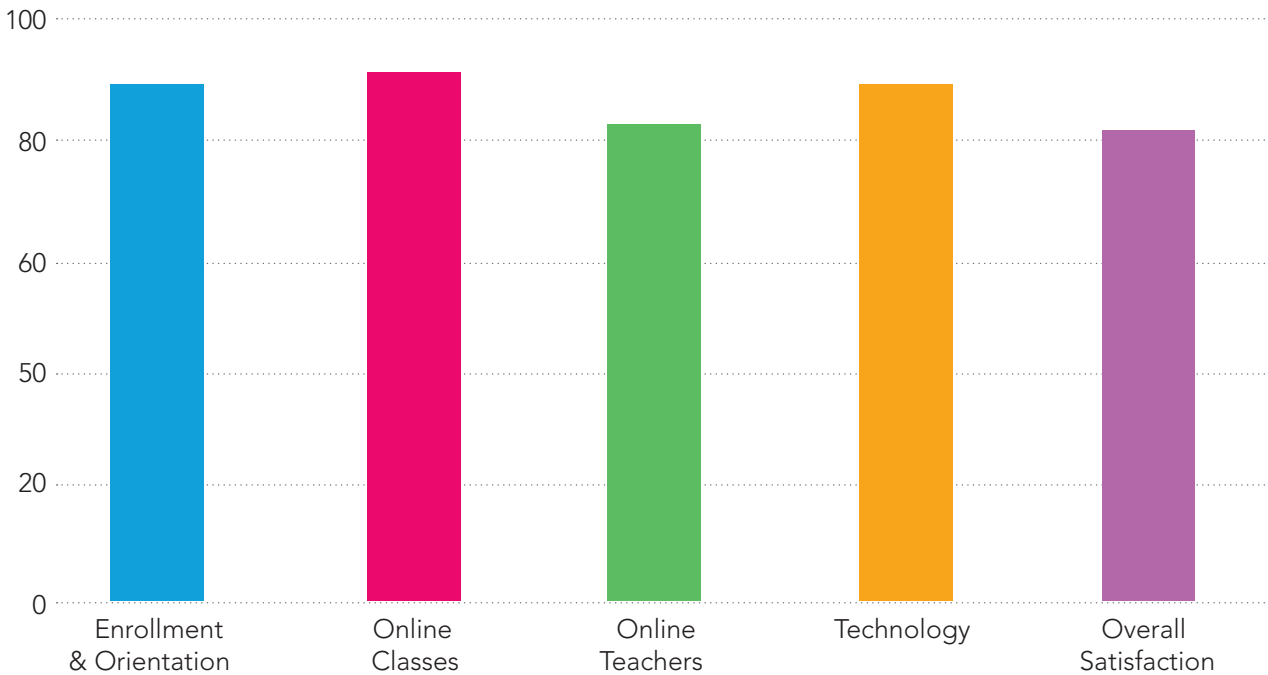
This paper marks the first comprehensive analysis of both quantitative student result data and qualitative survey data of students, administrators, and parents. An overview of the results in this paper indicated the following:

- 82% of courses scored as proficient and credit eligible
- Median grade percentages:
 - Advanced Placement* courses: 76%
 - Algebra: 75%
 - Electives: 90%
 - English 10–12: 75%
 - Global Languages: 81%
 - Math, excluding Algebra: 76%
 - Social Studies: 86%
 - STEM Courses: 75%

The survey results indicate high levels of satisfaction with EdOptions online classes, teachers, the enrollment and orientation process, and technology:

- Overall, 97% indicated satisfaction with the enrollment and orientation process.
- Of students surveyed, 91% would recommend EdOptions Academy to a friend.

Survey Question Subset Responses



Responses to the following open-ended questions reinforce the high-satisfaction percentages.

Question: "What is the best thing about the Academy?"

Student responses included the following:

- I find the best thing about this EdOptions Online Academy is that it gives me a better opportunity in my life. It gives me a chance to go off to college and follow my dreams.
- I liked that I could work at my own pace. I could take as much or little time on each lesson/submission as it took me to understand it.

Administrator and parent responses reflected a similar sentiment:

- All certified teachers available, helping to alleviate the problem in an alternative environment with very limited staff members.
- We are a very small school with a limited schedule. If a student needs to recover a credit or enters with a class we don't offer, EdOptions fills the gap.
- I love the fact that your courses do not include busy work. The EdOptions course will prepare them better for college. He is learning early how to take good notes and highlight important information for exams.

I. The Growth of Virtual Schools



Virtual schools are rapidly becoming a realistic alternative to traditional education. Overall, 31 states, as well as Washington, DC, have statewide full-time online schools. In 2012, state virtual schools had about 620,000 course enrollments according to the report *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online & Blended Learning* (Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, and Rapp, 2012). Approximately 275,000, or 44%, of the students attended full time. Growth in the number of students attending fully online schools varied across the country in 2011–2012. In the states that have the largest student populations in fully online schools or the longest history with such schools, growth was typically around 15% (e.g., Idaho 10%, Ohio 14%, Oregon 16%,

Pennsylvania 13%, Wyoming 18%). In some states with smaller starting numbers for the 2010–2011 school year, the growth was higher (e.g., Indiana 694%, Michigan 406%, Georgia 112%)

The annual *Digital Learning Report Card* (Digital Learning Now!, 2013) clearly shows that states are rising to the challenge of supporting next-generation models of learning. In 2012 alone, state lawmakers debated nearly 700 bills related to digital learning. More than 150 bills were signed into law, which opened up opportunities for students to take courses online, provided funding to support Internet-accessible devices for students, and advanced competency-based and blended-learning models.

The number of technology-ready students and teachers is also on the rise. In June 2013, the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education approved one of two \$30 million dollar contracts to buy iPad® mobile devices for 64,000 students and training for teachers (Jones 2013). The district expects to continue its relationship with Apple as it acquires technology that can support the new Common Core curriculum launching in 2014, as well as the new online state testing system. Several other states have advanced policies to eliminate class-size regulations and other roadblocks that interfere with seat time. Many states have launched new commissions to study online learning or to chart their own state's unique roadmap to reform.

Educational technology is advancing more quickly than expected. Today, technology-enhanced software is available to provide personalized learning recommendations. New online adaptive-learning systems can monitor every keystroke, every hesitation, and every wrong answer of an online learner's experience. This technology personalizes online learning content for every learner by collecting data and feeding it back to students and teachers with recommended activities and readings. The technology responds in real time to each student's activity on the system and adjusts to provide the most relevant content without interruption to the student's learning process (Webley 2013). Education changes and innovations that may have taken 20 to 30 years to implement in the past are available now for the willing. The intersection of the accountability movement, the increasing diversity of learners, and the tearing down of implementation barriers for brilliant ideas that already exist are driving changes forward.

EdOptions Academy from Edmentum

Edmentum brings more than 50 years of experience in driving significant advances in the digital education industry. The company offers a wide variety of online, innovative solutions spanning a multitude of programs. In 1960, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign created the first online learning platform. PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations) was developed to address a pressing need for greater access to high-quality education. Initially funded by a number of grants that supported science and engineering education, including a National Science Foundation grant, PLATO became the first computer-assisted learning system. Early on, learners accessed PLATO through standalone computer systems. Today, Plato Courseware's high-quality, rigorous courses can be accessed anytime from anywhere.

Educational Options was founded by educators in 1997. Its mission was to create outstanding Web-based educational products that support students and teachers inside and outside the traditional classroom. EdOptions set out to provide schools with more solutions to keep students engaged in the learning process. In 2011, PLATO Learning acquired the award-winning EdOptions, expanding and enhancing a comprehensive portfolio of education solutions to include a virtual school solution known as EdOptions Academy.

II. Program Design

In many respects, EdOptions Academy is no different from a traditional brick-and-mortar school. Students select and enroll in courses, receive instruction, complete course activities and assessments, receive feedback from instructors, and earn credits when they complete a course. But unlike a brick-and-mortar school, EdOptions Academy students can take courses anywhere they have an Internet connection—from a desk at school to their kitchen table. Students can choose from a wide array of courses that their school district may otherwise not be able to offer—from the 9th-grade English course they need to graduate to career and technical courses to Advanced Placement courses they need to earn college credits. The infusion of technology into the courses makes it possible to expand communication, access extended resources, and use audio, graphics, video, text, interactivity, and other digital capabilities to enhance learning.



Course Structure and Delivery

The beauty of EdOptions Academy is in its flexibility. A student who needs credit recovery to graduate can enroll in one of several electives or required courses. A student who lives in a rural area where there is a scarcity of specialized teachers in math or science, for example, can register for online Advanced Placement courses. A student who failed 10th-grade biology in a traditional setting can retake the course through EdOptions Academy, skipping material that pretest scores show was already been learned. EdOptions Academy accommodates Individual student needs with the flexibility of such factors as the reasons for taking a course and the time of day it is taken. The pace of learning is sensitive to the student's needs and is guided by teacher knowledge.

EdOptions Academy offers year-round rolling enrollment, including courses offered during the summer so that students can always take the courses they need when they need them. Students have 18 weeks to complete a course (eight weeks during the summer), but they can work on courses at their own pace and many students finish courses in less time. Because most courses require two semesters, A and B (½ credit each), courses are designed to cover 180 hours of instruction overall.

EdOptions Academy courses are all delivered through the Plato Learning Environment (PLE). This Web-based course delivery system uses Plato Courseware's extensive online course library to provide rigorous, relevant curriculum that challenges students with a 21st-century approach, engaging them with interactive, media-rich content. Courses consist of lessons, activities, and accompanying assessments. Comprehensive information related to the instructional design and features of Plato Courseware is available in the report, [*The Research Base of Plato Courseware*](#).

In addition to engaging lessons and activities, each course includes multiple assessment components that allow for formative and summative feedback opportunities. Assessment items are aligned to the Common Core, as well as to state standards, as indicated. The large available item pool contains multiple-choice items and technology-enhanced items designed to assess high Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels.

Student Support and Accountability



Taking virtual courses can be challenging for many students, but EdOptions Academy provides both individualized support and accountability to keep students engaged and focused on successfully completing their courses.

Every student is provided with a highly qualified online teacher who cultivates a positive and challenging academic experience. EdOptions Academy's teachers are fully trained to provide rigorous and engaging online instruction attuned to state standards, national standards, and/or Common Core State Standards. Academy teachers check and respond to emails from students and parents daily and send out weekly group messages about items of general interest. Teachers hold regular office hours to provide synchronous assistance to students, and they monitor the department help desk during office hours. Academy teachers also survey students during the semester, collecting data on the challenges and successes students experienced with a course and offering additional content and/or data management support.

Students are expected to work consistently and complete at least one lesson and accompanying assessments in each class on a weekly basis (depending on the class, this requirement may change). Each class has a pacing chart in the Student Information System that details what the student should complete each week to stay on pace. Students are also expected to respond within 24 hours to any communications from Academy teachers.

Similar to the duties of a classroom teacher, the responsibilities of EdOptions Academy teachers include monitoring student progress and performance on course assessments and notifying students of missing assignments. Teachers also look out for pacing concerns, such as skipping around in the curriculum or working beyond the assigned unit. Extended inactivity online and students' readiness to take the end-of-semester exam are also areas that teachers monitor. Teachers send at least one personalized email to each student with information about pacing, progress, and performance. Much of the work for a course may consist of offline activities assigned by the teacher. Teachers grade the offline assignments and provide constructive feedback to students.

To successfully complete a course, students must earn a combined average of 60% or higher on the unit tests and end-of-semester exam and spend a minimum of 14 days in class. With teacher approval, students can take assessments more than once if they do not earn a passing score on their first attempt. Academy teachers work with students to fill in any gaps in learning so that students can improve their scores.

School or district guidance counselors are responsible for student performance issues and welfare concerns, as well as for reviewing IEPs and 504 Plans. The school-based site coordinators act as monitors who respond to teachers' questions and follow student progress and attendance. Academy-trained proctors are available to monitor exams. EdOptions Academy is designed to mirror the support system of a traditional brick-and-mortar classroom with the added benefit of anytime, anywhere instruction.

Teacher Qualifications and Evaluation

EdOptions Academy employs highly qualified teachers who are skilled and experienced in teaching online courses. All Academy teachers possess a valid state teaching certificate and are certified in the states and subjects they are hired to teach. Many teachers have multiple state certifications. Currently, 200 Academy teachers are on board and available. The teachers bring expertise to teach the standard courses offered to high school students, including Computer Science, Economics, Psychology, Health, and Personal Finance. Teachers with specialized content certifications are also available to teach courses such as Criminology, World Religions, Introduction to Legal Studies, Anthropology, and Archaeology. Several teachers are certified to teach Advanced Placement courses, which cover Physics, Biology, Chemistry, Calculus, Environmental Science, U.S. History, and English Literature and Composition courses. Language courses include French, Spanish, Chinese, Latin, German, and English.

In all, 31 states have certified teachers with Edmentum contracts. However, if a request is made to enroll in a particular course or in a location that is not represented already, Edmentum staff will actively seek the resources to fill the need.

The **minimum credentials** of EdOptions Academy teachers include the following:

- A bachelor's degree from an accredited institution
- Teaching certification for the courses to be taught
- Three or more years of classroom teaching experience, with at least one year of online teaching experience preferred



This information summarizes the current qualifications of EdOptions Academy teachers, based on self-response:

- 75.6% (62 of 82 who responded to survey) have at least a master's degree.
- Three have a Ph.D.
- All are certified in at least one state.
- 31.7% (26) have College Board approval to teach Advanced Placement courses.
- 9.76% (8) have National Board Certification.
- Other qualifications include Reading, ESOL, Gifted and Talented endorsements, online learning certifications, and professional training.



In addition, Edmentum's academic department chairs ensure that all Academy teachers are equipped with sufficient information and resources needed for instruction. The department head reviews teacher performance three times per year (during the academic year of August through June, to ensure that instruction meets high standards. Reviews consist of one or more walk-throughs, feedback, evaluation checklists, and a final summative evaluation.

The walk-throughs consist of checks on the teachers' certification for good standing and ease of use of technology for synchronous and asynchronous communication purposes (email, Blackboard IM, Web conferences, live sessions, threaded discussions, and drop-box activities). Instructional reviews include the use of innovative strategies, the quality of feedback and monitoring to students, and the degree of responsiveness to students with special needs. Teachers are expected to work within the ethical and legal guidelines related to technology and to collaborate with other teachers, both within and outside of EdOptions Academy, on a regular basis.

III. External Accreditation and Standards

The program design for EdOptions Academy is guided by a number of external standards. Like every other school, EdOptions Academy goes through an annual accreditation process and creates a plan to continually improve program offerings for schools and students. This external accreditation means that course credits from the Academy can be transferred to any other accredited institution, both high school and post-secondary.

AdvancED Accreditation

EdOptions Academy is a **fully accredited online school** that is personalized to the needs of all students, regardless of age, ability, location, gender, and background. The official accrediting organization is AdvancED. AdvancED is the world's largest education community, serving more than 30,000 public and private schools and districts across the United States and in more than 70 countries that educate over 16 million students. More than 100 years of experience and the expertise of three

US-based accreditation agencies—The Northwest Accrediting Commission (NWAC), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) —come together under AdvancED. As part of the accreditation process, other regionally accredited schools (both secondary and undergraduate) are required to accept credits earned in EdOptions courses.



International Association for K-12 Online Learning

The International Standards for Quality Online Programs

The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) addresses institutional, as well as teaching and learning, standards for a quality online program. The standards are designed to provide states, districts, and other organizations with a set of guidelines for excellence in the operation of a comprehensive online program. EdOptions Academy closely follows the iNACOL standards and incorporates them into program and assessment development and operations. More specifically, the iNACOL standards and EdOptions Academy address the following:

- the need for a mission and values statement that is accessible and transparent to all stakeholders
- the hiring and training of highly qualified teachers (i.e., those with valid teacher licenses) to implement the program
- the inclusion of scientific, research-based findings and other best practices in the development of the program
- the administration and use of assessment data to guide the placement of students and their ongoing instructional needs
- the implementation of an accountability system, such as the participation in an accreditation process or the writing and follow-through of a school improvement plan developed through a needs-assessment process
- the importance of the collection and analysis of relevant data to evaluate the impact of the program and to identify areas that need to be enhanced
- the importance of the collection and use of satisfaction data from stakeholders, such as students and parents

The School Improvement Plan

The EdOptions Academy School Improvement Plan was updated for the 2013–2014 school year based on collected needs-assessment data. The plan includes ambitious and measurable goals in three areas:

- student completion
- customer satisfaction
- student achievement

The complete improvement plan is publicly available upon request.



IV. Efficacy and Impact of EdOptions Academy Courses

EdOptions Academy is committed to the use of data to guide student instruction and to examine student learning for each semester course completed. The analyses presented below assess the outcomes of Academy enrollment and offer some insight about the various program implementations. The data also provide a summary of the median amount of time students needed to complete a course and the median score for the final grade.

Research Questions

These research questions highlight course outcomes and course enrollment distribution:

1. What is the distribution of student course enrollments?
2. What is the percentage of course completions? (Completing a course means that all units within a course are covered or indicated as mastered.)
3. Across all courses completed, what is the pass, or proficiency rate?
4. How much online time do students spend on courses?
5. Across students, what are the median final scores, or grades for specific courses, such as Biology and Physics, or groups of courses, such as STEM, Electives, or Global Languages?

Analysis

A database of 1315 students enrolled in Academy courses from August, 2012 to June, 2013. In general, students represented 25 states and 60 schools/districts within those states. The number of course-types (or course names) taken (e.g. Spanish, Personal Finance, Physics) totaled 117. Of the 1315 students, the five courses with the greatest number of enrollments were in Spanish 1, Semester 1, Health, and Algebra 1, Semester 1, German 1, Semester 1 and Biology, Semester 2. The enrollment numbers for these courses were 65, 42, 37, 34 and 32, respectively. Table 1 below shows those courses with the top 26% of enrollments.

Table 1: Top Quarter of Course Enrollments

	Number of Course Enrollments	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Spanish 1, Semester 1	65	5	5
Health	42	3	8
Algebra 1, Semester 1	37	3	11
German 1, Semester 1	34	3	14
Biology, Semester 2	32	2	16
Algebra 1, Semester 2	31	2	18
Geometry, Semester 2	27	2	20
Criminology: Inside the Criminal Mind	26	2	22
Chemistry, Semester 1	25	2	24
French 1, Semester 1	25	2	26

After considering missing data for grades and time-in-course, the number of course enrollments in the working database was reduced to 1121. Eight hundred eighty-five (885) courses were completed. Missing grade data for 12 students left 873 for calculating pass rates.

Another aspect of the Academy’s flexibility lies with the course load of each student. Five hundred sixty-one students (561) remained in the final database. The number of courses taken by each student is shown in Table 1.

Table 2: Number of Courses Taken by Students

Number of Courses Taken by Students	Number of Students
1	404
2	131
3-5	2
6	10
7	2
8	7
9-10	1
> 10	4

Table 3: Completion Rate

Of the 1,121 course enrollments, 79% were completed, and 21% were dropped.

Number of Courses	Frequency	Percent
Completed	885	79
Dropped	236	21
Total	1,121	100

Table 3: Passing Rate

To pass an Academy course, students needed to complete all unit assessments and the end-of-semester exam with an average of at least 60%. The passing rate for completed semester courses was 82%.

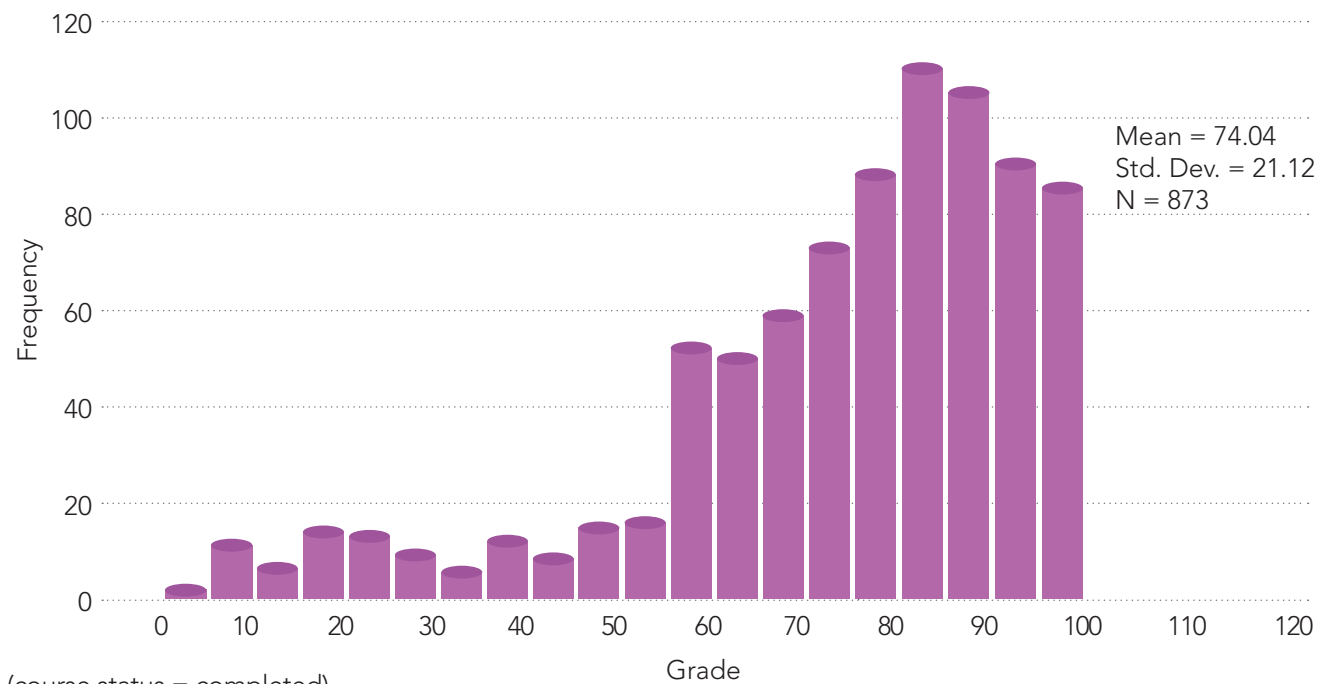
	Frequency	Percent
Fail	155	18
Pass	718	82
Total	873	100
Missing from System	12	
Total	885	

(course status = completed)

Final Test Scores/Grades

Graph 2 shows a set of course completion scores skewed to the right, implying a bulk of students passing with a wide range of scores at 60% and above (on a scale of 0–100). The standard deviation on the grade distribution (21.1) gives additional information about the students’ scores. For example, taking the standard deviation into account, a student’s true score of 74 could be as low as 52.9 or as high as 95.1, when considering measurement error. (A true score is a theoretical score that may be anywhere between plus or minus the standard deviation on the mean.)

Graph 1: Distribution of Grades for Completed Courses



(course status = completed)

Time on Task

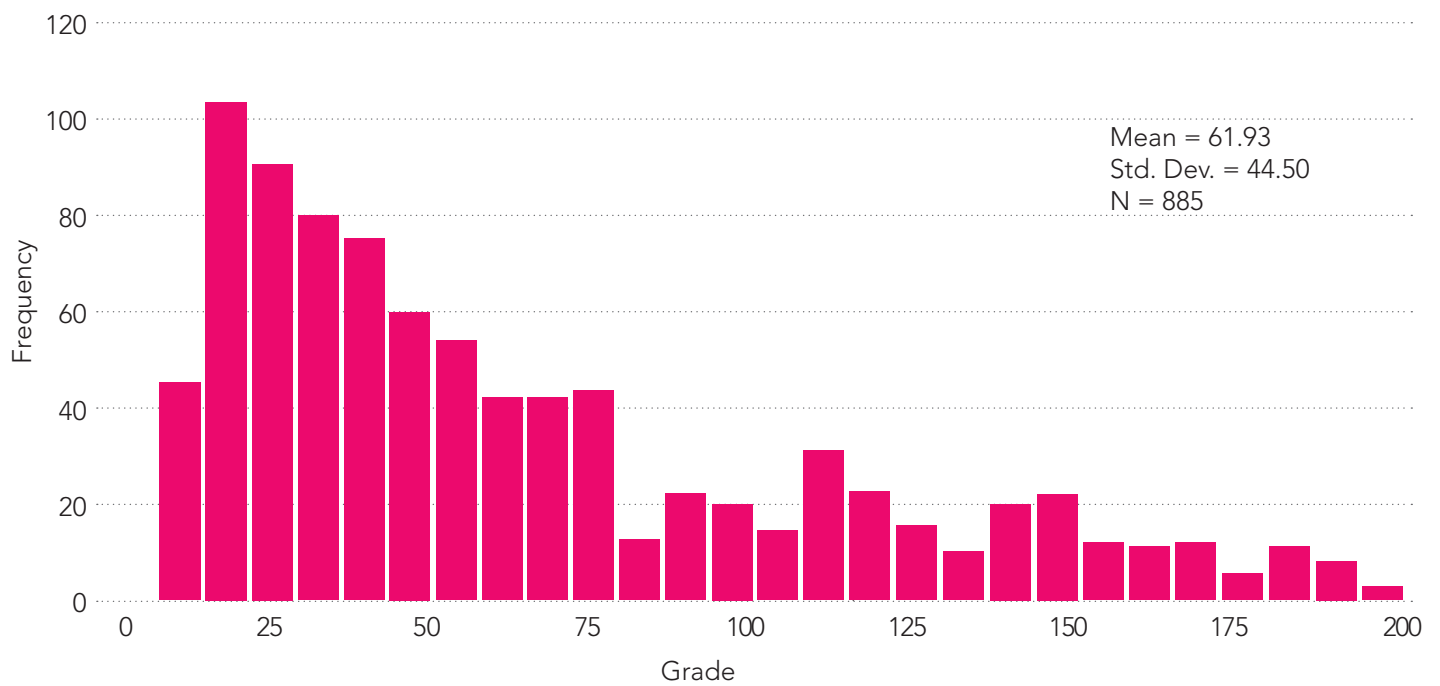
Time on task is a variable collected by the Plato Learning Environment (PLE) system that captures the time a student spends in online activities and assessments within a single course. Note that many courses require students to spend additional time on researching and writing activities. That time is not captured by PLE.



Graph 3 presents a distribution skewed to the left, or to the lower end of the time online scale, to complete a course. The large standard deviation (44.5) may be the result of some more extreme, yet non-outlier scores. For example, although 200 hours online was not defined as an outlier, it is a relatively high number of hours for a student to spend online for a one-semester course. The standard deviation (44.5) indicates true time on task, or time online, as high as 244.5 hours or as low as 182.57 hours to complete a one-semester course.

The students in this data set took a wide variety of courses for many possible purposes. Some students repeated courses they had not passed previously, while others tackled learning a new language for the first time. Considering the diversity of purpose, it is not surprising that time on task has a wide variation across students, from 10 to 200 hours.

Graph 2: Distribution of Hours Online by Course



The average grades and time on task by course are shown in the table below and reveal some interesting numbers:

- The median number of hours to course completion (time on task) is highest at 116 for language courses, most likely because of the prescriptive nature of the course design. All median grades for the language courses had scores in the 70s and above.
- Except for Algebra 1, Semester A, all other Algebra grade medians showed scores at a passing level of 60 or higher.
- In all, 220 students enrolled in elective courses, such as Digital Photography I and II, Archaeology, Computer Applications, and Art Appreciation. The overall median score, 90, was high, with a relatively quick completion time of 44 hours.
- The shortest time to completion was 15 hours for Economics.
- The longest time was for German 2, Semester B at 149 hours

Tables 4 and 5 below are arranged alphabetically and include groups of courses such as electives, math, and Advanced Placement, as well as individual course names.

Table 5: Median Grades and Time Online by Course Groups

Course	Median Grade	N*	Proficient	Median Hours to Semester Course Completion
Advanced Placement	76	17	✓	79
Algebra, Combined	75	87	✓	50
Electives	90	220	✓	44
English 10-12, Combined	75	56	✓	36
Global Languages, Combined	81	181	✓	116
Math, All Combined	76	146	✓	55
Social Studies, Combined	86	91	✓	47
STEM Courses Combined	74	164	✓	39

Table 6: Median Grades and Time Online by Course Name

Course	Median Grade	N*	Proficient	Median Hours to Semester Course Completion
American History 1, Semester A	74	21	✓	42
American History 1, Semester B	79	9	✓	51
Archaeology	89	5	✓	50
Art History and Appreciation	74	7	✓	18
Biology, Semester A	71	10	✓	37
Biology, Semester B	62	24	✓	31
Chinese 1, Semester A	85	17	✓	90
Chinese 1, Semester B	94	8	✓	87
Civics, Semester A	69	10	✓	22
Computer Applications and Technology	83	5	✓	29
Criminology	90	25	✓	39

Course	Median Grade	N*	Proficient	Median Hours to Semester Course Completion
Digital Photography I	98	16	✓	65
Earth and Space Science, Semester A	64	14	✓	38
Economics, Semester A	89	9	✓	15
English 10, Semester A	78	10	✓	41
English 11, Semester A	72	14	✓	20
English 11, Semester B	69	14	✓	27
English 12, Semester A	69	13	✓	48
English 12, Semester B	82	5	✓	43
Forensic Science I	88	14	✓	44
French 1, Semester A	74	19	✓	147
French 1, Semester B	75	9	✓	141
French 2, Semester A	83	7	✓	119
French 2, Semester B	92	5	✓	128
Geography, Semester A	84	11	✓	30
Geography, Semester B	77	8	✓	49
Geometry, Semester A	78	26	✓	44
Geometry, Semester B	80	18	✓	34
German 1, Semester A	73	29	✓	119
German 1, Semester B	82	16	✓	131
German 2, Semester B	79	5	✓	149
Gothic Literature	67	6	✓	48
Health	76	26	✓	26
International Business	81	5	✓	59
Latin 1, Semester A	91	6	✓	131
Latin 1, Semester B	93	8	✓	110
Law and Order: Introduction to Legal Studies	89	14	✓	33
Life Science, Semester A	76	7	✓	55
Music Appreciation	76	6	✓	34
Personal and Family Finance	76	8	✓	31
Personal Psychology I	92	17	✓	44
Personal Psychology II	90	5	✓	46
Physical Education	85	11	✓	36
Physical Science, Semester A	66	12	✓	41
Physical Science, Semester B	79	9	✓	45
Probability and Statistics	62	6	✓	73
Real World Parenting	100	5	✓	35
SAT 1 Mathematics	89	2	✓	89

Course	Median Grade	N*	Proficient	Median Hours to Semester Course Completion
Social Studies, Combined	86	91	✓	47
Sociology I	95	7	✓	45
Spanish 1, Semester A	71	22	✓	77
Spanish 2, Semester A	89	7	✓	128
Spanish 2, Semester B	83	6	✓	107
U.S. Government, Semester A	82	13	✓	27
Veterinary Science	93	15	✓	54
World History, Semester A	74	15	✓	39
World History, Semester B	81	8	✓	44
World Religions	97	7	✓	69

Survey Data

Student Perspectives

In April 2012, a 20-item online survey was administered to all students enrolled in EdOptions Academy courses. The survey was delivered to students online through the program infrastructure. Completion was requested as a voluntary activity. Five subsets of Likert-type questions and one open-response question were included. The 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree addressed these areas:



- enrollment and orientation
- EdOptions online classes
- online teachers
- technology
- overall satisfaction

The open-ended item asked students to identify the “best thing” about EdOptions Academy.

Enrollment and Orientation Items

- The Academy’s enrollment process was simple.
- My questions about the enrollment procedures (class selection, transcript review, grade transfers, etc.) were answered adequately by my site facilitator.
- The Orientation Course helped prepare me for my Academy classes.
- I was satisfied with the overall enrollment and orientation process at The Academy.

The items in this subset asked whether the enrollment process and procedures were clear and easy to implement. The range of average item responses spanned from 80% to 97.3% marking Strongly Agree with an overall average of 89%. The highest agreement, 97.3%, indicated an overall satisfaction with the enrollment and orientation process. The 80% item average indicated satisfaction with the facilitators' directions for reviewing and accessing the course catalog and student grades.

EdOptions Online Classes Items

- EdOptions Academy's lessons were organized well and easy to follow.
- EdOptions Academy's submissions assessed my understanding of the lesson content.
- The course materials and activities adequately taught me what I needed to learn.
- Overall, I was satisfied with the course content and materials.



The items in this subset showed a range of average item agreement from 90.7% to 95.3% with an overall satisfaction average of 93% Strongly Agree. The highest average item agreement, 95%, indicates satisfaction with the program assessments.

Online Teachers Items

- The online teacher(s) communicated with me on a regular basis.
- The online teacher(s) provided additional support when needed.
- The online teacher(s) graded my submissions within 24 hours.
- The online teacher(s) provided adequate written feedback on my submissions.
- The online teacher(s) kept my official online grade book up to date.
- Overall, I received sufficient help from Academy staff when I needed it.

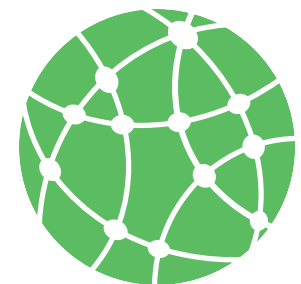


The items in this subset showed a range of agreement from 72.1% to 90.7%. The highest average item agreement showed 90.7% of the students were satisfied with the teacher's willingness to provide additional support. In all, 72.1% agreed that teachers provide sufficient written feedback on their assignment submissions.

Technology Items

- Technology was easy to use and understand.
- The platform for delivering course material was easy to use.
- In your opinion, the grading platform was easy to use.

The items in this subset were positively rated with 100% and 83.7%, indicating an ease of use for the EdOptions Academy's program platform. The platform offers a comprehensive, Web-based solution featuring adaptive technology and a rigorous curriculum designed to help middle school, high school, and adult learners reach their academic goals. The learner data management system also was perceived to be easy to use.



Overall Satisfaction

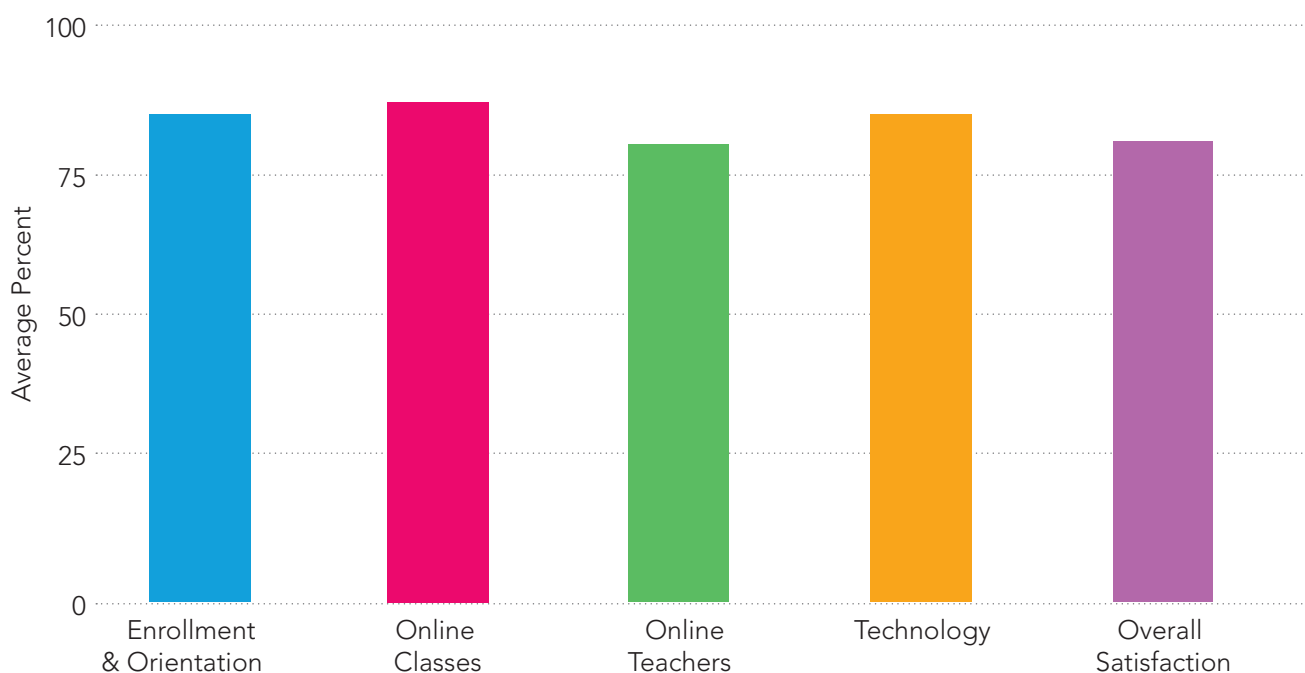
- Overall, I received sufficient help from Academy staff when I needed it.
- I would recommend EdOptions Academy to a friend.

The items in this subset related to getting questions answered, complaints resolved, and support when needed. The positive responses ranged from 75% to 91%, with the subset average at 84%. In all, 91% of students indicated they would recommend EdOptions Academy to a friend.

Table 7: Percent Satisfaction with EdOptions Program

Program Components	# of Items	Satisfaction
Enrollment and Orientation	4	89%
EdOptions Classes	4	93%
Online Teachers	6	84%
Technology	3	92%
Overall Satisfaction	2	84%

Graph 3: Percent Satisfaction with EdOptions Program



Some students provided comments to explain their ratings. Most were positive statements about the program, covering various aspects of motivation, connection, and engagement. Here is a sample of comments in response to the item, “Identify the best thing about EdOptions Academy:”

- How the content in the course actually helped me learn new things, rather than memorize something for a small amount of time.
- I liked that I could work at my own pace. I could take as much or little time on each lesson/submission as it took me to understand it.
- I personally liked the way the teachers would send you quotes, or tips through emails and how they would ask you questions and it wasn’t all about the work or that you felt like you were talking to an automated machine. My favorite thing though was when I was bored on weekends I could log in and do a lesson or two and have less work in the week, or even take off another day.
- I find best thing about this EdOptions Online Academy is that it gives me a better opportunity in my life. It gives me a chance to go off to college and follow my dreams.



- The best thing I find about EdOptions Online Academy is the material is easy to comprehend; fun to learn and I enjoy not having to be in classrooms with other students with teachers that can't focus on me and give me the attention that I need.
- I find that EdOptions Online Academy is the best method for me to learn.
- Spanish Language Class was the best foreign language class I ever took. So much better than anything my traditional schools ever offered.

Students also responded to the open question, "What would you change about EdOptions Academy?" Here are some responses:

- A larger selection of elective credits
- Give the students more than two chances to pass a test.
- I cannot submit an assignment through a smartphone and that is somewhat of a hindrance.
- I don't think they need to change anything because it is great!

School Administrator and Parent Perspectives

School administrators were asked to respond to eight Likert-type items and one open-ended question about the system. The questions were related to the quality of training, the efficiency of the enrollment process, and the program's success with students. The table below provides the percentage of administrators who were satisfied, as well as their accompanying comments.

Table 8: Percentage of Administration Satisfied

Question	% Agreed
Enrollment process easy	73%
Resource material helpful	77%
Enrollment process easy	96%
Teachers respond regularly	91%
Teachers respond quickly	100%
Program success	100%
Recommend the program	95%
Quality of curriculum	96%

Administrators responded to the open-ended question "At your school, what did you find to be the best thing about EdOptions Online Academy?" Here are some responses:

- I found the best thing about EdOptions Academy was the curriculum. It was easy for the students to understand and complete their assignments. I am also impressed with how closely aligned the program is with the state GLEs. The students learned more in EdOptions than in the regular classroom.
- The increase in opportunities for students in our district to keep from becoming credit deficient, opportunities for students to stay engaged in their education by meeting their need to not be on campus sometimes for a semester, and sometimes as a graduation option. This has nicely enhanced opportunities for our students in this rural community where options run short sometimes.

- We are a very small school with a limited schedule. If a student needs to recover a credit or enters with a class we don't offer, EdOptions fills the gap.
- All certified teachers available, helping to alleviate the problem in an alternative environment with very limited staff members.

Parents also responded positively to the survey. In all, 72% of parents found the resource materials helpful and rated the quality of the curriculum and the overall experience with EdOptions as good or excellent. Some of the comments from parents are presented below in response to the question "What did you find to be the best thing about EdOptions Academy?"

- I love the fact that your courses do not include busy work. The EdOptions course will prepare them better for college. He is learning early how to take good notes and highlight important information for exams.
- The freedom it gives my child to work at her own pace but still have some structure.
- It gave my son the opportunity to finish his senior year after his accident.

Conclusions

As a company, Edmentum strives to add quality and innovation to the learning process through inspired solutions. EdOptions Academy is one of many programs available to help districts expand opportunities for all students. Edmentum is committed to collecting data and evaluating programs to continue to improve their effectiveness.

This paper is presented in sections that describe the components and implementation of EdOptions Academy and the preliminary findings of the Academy's effectiveness. The Academy is presented as an officially accredited school that is flexible enough to offer courses within or outside of a brick-and-mortar environment. Because of the accreditation, course grades are transferable to other high school and undergraduate institutions. Full courses are typically taken across two semesters. The course materials are designed to cover a minimum of 180 hours within a traditional classroom setting transferable to other high school and undergraduate institutions. Teachers hired to teach Academy courses are highly qualified and licensed in the states and content areas in which they will teach. Teacher performance evaluations and a school improvement plan are also components of the Academy, ensuring accountability and maintenance of high-quality standards.

The findings of this preliminary data analysis on Academy courses show positive results. In all, 79% of the courses were completed, 82% of which were passed. Future studies are planned to examine the assortment of differences and to target the causal impact of the program overall and on particular groups of interest.

In terms of satisfaction, students, administrators, and parents are pleased with the implementation and the outcomes of Academy participation. Although the survey sample was small, the responses to the various questions and the written comments all pointed to satisfactory opinions.

There are many program details that need to be operationalized to expand the research potential of the program. Implementation studies, longitudinal studies, and studies that examine the affective contributions are all part of the long-term research plan. The initial findings are promising.

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