

ABSTRACT

The Characteristics, Knowledge, and Preparation Levels of K-12 Online Distance Educators in the United States

by

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With the increasing popularity and accessibility of the Internet and Internet-based technologies, along with the need for a diverse group of students to have alternative means to complete their education, there is a major push for K-12 schools to offer online courses. This is primarily occurring through offering virtual high school programs via online distance education. Virtual schools have been in existence since the proliferation of the Internet in the mid-1990s, and they continue to grow in popularity as a realistic alternative to traditional education. As the number of online distance education courses continue to proliferate throughout the nation, a growing number of teachers are facing the challenge of creating online versions of their traditional, face-to-face courses while still preserving the quality of the instruction. Little is known about this population of teachers or the extent of their preparation. This study examines the demographic nature of the K-12 online teachers and the level of preparation with respect to three major areas identified from the literature: a) technological knowledge; b) pedagogical knowledge; c) content knowledge. By studying this particular population, teacher educators can better understand the specific needs that teaching in an online environment pose. This, in turn, can inform changes, adaptations, and improvements to teacher preparation programs across the United States.