



SREB/iNACOL National Online Teachers of the Year talk about teaching and technology

Confessions of the NOTYs: How Technology Helps Teachers Succeed

Introduction

Nearly everyone can remember having an outstanding teacher — someone who had a profound influence on their lives. Outstanding teachers are able to trigger students' interest in their subjects so the students are able to reach higher levels of mastery. But *how* do they do this?

With the explosion of online learning across the nation in the last decade, the even tougher question is: How do outstanding teachers succeed in online classrooms when they never physically meet their students?

Elite teachers have, in fact, emerged in these classrooms, and they have compelling stories to share. They are not limited by technology. They are capitalizing on it — and engaging students in exciting ways that can help **all** teachers use technology to reach students effectively.

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) have presented the National Online Teacher of the Year (NOTY) Award to an outstanding online teacher since 2010. In an effort to gather information on the best practices of these exceptional educators, SREB interviewed nearly all the NOTY winners and finalists — and in some cases reviewed their nomination materials and program presentations. This report presents their insights, largely in their own words. It can be applicable to a variety of classroom environments — not just to online learning.

NOTYs are not limited by technology. They are capitalizing on it — and engaging students in exciting ways that can help all teachers use technology to reach students effectively.

This publication was prepared by Joan M. Lord, vice president, Education Policies, SREB; Liz Glowa, consultant to SREB; and Matlea Parker, former manager of the NOTY program at SREB. They acknowledge with gratitude the contribution of all the NOTYs who were generous with their insights and time. The NOTY program is grateful for the generous support of AT&T, Blackboard Collaborate, Florida Virtual School, the Pearson Foundation, SAS and VSCHOOLZ. For more information, contact Joan Lord at joan.lord@sreb.org.

It comes at a time when online teaching in virtual classrooms is changing rapidly. Even since the NOTY program began, online learning has become more integrated into district school operations. Statewide, stand-alone virtual schools have been downsized and district-level online courses have been added. Even as the NOTYs (winners and finalists) and others are plowing new ground in online education, many teachers are innovating by blending classroom and online teaching. Some also are experimenting with technology-enhanced classrooms with sophisticated learning management systems.

The NOTYs see one overriding advantage to this growing integration of technology in education: the ability of teachers to individualize and differentiate instruction to fit each student — far exceeding their ability to do so as traditional classroom teachers. Other ways to help students are discussed in this report. Teachers who use technology in instruction (or want to) will find common and new ideas — and fresh inspiration — here.

For the NOTYs, it all starts with being **passionate** about their students. (See the Appendix for details about the NOTYs.)

Connecting with Every Student as an Individual

All successful K-12 teaching depends on effective communication between teacher and students — and often between teacher and parents. However, the NOTYs show that good online teachers quickly learn to build online learning communities that keep each individual student engaged in learning with other students so they can make academic progress.

The **frequency and intimacy of the one-to-one communication** between individual students and between student and teacher enables these relationships to build. For the NOTYs, frequent public (discussions, webinars) and private (email, phone calls) communication with their students builds trust in ways that often do not occur with other teachers who do not have the benefit of technology, nor does it often occur among students about academic work.

Many of the NOTYs believe this constant individual communication actually helps them get to know their online students much better than they would in face-to-face classes. **Kristin Kipp** (Jefferson County's 21st Century Virtual Academy, Colorado, 2011 NOTY) said she not only knows her students but she knows “their family backgrounds ... their quirks ... their story.” Kipp pointed out that “just because I've never seen a student face to face doesn't mean I can't know them and challenge them to be a better student and even a better person.”

Andrew Vanden Heuvel (Michigan Virtual School, 2011 NOTY Finalist) indicated that he gets to know each of his students not by talking to them — but by listening! “I listen to them in order to learn



*Kristin Kipp
2011 NOTY*



*Andrew Vanden Heuvel
2011 NOTY Finalist*

their needs, to identify their interests, to recognize their abilities, and to determine how best to teach them. I think that this student-centered approach to education is the hallmark of excellent teaching. I believe the real reason that we must embrace online education is because it is student-centered to a degree that can never be duplicated in a traditional classroom.”

Surprisingly, most of the NOTYs said that class management is not a big issue in the online environment — a response quite different from that of traditional teachers. Without the social context of traditional schools, students approach online courses quite differently — recognizing that their teachers and their peers know them by their online presence and their work. The NOTYs therefore set the stage early for responsible student communication in online classes.

Jennifer Currin (North Carolina Virtual Public School, 2013 NOTY Finalist), for example, noted that she never allows her students to get the idea early in a course that their “voices” are sent into an open void. She knows that would invite random, off-subject postings. She always responds to every early posting and encourages other students to respond also. In this way, she lets students know their ideas are valuable and worth response. If responses are off-topic, she nudges students back to the subject. **Students learn early that their ideas are worthwhile** and respected enough to be challenged within the context of the course. Students who post inappropriate content quickly learn that they have to be ready to defend whatever they post.



*Jen Currin
2013 NOTY Finalist*

Building Stronger Relationships that Promote Learning

Having strong individual relationships with students helps the NOTYs build a foundation for learning. They want higher achievement for every student — and they want to encourage a passion for learning. While the chatter they frequently have with students might seem meaningless, it serves to build familiarity and trust. For good teachers, the “talk” soon turns to the subject. NOTYs use what they find out in these discussions to promote learning at other times.

Boosting the participation of challenging students

Thomas D. Landon (Virtual Virginia, 2011 NOTY Finalist) described the advantage of the comfortable relationships he and his students build when the course alone is their focus, instead of peer pressure. In one instance, an initially reticent student developed very quickly into a “bubbly and perennially enthusiastic” student, and Landon developed a strong bond with her. He assumed she was one of the most popular kids at her school and probably a cheerleader. But when he visited her there that term, he got a surprise. She had dark, dyed hair and black eyeliner and was evidently more punk rock or



*Tom Landon
2011 NOTY Finalist*

Goth. Moreover, on campus she was academically shy. He credits the online environment with helping her conquer her early lack of self-confidence in his course. Under the anonymity of a keyboard, she was able to show her enthusiasm for the course subject in online discussions with other students without worrying about what they thought of her. Online tools like the webinar platform and even a regular telephone helped him reach her and other students whom he could not have reached in the traditional classroom.

Renee Citlau (Anaheim Union High School District, Anaheim, California, 2013 NOTY) also underscored the point that teachers can use technology to ensure that every student fully participates. The nature of the threaded online discussions, which are integral to her classes, guarantees it. In these discussions, one student posts an idea online and others must respond in turn, purposefully adding to previous posts. The time interval between posts gives students the opportunity to formulate a thoughtful response. Full participation of this kind rarely happens in a traditional class, Citlau said. She finds that because all students have an equal voice in discussions, they are more likely to participate. This is especially **helpful for English-language learners**. One student told her that he could participate in his online classes without being teased about his accent — something that he faced regularly in his traditional classes.



*Renee Citlau
2013 NOTY*

Finding an ally in parents

NOTYs find that technology can turn parents into strong teaching allies. The NOTYs initially expected to have little contact with parents beyond orientation and the telephone. But in many cases, technology helped parents **create a stronger learning environment in the home**, particularly after they became engaged in the course content along with their student. Furthermore, NOTYs indicated they have few problems with parents who interfered or attempted to do the student's work. All teachers now have plagiarism software available to help them track down the sources when students copy other's work. More important, NOTYs know their students from frequent contact, so they can recognize their written work — and generally have good relationships with them so they can confront them about the necessity of doing their own work.

Jen Currin indicated that her students and their parents know that they can contact her at any time, and they do. Usually by the middle of a semester, students and their parents call her more than she calls them. When this happens, she knows they are all on the right track. As she said: "This shows me just how invested the students have become in their own learning and the parents in the learning experience of their child. I never had this type of relationship with my students and their families in the face-to-face classroom."

Steven Sproles (Virtual Virginia, 2010 NOTY Finalist) did not anticipate the extent to which parents of his students were engaged with his course. When he attended a statewide economics competition at which several of his students participated, a parent he'd "met" on the phone approached him and said, "I feel like I know you." The conversation quickly turned to Sproles' "crazy videos." Sproles discovered that his video lectures were the subject

of considerable discussion at the student's home and that the parent had become a shadow student in the course. Sproles is impressed with the **motivational boost** this parental engagement has on student learning. Having a parent deeply interested in a school subject — and actually engaged in the course work — shows the student how important learning is to the family. For Sproles, parental involvement is now an important tool “in engaging kids and making sure they really understand what's going on in the course.”



*Steven Sproles
2010 NOTY Finalist*

Tracy Seiler (South Carolina Virtual School Program, 2012 NOTY Finalist) uses a variety of methods to make Latin students and their families comfortable, from Skype to instant-messaging tools for family conferencing. She developed a Web page for students and parents where she posts documents and links to various resources to help students with assignments and to offer study aids and advice to parents. Like Sproles, Seiler finds that many parents become shadow students in her Latin class, listen to podcasts of her classes and study along with their children. In bringing parents into the virtual classroom, she empowers them to engage the subject with their children, and she is able to motivate her students to work more diligently to achieve success in the course.

Dianna Miller (Florida Virtual School, 2012 NOTY Finalist) uses discussion-based assessments to ensure that students understand course content. She includes the parents in progress reporting. She is also able to confirm that the students are doing their own work. “The byproduct of this communication with the student and parent is that I often learn more about students' personal lives than I did when I was in a traditional school.” Once, a mother became so engaged in a course that she called Miller for book recommendations so she could be prepared for future discussions. The conversational shift that occurred in this student's home is one example of what online teachers seek.



*Dianna Miller
2012 NOTY Finalist*

Individualizing and differentiating instruction

No two students enter a classroom with the same knowledge, skills and needs. They each work best if allowed to go at a different pace. Yet teachers in traditional, face-to-face classrooms set the same learning objectives for all the students in the class, follow the same timetable, and use the same instructional materials and approaches. Most traditional school structures — requirements, calendars, facilities, assessments — provide little latitude for individual differences.

Although many traditional classroom teachers (even those who blend technology with their regular instruction) say they *intend* to individualize and differentiate their instruction, they often find it difficult to do so effectively. Faced with a room full of students, treating students differently is sometimes seen as being tough on some or easy on others. Differentiating instruction can even be stigmatizing for certain students. Some teachers do not have the variety of materials and resources available for students with differing needs.

Online technology enables teachers to:

- adjust the pace of learning and the content of the course for each student
- create multiple instructional groups for students with different needs, and
- customize assessments.

The role of the teacher is to monitor constantly the learning progress of the student in relationship to course standards and assure students are making adequate and continuous progress.

Emily Parrish (North Carolina Virtual Public School, 2011 NOTY Finalist) believes this differentiation is critical to meeting students' needs. As she recalls, "one time I realized I had a dozen individual online chats going with students, at the same time. Yet I was not telling this student to wait, or that student to wait... because each of them, as far as they knew, had my undivided attention." She uses feedback and data to plan instruction: "By providing directive, purposeful, goal-oriented, specific, content-driven feedback on every assignment each day, I am able to clearly guide my students through the course and differentiate the instruction they receive." She meets with her students often online, using applications that both student and teacher can share to review the student's work.



*Emily Parrish
2011 NOTY Finalist*

Kristin Kipp indicated that she always tried to differentiate instruction when she taught face-to-face, but she was never satisfied in how she was able to apply it. For her, the problem was always, "What's the rest of the class doing while that small group has my full attention?" or "What if Johnny can't understand why Jane gets a different assignment from mine?"

Kipp explained how **students benefit from the flexibility** of online classrooms. She once taught a British literature course that included Shakespeare's plays. Her class included students with a range of literacy skills. When the class tackled a Shakespearean play, Kipp did what most teachers would do: She grouped her students by those who would struggle with Shakespeare's characters and language, and those for whom the text would not be as difficult. The first group worked on basic comprehension of the play and its themes. The second group grappled with the deeper meaning. In the end, all students met all of the course standards, and all added to their knowledge and skills. The significant difference: Because of technology, **none of the students knew that others in the class had a different experience.**

Gabrielle Bray (Gwinnett County Online Campus, Georgia, 2010 NOTY Finalist) credits her success with her students in part to being able to provide individualized feedback to students. By using email, phone calls, chat rooms, discussion boards and feedback on returned work, she is able to target specific information to students so they can move ahead with their learning. Rarely did she have this much opportunity for routine individual feedback in a traditional classroom.



*Gabrielle Bray
2010 NOTY Finalist*

Leslie Fetzer (North Carolina Virtual Public School, 2012 NOTY) noted that technology works well with **exceptional-needs** children in a blended learning program offered through North Carolina's Occupational Course of Study. The students attend class in a traditional school with teachers certified to work with exceptional children. Highly qualified, online academic teachers in the areas of English, math, science and social studies partner with the teachers of exceptional children to provide instruction. "The online teacher's ability to personalize student learning means that students with every type of learning challenge or disability can meet with success," Fetzer said.



*Leslie Fetzer
2012 NOTY*

Prior to the program, the students had been studying a life-skills curriculum. But once the program was launched, the core content curriculum **matched the level of their peers** in general education — and the students were successful because they were given extensive and individual support from their face-to-face and online teachers. Many of the students, she noted, scored "proficient on the same end-of-course-tests that the general education students took." As a result, the students' self-esteem has grown so significantly that they are "literally walking differently in the halls."

Among students with autism, Fetzer reports, the results have been remarkable. She cites the "anonymity of the computer" as a crucial element in these students' being able to overcome their "struggle with forming relationships." What's more, she reports, the relationships the students are creating online are carrying over, so that parents and teachers are seeing huge strides in these students' abilities to relate to others.

Fueling Progress and Excitement

Using learning management systems

How can online teachers keep up with students they don't see every day? The NOTYs begin teaching their courses with a fully developed set of course materials — ones they helped developed or ones established for them — already posted online at the beginning of a term. They are then able to adapt the materials and add to them, based on the needs of their students. Using a learning management system (LMS), they are able to monitor their students' progress as the students experience the materials — and **extend or modify the materials as needed** to help each student meet course objectives. They believe these systems give them a distinct advantage in their teaching.

These systems also have been adapted for technology-enhanced classrooms, and teachers in those environments are experiencing these same advantages. Teachers using LMSs know when and how often their students are engaged with the course materials — and they even know for how long at a time. They know how much each student contributed to joint projects. In these ways, they know more about how engaged their students are with the course than traditional teachers do.

The data-reporting capabilities of the LMS provide teachers with an ongoing source of information about their students. These systems also control the course materials, course calendar, email and discussion tools, and other applications associated with a specific course. LMSs also provide content presentation options that allow teachers to release content variously to different students. Teachers can set the content up to be released to students automatically as the students request it, be controlled by class conditions (such as demonstrated mastery of a concept) or by the teacher. In short, LMSs **help teachers personalize learning** for students.

Jen Currin uses the LMS to release content to students to meet their individual needs, including content that she has built specifically for them. She works closely with her students on identifying their needs. If they need something not available on the LMS, they feel confident coming to her for help. She often creates material for them.

Teresa Dove (Western Governor’s University; formerly, Florida Virtual School, 2010 NOTY) explained that the major advantage of online learning, with the support of the LMS, is a re-focus of the teacher’s time — back on students. In traditional classes, most teacher-time is spent “presenting” content material. Dove estimates that classroom teachers might have “10 minutes to circle around and help students.” But, she pointed out, because online class material is controlled through the LMS, the content and tasks are available on demand over extended periods of time. This means the teacher can concentrate on working with students to identify just what they need to do to master the content and complete the assignments.



*Teresa Dove
2010 NOTY*

Steven Sproles finds that he is freed by the LMS, as it provides course content directly to students so he has time to give students direct feedback on their learning. He was pleased that students took advantage of the individual help he offered — the kind that is difficult to make available in traditional classes. He had more time to work one-on-one with students to help them with content where they needed support — all more difficult to do immediately and discreetly in a normal classroom setting, but very easy in the online environment.

Making use of technologies within online learning courses

The NOTYs are both content and technology experts, and they know what helps students to master the subject in an online environment. They know that some instructional practices are more difficult online, but they also know they have even more options available to them *because* they teach online. If one thing doesn’t work for a student, they can try something else — or let the student suggest a way that will help them master the concept.

Asherrie Yisrael (Georgia Virtual School/Georgia Virtual Learning, 2012 NOTY Finalist) recalls teaching an online physics course in which the students became a “little bored” with the content. One student’s simple request to turn a written lab report into a video report changed the mood of the entire course. Yisrael granted the request, thinking it might be an acceptable alternative, and would be an interesting experiment. She required the student to videotape herself conducting the experiment and then record all the elements of a standard

lab report.

As she remembered, “I was overwhelmed when I saw the video — blown away.” Yisrael could see in the videotape how the student had approached the lab experiment in more detail than she had seen in written report. She could hear the student’s analysis of the experiment directly from the student. And she could see that the student was **much more engaged** in the process than students generally are in lab exercises. Yisrael provided other students with similar opportunities for video reports, and the video option became a standard way for students to submit science lab assignments at the school.



*Asherrie Yisrael
2012 NOTY Finalist*

Tom Landon described how technology has changed his role. “The better my course is designed, the less my students need *me* to do the teaching of the daily content, and my role shifts to making sure that students are getting what they need from the course.” He knows a big part of his job is identifying high-quality resources for his students from the endless array available online. He acts as an instructional curator. He takes full advantage of such resources as Annenberg Learner videos and TED talks in his human geography course. His students have also benefitted from his background in television and radio production, as he creates his own video materials to demonstrate key concepts. “I’ve used clips from films I’ve produced not only to teach, but also to model for my students that it isn’t just other people who go into the world and document it, but that regular folks like their teacher (and by extension, themselves) can do the same.”

Andrew Vanden Heuvel advised that “cell phones, Facebook, texting and video games — to an online educator — are not the enemies of learning, but the tools of it. If education is to be engaging today and relevant for tomorrow, it should include these tools and new methods that increase **student collaboration, creative thinking and problem-solving.**”

Tracy Seiler uses social media extensively to extend the boundaries of her Latin course. Her students and their parents have access to a social media connection through Ning in the South Carolina Virtual School Program. The site, which functions in a protected and private setting, allows students to have Facebook-like pages. “The students access Ning to find out about Latin club activities, the National Latin Honor Society, planned field trips, obtaining peer tutor, or communicate with one another.” In order to meet the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages guidelines for written and spoken expression of the target language, she and her students use Twitter (written) and VoiceThread (spoken) to communicate with each other in Latin.



*Tracy Seiler
2012 NOTY Finalist*

Renee Citlau has used a variety of technology applications to promote language development in her online classes and to increase student learning and engagement. These tools promote vocabulary review and various writing skills. She has also asked students at other times to compile a list of idioms and definitions that they have heard her use or that they found in

their readings but that were unfamiliar to them. These then became the basis for online discussions.

Using technology in ongoing assessment

Not only can teachers use tools within an LMS to find out how often students log into the course and work on assignments, or how long they spend interacting with fellow students and contributing to joint projects on discussions boards, but they can also take advantage of formative assessments built into an LMS to give students feedback — and find out how many students took advantage of them. Research shows that this kind of assessment helps learning — and online learning is ideal for promoting it. Unlike a final exam at the end of a course designed to find out how much a student learned, this kind of assessment **helps learners find out what they still need to learn** and helps them get incrementally better.

Formative assessments and practice drills administered by the LMS change the relationship students have with teachers. Formative assessments let the students know where students stand on mastery of course content and skills, and the LMS can administer these. In some cases, the student can get feedback directly from the system. In others, it is in interaction with the teacher. The LMS can administer rote drills for practice to help students master skills, and the teacher is no longer the arbiter of satisfactory progress. Instead, the “system” lets the students know if they have mastered the skills, and except for final exams, it lets them continue to work on the drills until they master the skills.

Some of **Citlau’s** language development applications have formative assessments built into them so students and teachers can know how well students are progressing throughout the course, she said. Citlau has various formative assessments applications **as a group activity** for learning how the class as a whole is doing. She then knows what concepts she needs to review.

Andrew Vanden Heuvel notes how effective repetition and immediate feedback is in math and science online learning environments. He has found that auto-grading is particularly effective in these subjects and that students learn well in online groups in which they can help each other learn difficult concepts. Because the numbers in the math problems can be randomized, each student can get a unique set of questions and still be assigned a group for collaboration — without the temptation of cheating, because each student has a different set of problems. The system also provides sample problems that are worked out in detail so students have models.

More important, each student gets immediate feedback when they believe they have completed the assignment. If they are wrong, they can call up another “set of questions” and work the assignment again. As Vanden Heuvel noted, students complete their work “but instead of doing it for the teacher and waiting for teacher feedback a day later, they get it immediately. They can try and try until they get it right and figure out the concept as they go. The online auto-grading feature tells you instantly if you’re right or wrong. And it will give you another try to do it again. In fact, it will give you 50 more tries until you get it right.”

What Else Makes Online Learning Work?

What other advantages of technology can boost student learning? Many of the NOTYs weighed in.

Increasing access and flexibility

Online learning provides courses for students who might not otherwise be able to take them. These include courses not available to students in their home schools, Advanced Placement (AP) courses and credit-recovery courses — often used to help students get credit for courses they attempted but for which they passed only some components.

The NOTYs serve students who come from all types of communities in the United States: urban, suburban and rural. Some even serve students around the world.

Teresa Dove extols the FLVS Global School, the national and international arm of the Florida Virtual School, for expanding her reach as a teacher to students outside Florida. Dove was able to reach students beyond her home state of Virginia — and even to students beyond the U.S. border who do not have a high-quality education available to them. Using multiple technologies including Skype and Blackboard Collaborate, the FLVS Global School empowered Dove to connect with students around the world.

Tom Landon's students are primarily from rural, low-income communities in Virginia where almost all of the manufacturing jobs have moved overseas. With a declining tax base, it is often financially impossible for these schools to offer AP or courses in less traditional subjects such as Chinese or human geography. Yet the students still want the courses. Landon believes the online education they receive becomes their passport to higher education and a better life. Otherwise, he said, where you live becomes a barrier to what you can achieve.

Online learning also can take advantage of the rolling calendar and allow students to begin courses at nontraditional times and complete them when they master the content — not at a predetermined time. In some courses, students can even progress through assignments at their pace, and to some extent, choose the order in which they complete them.

Collaborating in eCommunities

The NOTYs believe that online teaching tends to occur more in collaborative, peer environments for teachers than face-to-face teaching does. Online teachers have the electronic tools at their fingertips to reach out to other teachers who work in virtual collaborative environments. Most of them take advantage of these collaborative opportunities to share ideas for course resources, get ideas for helping an individual student and share successes.

Online courses are usually developed and designed by groups of teachers and learning professionals. These design groups give teachers a chance to get to know each other and to interact. Online learning has been generally hosted by virtual schools; within these schools, teachers have benefited from professionally oriented eCommunities. These entities have hosted support groups of peers to ensure collaboration and **professional growth** for

online teachers. The NOTYs all attributed their success, at least in part, to this kind of peer-oriented professional development.

Steven Sproles credits part of his success as an online teacher to his relationships with his peers. “Being able to share ideas with other teachers in our online discussion areas has really helped me explore new assessment techniques. For example, as I began facilitating more and more online discussions with my students, I felt that I needed a better way to assess student performance. Other teachers helped me with this task; student participation and performance greatly improved as a result.”

Michelle Licata (Florida Virtual School, 2013 NOTY Finalist) uses the data available to her from the course management system and from student work to customize webinar lessons for students in her course who are struggling. She shares data on the students with her online colleagues and collaborates with them in refining webinar lessons to ensure the greatest benefit for her students. She then assesses the impact of the webinar lessons on the students, based on their participation in these sessions, to see if students improve their performance and if they have mastered the concepts. She believes that collaboration among colleagues is not only beneficial for teachers, but ultimately for their 21st-century students.



*Michelle Licata
2013 NOTY Finalist*

Jen Currin acknowledges peer support and her eCommunity with creating a professional learning environment for her. “In the face-to-face teaching world, I found that most teachers, whether new or experienced, simply closed their doors and taught. They didn't really reach out to other teachers, and they didn't share best practices very often. My eCommunity colleagues meet twice a month, and my online colleagues are always available when I have questions and need advice. It is because of the collaborative nature of my eCommunity that I found success in online teaching.”

What Are the Challenges Facing Online Education?

Because the NOTYs are excellent online teachers, what they have to say about a range of emerging issues facing online teaching is important. Regarding the future of teaching with educational technology, they believe that:

- **Teacher preparation** classes should include courses in best practices and methods for online education so teachers are prepared to teach online or in a blended classroom, as well as face-to-face. While some schools, districts and states provide professional development so teachers can work effectively in online and blended educational settings, more schools should. Some states have developed teacher certificates or endorsements in online teaching, but more should. More needs to be done to ensure that teacher candidates are introduced to online teaching strategies from their earliest introduction to the profession.

- Both teachers and students benefit when online schools provide ***student orientation and staff support***. When these activities are standard parts of a student’s program, teachers can focus on teaching and not on course logistics and technology connections.
- Online teachers benefit greatly from program supports, such as eCommunities, peer coaching and mentoring, ***ongoing professional development*** and shared resources. Funding and opportunities for statewide efforts to support professional development for online teachers and schools need to increase.
- The NOTYs support the need for ***performance-based reviews*** of teachers that included improvement in student achievement scores as one of the variables. Grades, course completion, and student and parent satisfaction were some of the other variables mentioned.
- The ***equity challenge*** — ensuring that all children have full access to educational opportunity — needs more attention. The challenges include access to courses, technology, and broadband based on regional and economic factors, student demographics, and state and local policies.
- All courses, including online courses, need to be ***high quality***. Course quality and design vary among institutions. Courses should be reviewed by content and instructional design experts when they are developed or modified to be sure they meet the needs of all learners.
- States need ***strong accountability measures*** to be sure online courses are meeting students’ needs. States also need to analyze the effectiveness of blended learning and technology-enhanced classrooms.
- Online teachers and schools need to make full use of state and local ***student information and other data systems***. Often these systems are not fully available to online teachers — who need information about their students. Integration of the online school and state data systems benefits online schools and provide the state with data to monitor and evaluate the online schools.

Conclusion

While many tools are invaluable in effective teaching, today’s evolving technology can give the nation’s teachers a real advantage in reaching every student in class. The experiences of the NOTYs in this report offer teachers important examples of the benefits of building personal, online relationships with students. The NOTYs know how to use these relationships to tailor an academic program to each student’s individual abilities and skills. And the NOTYs draw on an abundance of resources to engage and excite the student about learning. Leaving course mechanics as much as possible to the technology, they focus their skills as educators where it counts — helping students work to capacity, overcome learning hurdles and redirect their efforts with constant feedback.

The NOTYs insights demonstrate that learning in the 21st century is accomplished in a variety of environments. And their voices give us hope that as classrooms open up in more

ways and in more places, more of the nation's students will have access to a top-quality education.

Appendix: About the NOTYs

2010

NOTY: Teresa Dove is currently a mentor for technology integration for Western Governor's University and an online adjunct faculty member at Boise State University. From 2006 to 2013, she taught math/Algebra II online and was a schoolhouse Literacy Coordinator for Florida Virtual School, which serves more than 206,000 students and employs more than 1,100 educators. A resident of North Tazewell, Virginia, she was a mentor, a member of the Reading Leadership Team and was the first Algebra II teacher at Florida Virtual to create a Model Literacy Classroom.

Finalists:

- **Gabrielle Bray** teaches ninth- to 12th-grade social studies courses. The Lawrenceville, Georgia, resident has built strong mentoring relationships with her students and has improved her students' scores on the Georgia end-of-course test in economics to above state averages, according to the director of her school.
- **Steven Sproles** of Seymour, Tennessee, currently teaches Advanced Placement (AP) macroeconomics and microeconomics at Virtual Virginia, based in Richmond. Hired as Virtual Virginia's sole AP psychology teacher in 2006, Sproles led the development of a new AP psychology course that expanded the number of teachers teaching the course and helped boost student achievement. He also serves as team leader for Virtual Virginia's social studies department.

2011

NOTY: Kristin Kipp of Indian Hills, Colorado, has been an online teacher at Jefferson County's 21st Century Virtual Academy since 2008. The Academy serves high school students throughout Colorado. Kipp teaches 10th and 12th graders in both English and history. She also serves as a speaker and consultant at online learning programs around the country. She recently authored a book on online teaching, *Teaching on the Education Frontier: Instructional Strategies for the Online and Blended Classroom*.

Finalists:

- **Thomas Landon** of Roanoke, Virginia, has been a teacher since 1994, including seven years at Virtual Virginia as an online teacher of AP human geography (APHG). Landon, along with a course designer, first introduced the course seven years ago to just a handful of students. At that time, enrollment did not merit a full-time teacher, so Landon split his time between two courses. Now the course enrolls 150 APHG students, and an adjunct instructor helps serve all of the students. Enrollments continue to grow, and there is a waiting list. Landon's work helped raise his students' scores on the AP exam to significantly above the national average.

- **Dianna Miller** of Dunnellon, Florida, has been a teacher since 1996, mostly at Florida Virtual School, where she teaches social studies, including AP microeconomics and macroeconomics. She also teaches elementary social studies methods at University of North Florida. She has been a leader in curriculum development in AP economics, and she is currently lead teacher for AP social studies. She coaches other AP teachers teaching online, scores AP exams and serves as table leader for scoring AP macroeconomics exams. She is a frequent presenter at the AP National Conference and has served as a question writer for the Educational Testing Service. Miller is co-author of *Explorations in Economics*, a textbook used in classrooms around the nation.
- **Emily B. Parrish** of Duck, North Carolina, has been an online teacher for the past six years and is a veteran of the traditional classroom. She has taught credit-recovery geometry (a course she helped develop) and occupational studies Algebra I at North Carolina Virtual Public School, where she has served as department head and instructional leader. Her passion is teaching at-risk and exceptional learners, using blended learning and differentiated instruction.
- **Andrew Vanden Heuvel** of Grand Haven, Michigan, teaches AP physics and astronomy at Michigan Virtual School, which reaches high school students statewide. After only two years of online teaching, he was named the state's online teacher of the year and was appointed as a NASA solar system educator and consultant for *USA Today* Education, where he helps develop projects for teachers nationwide.

2012

NOTY: Leslie Fetzer of Holly Springs, North Carolina, has taught online science to grades 10 through 12 since 2008 at North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS), which serves 50,000 students statewide. She has taught in NCVPS' Occupational Course of Study Blended Learning Program, where she worked with exceptional children. She also served as an eCredit-Recovery teacher, instructional leader and course developer, and she was the 2011-12 NCVPS Teacher of the Year.

Finalists:

- **Tracy Seiler** of Columbia, South Carolina, has taught online since 1998. She teaches Latin for grades seven through 12, honors Latin, AP Vergil and related courses in the South Carolina Virtual School Program (SCVSP), which reaches about 5,200 students statewide. As a Latin course developer and teacher, Seiler has helped to bring a Latin program to schools that cannot otherwise afford to have one. Seiler has assisted the University of South Carolina in designing the online summer AP Latin endorsement course and serves as her team's leader at SCVSP.
- **Asherrie Yisrael**, a resident of Covington, Georgia, has been an online high school science teacher at Georgia Virtual School since 2008. She has taught physics, AP physics, forensic science and physical science to grades nine through 12. She was the 2010-2011 Teacher of the Year at Georgia Virtual School and is the Science Department chair and currently serves as the Assistant Supervisor of Instruction.

2013

NOTY: Renee Citlau of Anaheim, California, is the Education Technology Curriculum Specialist in the Anaheim Union High School District. She provides professional development to teachers in technology integration and online pedagogy. A 16-year teaching veteran, Citlau has taught online for six years. She helps skilled classroom teachers learn to blend online tools into their classrooms and to teach online. In 2012, she won the Computer Using Educators and California Learning Resource Network Online Teacher of the Year Award. She was 2008 Teacher of the Year at Anaheim Union High School District's Cypress High School.

Finalists:

- **Jennifer Currin** of Wilmington, North Carolina, has been an online English teacher at North Carolina Virtual Public School since 2010; she has been a teacher since 2003. She teaches in NCVPS's Occupational Course of Study division, where she differentiates instruction to help students with disabilities complete the same curriculum as regular education students. She also teaches credit recovery classes. In both settings, she works with students who have known few successes in classrooms. She personalizes the learning environment and helps them succeed.
- **Michelle Licata** of Tamarac, Florida, has taught history and psychology at Florida Virtual School since 2006. She is a National Board Certified teacher and the 2012 Florida Virtual School Teacher of the Year; she has taught since 1997. She coaches and mentors new and seasoned teachers to use technology to balance work and home life so they can work smarter, and she serves as an advocate for Florida's online teachers.

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