

Testimony Before the Education and Labor Committee

By John McAuliffe

Good morning, I would like to thank Chairman Miller and the rest of the Committee for inviting me here today to participate on this distinguished panel to discuss technology in our schools. I am here representing Educate Online, America's leading provider of live, personalized, online tutoring services. Educate Online has successfully served more than 50,000 students since 2002 in our math and reading programs and currently serves students in almost 200 school districts across the country. All tutoring is done by certified teachers and takes place online at the student's home or at school. Students access the tutoring through a computer and internet connectivity provided by Educate Online, both of which are provided at no charge to the student.

My message today is this: technology is transforming the way education is provided throughout our country. Technology can expand the learning day, week, and year for students and it can help us redesign the traditional classroom and school building if used correctly, education technology can vastly increase student achievement. We know this firsthand, as research on our program has proven that a typical Title I student who starts school a full year behind in reading, can catch up to his or her peers with just 24 one-hour sessions of tutoring – typically spread over about two months in time. In some instances, we have shown even greater results with English Language Learners and other at-risk groups of students.

On average, SES students show grade equivalency gains of 0.74, or seven months grade equivalency increase, on norm-referenced assessment after 24 sessions. So a third grader who scores as a beginning second grader could be reading at or close to grade level after 24 hours of instruction.

Our program is generally 24 sessions and students typically take two to four 60-minute sessions per week. Sessions are offered seven days a week, generally after school and on weekends, offering tremendous flexibility to our students. Using the headset and computer provided by Educate Online, students log on to a virtual classroom and are matched with an instructor who is usually logged on from his/her home. Students and teachers are able to view the same learning environment, so they can work together effectively. Our educational programs in math and reading utilize individualized, direct instruction and mastery learning techniques to address each student's specific skill gaps. Teachers teach, and reteach as necessary, until the student truly masters the goals on his/her individual learning plan before moving on to the next lesson.

All instructors are U.S.-based, certified teachers, have a bachelor's degree and a minimum of two years of successful teaching experience. More than a third of our teachers have master's degrees, and about 5% have doctorates. Approximately 9% are certified to work with ELL students, and approximately 14% are certified to work with students with disabilities. All instructors undergo eight hours of synchronous training which includes a comprehensive review of course curriculum, proprietary methods, online technology, and methods for maximizing student motivation/participation.

At the end of the training, the instructor must pass an assessment that evaluates knowledge of our curriculum, assessments, and logistical processes. After training, new

teachers practice delivering sessions and shadow other teachers before they are allowed to tutor on their own. New instructors work with one student at a time, working up to tutoring three students at a time, over a period of weeks. Team leads work with the Educational Services director to mentor teachers by sharing teaching tips and valuable information about new research or teaching strategies. Educate Online has a dedicated team of monitors who score teachers periodically and use this as the basis for additional coaching, mentoring, and professional development. This ensures the highest quality of teaching for our students. Student-to-teacher ratios never exceed 3:1.

Educate Online's program has been independently evaluated

In a 2006 independent analysis, funded by the United States Department of Education, the effectiveness of the Educate Online program was evaluated by measuring pre- and post-assessment test scores. The analysis, conducted by Rockman Et Al, demonstrated that students in the Educate Online program performing below grade level, **demonstrated scale score point gains** on the California Achievement Test (CAT).

Researchers examined data from more than 6,000 elementary, middle, and high school students, and analyzed the increase between the CAT pre-test and CAT post-test to determine academic progress. Data was examined from students across the country.

The study found that after completing the Educate Online's math program, students demonstrated grade-level gains in math of 0.2 to 2.2 over a control group and what was most impressive was that the lowest performing students demonstrated the greatest achievement scores.

Researchers again compared academic results from students in the Educate Online program with a control group of students during the 2007-2008 school year and findings indicate that students who completed the reading program in the fall of 2007 demonstrated an average grade-level gain of 1.65. What is exceptional is that students classified as English Language Learners in the fall 2007 program demonstrated average grade level gains of 1.3.

Educate Online also contacted classroom teachers to further gauge our impact on students. In 2006, with permission of the San Diego Unified School District, Educate Online surveyed teachers of students who completed our program. 79% of teachers responded that there was a noticeable change in student performance due to the Educate Online program. 83% of English Language Arts classroom teachers indicated that they had seen a noticeable change in their student's ability to read. 83% of math teachers indicated that their student demonstrated growth or a noticeable improvement in their ability to solve math problems.

Our program has also resulted in students increased performance on their state assessments. In the 2007-2008 school year, 250 middle school students, mostly Native American students, in South Dakota received tutoring after-school and during the regular school day from Educate Online. 91% of participating students saw gains in reading on the South Dakota State Test of Educational Progress (STEP). On average, students who received tutoring from Educate Online experienced gains of 18 points on the STEP.

Ensuring Student Safety

To ensure student safety, the computers are loaded with security software embedded in the operating system, only allowing students to access the Educate Online program until

they complete their tutoring. While in our program students and parents can only access the Educate Online site. We secure our computers to ensure students do not have access to any inappropriate content and also for performance reasons: First, we want students to use the computers for tutoring while in the program; second, we do not want students or our teachers to accidentally download a virus that would interfere with the performance of the computer; and third, we want to protect our students from receiving emails from unknown persons. Students who successfully complete the program earn the right to keep the computer. We then send them a code to “unlock” the computer and it is theirs to keep and use accordingly. Families incur zero costs with the Educate Online program.

Educate Online’s Educational Program

The Educate Online curriculum contains more than 12,500 digital lessons created by third party educational publishing companies, such as *Monotype* and *Words and Numbers*, as well as an internal content writing team. All course content was custom created to directly support a predefined curriculum derived from National Reading Panel (NRP) and National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) standards. Each lesson is a designated “type” that supports a specific phase of the “teaching cycle” that facilitates the mastery learning and scaffolding methodology – pre-test, guided practice, independent practice, problem solving/applied practice, and mastery test.

In addition to adhering to NRP and NCTM standards, Educate Online has directly mapped our curriculum to state standards, and can provide detailed alignments.

Educate Online’s Academic Reading program is a comprehensive, systematic approach to developing reading skills. Direct instruction is the key component in each of its

five major strands: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Using guided practices in phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension, the instructor models and reinforces skills while gradually transferring the responsibility of monitoring to the student.

The Math Essentials program focuses on problem solving and the application of mathematics to real-life scenarios. The objective of our math program is to prepare students to excel in mathematics by mastering each level before moving on to the next. Our math program helps to fill the gaps and build solid mathematical foundations. These foundational concepts are then used to build on more complex operations and concepts such as fractions, algebraic reasoning and more.

Both programs optimize instructional time through use of diagnostic assessment and prescriptive, personalized learning plans.

Educate Online is accredited by CITA, the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation.

Communicating with Parents

We update the Educate Online parent website after every session, so that using the computer provided by Educate Online, parents can see absolutely up-to-date progress reports for their child. They can also view the lesson content to help reinforce the child's learning. The progress reports illustrate the skills each student has mastered and outline the upcoming lessons that the student will be completing. The parent website is also where parents may schedule tutoring sessions for their children at their own convenience, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

We make every effort to make it easy for parents to contact us. Educate Online has a trained bilingual (English and Spanish) call-center staff to handle technical problems, parent questions, and any other issues that may come up during the program. Our help line is open during business hours and any time tutoring sessions are offered.

At the end of the program, parents receive a final report on their child's progress.

Communicating with Schools and Districts

Educate Online has been working to find new ways to communicate with districts and schools consistently and effectively. A new communication tool for the 2009-2010 school year is the Principal's Support Package. Principals will be able to log onto a secure website and see student progress, at their convenience. The website will be updated after every tutoring session delivered, ensuring up to date information and the ability to share that information with classroom teachers. Educate Online also sends monthly written progress reports to the district, and will also send progress reports to district schools. If the district provides contact information for classroom teachers, Educate-Online will provide student's regular classroom teachers with monthly progress reports for each student, so that the teacher can see the skills their students are mastering in tutoring.

Educate Online Our Future Programs

Educate Online is in the process of piloting the use of our technology to develop a speech and language program. Through this model we will connect students via the internet with speech pathologists. We think this technology will

be particularly useful in communities where they are experiencing a shortage of speech and language pathologists.

Additionally we are partnering with community colleges to target students that just graduated from high school but need to take some remedial classes before entering college. This program will provide tutoring to these students the summer between high school and college and target student's individual skills gaps so that by the fall the student is prepared for college.

Conclusion

Again, I would like to thank to the Chairman and Ranking Member for inviting me to be here today so that I can share the success our technology program is having for students and schools.

I am happy to answer any questions from the Committee.