



Online Learning Justification Workbook

SIX STEPS TO ROI AND VOI
ANALYSIS FOR ED TECH
INVESTMENTS

Blackboard K-12

Project
Tomorrow



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Getting Started

More and more, education leaders are finding themselves in a position of having to justify their ed tech investments from both a cost and educational value perspective. This justification can be daunting as these two objectives, cost cutting and increased educational impact, are often competing. Further, there is little precedent in the education sector for this kind of analysis.

The Online Learning Justification Ladder helps walk you through this type of data-based decision making. It consists of six steps that ask the essential questions required to establish the foundation for an ROI and/or VOI analysis for an online learning project. In order to give readers the foundation necessary to complete the Ladder, this report addresses 5 key questions:

- 1 What factors are driving districts to initiate or expand online learning?**
- 2 What do the terms “Value on Investment” and “Return on Investment” mean in an education setting?**
- 3 What is the new math for justifying online learning decisions?**
- 4 How are innovative districts using this new thinking to justify their online learning projects?**
- 5 How can you use the report’s recommendations and tools in your district to evaluate your district’s ed tech investments?**

It is clear from a series of interviews, as well as the results of the national Speak Up survey, that districts are turning to online learning to meet both professional development and student course needs in a highly effective and cost efficient manner. Districts have been able to save money, generate new revenue streams, and outline clear value-add from online learning projects. For example, Lubbock ISD in Texas has earned over \$100,000 through its Online School, which more than pays for their Blackboard license. Excess funds are invested in further development of the Online School.

One of eight key recommendations from the report: “Engage your stakeholders in the justification process. You will be surprised how the unique perspectives of students, teachers, parents, and community members can illuminate new areas of savings or value. Also be transparent in your planning and the justification process. To get community buy-in, transparency is not only politically important, but vital for success.”

WORKSHEET DIRECTIONS



The Online Learning Justification Ladder:

A new district self-assessment and strategic planning tool for ROI and/or VOI analysis

<p>Step 1: HOW?</p> <p>Identify how you are approaching the justification of your online learning project. Is an ROI analysis required to gain approval or the investment dollars to proceed? Or is it more important to be able to articulate the benefits of the project through a VOI analysis?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Using an ROI Analysis▶ Using a VOI Analysis▶ Using both ROI and VOI▶ Explain:
<p>Step 2: WHO?</p> <p>Identify a targeted audience for your online learning project. What are the needs of this audience? What are the current and future costs associated with meeting those needs? Why is an online learning solution the best solution for this audience?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Students (what grades, what needs?)▶ Teachers▶ Administrators▶ Non-credentialed staff / other employees▶ Parents▶ Explain the characteristics of your targeted audience:
<p>Step 3: WHAT?</p> <p>Describe the specific online learning project that supports the needs of your intended audience. What online courses or learning environments are you providing to meet the needs of your participants?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Describe your project and the specific course offerings or environment that it provides:
<p>Step 4: WHEN?</p> <p>Describe when your participants will access the online courses or learning environments provided by your project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Describe when the participants access the course offerings: during the school day, after school, in the evenings, during the summer, etc.
<p>Step 5: WHERE?</p> <p>Describe where your participants will access the online courses or learning environments provided by your project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Describe your participants' location when they are online for your project: at home, in the classroom, in a computer center, at the library, etc.
<p>Step 6: WHY?</p> <p>Explain why your online learning project is a justifiable decision by either ROI or VOI standards. If your approach is an ROI analysis, identify tangible cost savings and/or earned revenue derived from the project. If your approach is a VOI analysis, clearly describe the benefits of this project to your intended audience or your district and how this project meets the needs of that audience.</p> <p>Answer this critical question: Why is this online learning project a good investment of your district's time and resources?</p>	<p>For an ROI analysis, identify the cost savings or earned revenue in budget line items such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Travel and meeting costs▶ Printing for training materials or curriculum guides▶ Substitute teacher fees or training stipends▶ Textbooks▶ Software licenses for redundant products▶ Course fees including online summer school <p>For a VOI analysis, describe the benefits of your project in areas such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Course expansion and credit recovery▶ Student engagement, achievement, productivity▶ Teacher productivity▶ Parental/community interactions▶ Curriculum alignment and consistency▶ "Greener" approach to operations



<p>About Jeffco:</p>	<p>Jefferson County Public Schools (Jeffco) is a large suburban school district in the greater Denver area covering 476 square miles. Jeffco services 85,946 students with 5,000 teachers.</p>
<p>Ladder Steps for:</p>	<p>Jeffco Teacher Professional Development</p>
<p>HOW? Identify how you are approaching the justification of your online learning project. Are you using an ROI or a VOI analysis?</p>	<p>To accomplish Jeffco's goal of creating online learning options for our students, it was imperative that we train our teachers accordingly. A specific teacher professional development course was created so that the teachers could have a first-hand experience of learning in an online environment while they also gain the knowledge of best practices and instructional strategies to use when teaching online.</p> <p>From a value on investment standpoint, creating this training in an online environment allowed us to build capacity and train multiple teachers without the boundaries of time and space. We had met with our PD departments and we knew traditional methods were not working due to a plethora of reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not time sensitive: We needed some options for “just in time” learning • Sustainability: We needed to reach more teachers with less facilitators/experts. We have only about 100 Division of Instruction support staff to train 5000 teachers in our district. • Geographically challenged: Our district is too large for after school trainings. • Sub costs: Too high for our traditional training model especially given recent budget cuts.
<p>WHO? Identify a targeted audience for your online learning project.</p>	<p>The course name is “Teaching Students in a Hybrid Environment.” This course is designed for middle school or high school teachers who are planning on teaching an online course and/ or all teachers who are looking to add online elements and hybrid components to their regular classroom. This includes credit recovery, fully online course options, hybrid/blended options, and online enhanced environments. Completion of this course is required in order to teach a hybrid/online class. We currently offer 75 online PD courses and filled 1900 seats last year. The fee for most of our courses is \$50 for our teachers; \$100 for other teachers.</p>
<p>WHAT? Describe the specific online learning project that supports the needs of your intended audience.</p>	<p>During this class, participants learn best online instructional practices, increase their understanding of the instructional model as well as become well versed in how to function as a teacher within Blackboard. During this class, teachers learn how to add online enhancements such as discussion boards, wikis, online assignments and tests, and more! This course contains mandatory face to face meetings as well as the online component.</p>
<p>WHEN? Describe when your participants access your online courses.</p>	<p>The course is a six week online course which involves both synchronous and asynchronous activities. Teachers meet for one four hour face-to-face meeting, then complete three weeks online. This is followed by one eight hour meeting and then three more weeks online. The course closes with one more four hour face-to-face meeting.</p>
<p>WHERE? Describe where your participants will access your online courses.</p>	<p>Online portions are done at home or in their work locations. The face-to-face meetings take place at our central admin offices or at a local school.</p>
<p>WHY? Why is this project a justifiable decision by ROI and/or VOI standards? Why should this investment be made?</p>	<p>We know that the move to training in the online environment vs. the traditional face-to-face environment has benefitted the district in many ways both from an ROI and a VOI standpoint.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Savings by eliminating the costs of substitutes. Our sub fee per day is \$120 plus benefits. Therefore, the online PD course saves the district \$3,000 for a one day training with 25 teachers. Plus from a value-added perspective, we always prefer the students’ regular classroom teacher be the one in front of them each day. • Printing costs in the district have decreased. This is directly related to the fact that even during our traditional trainings we now push our documents through the digital PLC or course/learning space. • We are selling our PD courses to other districts and using the funds to support the internal development of new PD courses for our teachers. • Most importantly, we are seeing an increase in the number of teachers who are taking advantage of our optional trainings and the quality of the training interaction is greatly enhanced.

Profile: School District of Clay County (FL)

Project: Home Connections Program - Hospital Homebound Students

Administrator: Alisa Jones, Supervisor of Instructional Support Services, Clay Virtual Academy



<p>About Clay County School District:</p>	<p>Clay County is a suburban public school district located in the Greater Jacksonville Metropolitan area of Florida serving 35,949 students with 2,772 teachers.</p>
<p>Ladder Steps for:</p>	<p>Clay County Home Connections Program</p>
<p>HOW? Identify how you are approaching the justification of your online learning project. Are you using an ROI or a VOI analysis?</p>	<p>Clay County started using Blackboard in 2001 with a \$5000 investment providing online professional development to teachers and used an ROI type analysis to uncover significant savings in time and travel. With the decrease in budgets, it has become more important to justify the expenses associated with expanding online learning in Clay County. For this specific program, the Home Connections Program, an ROI approach was the original precipitator - we needed to be able to cut our overall expenses of providing education services to our Hospital Homebound students.</p>
<p>WHO? Identify a targeted audience for your online learning project.</p>	<p>Our Home Connections program serves a variety of students from difficult pregnancies to severe medical issues, i.e. cancer, heart/lung disease, even severe broken bones and mental conditions. The biggest issue with these students is juggling doctor appointments or therapy sessions with traditional schooling. Often times these students are medicated and need sleep or rest during different times of the day.</p> <p>Students capable of digital learning are staffed as full-time students, short-term students, or intermittent. Prior to virtual delivery, short-term and intermittent students placed a hardship on the classroom teacher who was responsible for providing assignments for the Hospital Homebound teacher to deliver to students.</p>
<p>WHAT? Describe the specific online learning project that supports the needs of your intended audience.</p>	<p>Instructor based online courses in the areas of Math, Science, Social Studies, English and Reading were created for 9-12th grade Hospital Homebound students. The courses were personalized according to the length of time students would need the Hospital/Homebound services. The courses were developed inside Blackboard. The Wimba Virtual Classrooms offered the Hospital/Homebound students the ability to communicate live with their instructors on a daily basis.</p>
<p>WHEN? Describe when your participants access your online courses.</p>	<p>The Hospital/Homebound students access their courses anytime and from anywhere. Students attend online classes and complete work daily. They have the flexibility to work morning, noon and night. This is important with those students that are frequently medicated or attending doctor's appointments at a variety of times. The students are able to watch an archive of the courses they were unable to attend live.</p>
<p>WHERE? Describe where your participants will access your online courses.</p>	<p>Students have been able to attend online classes and complete work from their hospital bed, their own home, and even hundreds of miles away from Clay County, Florida.</p>
<p>WHY? Why is this project a justifiable decision by ROI and/or VOI standards? Why should this investment be made?</p>	<p>Our traditional Hospital/Homebound program involved four full-time teachers traveling across the county to serve six to eight students each. Once we began our virtual program the teachers were based out of the county office and traveled virtually into the homes of students. Travel costs were cut 100%. Formerly, the district paid the Hospital/Homebound teachers a mileage reimbursement for traveling to the hospital or the homes of the students. Given an average of a 15 mile travel trip, the savings to the district for 100 students is approximately \$55,000 each year. Additionally, our four full-time teachers are now able to serve many more additional students through the virtual program than before.</p> <p>The Home Connections Program was born out of the need to cut costs in the Hospital/Homebound Program, but so much more than a monetary gain was made. When a student is placed in the Hospital/Homebound program, students are generally facing a real health crisis. Schooling is the last thing on the minds of these families. Our goal has always been to maintain as normal of a routine as possible without sacrificing that students education. In our more traditional model these students are pulled away from both teacher and peer interaction. This has not been the case with our virtual Home Connections Program. We have found that children and their families have discovered a real classroom connection despite the student's current situation.</p>

Profile: Lubbock Independent School District (TX)

Project: Online Summer School for Advancement

Administrator: Tracy Clanton-Smith, LISD-TV & Online School Coordinator



<p>About Lubbock ISD</p>	<p>Lubbock ISD is a suburban public school district located in the Lubbock Metropolitan area of Texas serving 28,970 students with 2,025 teachers.</p>
<p>Ladder Steps for:</p>	<p>Lubbock ISD Online School</p>
<p>HOW? Identify how you are approaching the justification of your online learning project. Are you using an ROI or a VOI analysis?</p>	<p>We approached the Online Summer School program as one that needed to be self-sustaining from the start. We knew that it would take some time to build the program, but we wanted to make sure that the steps that we took were always ones that justified the expense with a return on our investment. We also approached our Online School program from the standpoint that we wanted to offer our students the opportunity to take an online course so that they would have the online or virtual course experience before they attended college or a university. We felt strongly that the online experience would be beneficial to our students that continued on with their education after high school.</p>
<p>WHO? Identify a targeted audience for your online learning project.</p>	<p>Our Online School for Advancement students are 9-12th grade students that are looking to take an online course so that they may then take more AP or IB courses in the regular classroom during the school year. This also helps our athletes or students that are involved in courses that take up a "block of classes" in their schedule (such as a Cosmetology student). The majority of our students are students within our own district. We do serve students that attend our neighboring school districts. Typically, 85-90% of our students are "in-district" students while 10-15% of our students are from other districts. A typical Summer School has approximately 600 students with 60 of those students being out-of-district students.</p>
<p>WHAT? Describe the specific online learning project that supports the needs of your intended audience.</p>	<p>All of our online courses are self-paced courses with guidelines for our students so that they may finish within the session that they are enrolled. If students complete all of their coursework before the end of the session, then they are allowed to request the final exam password so that they may go ahead and finish up their course. Our courses also contain instructors that provide assistance and feedback via email to students on activities as students submit their activities. Our most popular online courses are the Health, Speech, Government, Economics, and P.E. courses. In summer 2010, we had 532 courses completed for credit with 473 of those courses being taken by LISD students; 59 by out-of-district students.</p>
<p>WHEN? Describe when your participants access your online courses.</p>	<p>Our students usually access their courses after school, evenings, and on weekends. Their online interaction is higher towards the end of the week and over the weekend than any other time of the week. Time periods that we have found our students to be online include evenings and late at night.</p>
<p>WHERE? Describe where your participants will access your online courses.</p>	<p>Most of our students access their online courses from home. We do provide a computer lab at our Advanced Technology Center for students that need to use a computer that do not have Internet access. Our tests are timed exams that must be completed within a one hour time limit. Our exams will not allow for students to copy/paste or print any questions/information from the exam for security purposes.</p>
<p>WHY? Why is this project a justifiable decision by ROI and/or VOI standards? Why should this investment be made?</p>	<p>The LISD Online Summer School program has shown that it can be self-sufficient and even make a profit from one year to the next. We run 3 online sessions per year in fall, spring and summer with the largest overall enrollment being in our summer session. Our program is a fee based program. LISD students pay \$150 per semester course; Out-of-District students pay \$250 per semester course. For our students on free/reduced lunch, we charge a smaller fee of \$50 per semester course.</p> <p>Our 2010/11 Online School earned over \$100,000 from fees - with 75% of that overall amount coming from our Summer Session. That income pays for our Blackboard license to cover 5,000 users and any other licenses that are involved with our courses and to pay our teachers for each student that completes their course in a session. Additional excess funds are rolled back into the Online School program.</p> <p>The program provides additional value-add beyond the financials however. We offer the opportunity for our students through this program to take some of their basic courses online so that they can have the "online course" experience that they will encounter in their College/University experience. This opportunity also helps our students have choices in how and what they take and when they take it. For many of our students, it then allows for them to dive deeper into the types of courses that are of interest to them or to take more AP courses in the regular classroom.</p>

WORKSHEET



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<p>Step 5: WHERE?</p> <p>Describe where your participants will access the online courses or learning environments provided by your project.</p>	
<p>Step 6: WHY?</p> <p>Explain why your online learning project is a justifiable decision by either ROI or VOI standards. If your approach is an ROI analysis, identify tangible cost savings and/or earned revenue derived from the project. If your approach is a VOI analysis, clearly describe the benefits of this project to your intended audience or your district and how this project meets the needs of that audience.</p> <p>Answer this critical question: Why is this online learning project a good investment of your district's time and resources?</p>	



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Step 4: WHEN?

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Step 5: WHERE?

Describe where your participants will access the online courses or learning environments provided by your project.

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Answer this critical question: Why is this online learning project a good investment of your district's time and resources?