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A Multidimensional Policy Evaluation of the Utah Statewide Online Education Program

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ABSTRACT

A Multi-Dimensional Policy Evaluation of
the Utah Statewide Online
Education Program

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The focus of this research is in the area of online learning policy. Online learning is rapidly gaining popularity and is becoming more and more an integral part of the K–12 education landscape. Such a study is important because there are very few policies that have been created to govern online learning differently than traditional brick-and-mortar classrooms. Utah's Statewide Online Education Program (SOEP) has been largely marketed as policy that does transcend these barriers. This research uses a multidimensional mixed-method case study to evaluate the program. The findings from this research provide evidence that the SOEP falls short of providing policy that can guarantee implementation of the program's goals and purposes and fails to ensure quality online learning for students. The main conclusions drawn from this study are that principals are hesitant to implement the SOEP because they are concerned about the potential loss of funding and a lack of confidence in the quality of online courses. This dissertation recommends the following: The creation of technology funding that guarantees full access to the Internet for all students, the creation of a performance-based assessment system for all students, and online learning in-service and professional development for both principals and teachers.

Keywords: online education, virtual education, digital learning, policy evaluation, online learning policy, policy implementation

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Introduction

> I consider knowledge to be the soul of a republic, and as the weak and the wicked are generally in alliance, as much care should be taken to diminish the number of the former as of the latter. Education is the way to do this, and nothing should be left undone to afford all ranks of people the means of obtaining a proper degree of it at a cheap and easy rate. (John Jay, first Chief Justice of the United States, as cited in Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 30)

As noted by Chief Justice Jay, education is in the best interest of a nation, particularly a republic. The ability of its citizens to make informed educated decisions determines the stability of such a nation. In order for citizens to make sound choices, they must be educated. How then, does a nation ensure a "proper degree" of education for its youth?

In the United States, each individual state has been charged with the responsibility of developing a system of education. Yet, even with each state developing its own educational system, education looks very similar from state to state. This traditional schooling structure has served as the predominate model of education for well over a century. However, the traditional school does not meet the needs of all students, and as such, many students, parents, school districts, and states are seeking other avenues of education (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2008). The use of online learning is one such avenue.

Online Learning Background

Online learning is currently the fastest growing alternative to the traditional K–12 classroom. Online learning opportunities exist in all 50 states in one form or another. Types of online learning vary greatly from completely independent learning modules, to classrooms where

the student uses online learning opportunities to supplement their traditional instruction. In the last five years, the enrollment of students taking online courses has more than doubled. Recent estimates suggest that in 2010, 1.5 million elementary and secondary students participated in some form of online learning (Wicks, 2010).

Evolving from distance education, online learning was made possible by the development of the Internet. Rudimentary and primitive in the beginning, online learning made it possible for teachers to send information in real time to students who were not physically in the classroom. This made online learning an attractive alternative to those students who were seeking greater "rights to education" or "rights in education" (Babaci-Whilhite, Geo-JaJa, & Lou, 2012). Students who were homeschooled, seeking credit recovery, uncomfortable in a traditional school, limited by location or circumstances that made attendance a challenge, or wanting to accelerate have found online learning an option. Online learning has continued to evolve and attract new students. No longer is online learning just an option for the student in an alternative school program. Many students are choosing online learning options over the traditional classroom (Christensen et al., 2008). Indeed, the traditional classroom is evolving to incorporate the use of online learning in what is commonly known as blended learning (Graham, Woodfield, & Harrison, 2013).

Over the past two decades online learning has been defined in many ways. It can look very different in its many forms. To help clarify this, the International Association for K–12 Online Learning (iNACOL), created a list of definitions of terms used in conjunction with online learning. This effort was designed to provide policy-makers with a set of definitions that were uniform to develop policy, practice, and an understanding of and within the field of online learning. According to iNACOL (2011), online learning is defined as "education in which

instruction and content are delivered primarily over the Internet. The term does not include print-based correspondence education, broadcast television or radio, videocassettes, and stand-alone educational software programs that do not have a significant Internet-based instructional component, used interchangeably with virtual learning, cyber learning, e-learning" (p. 7).

Online learning can be facilitated through a multitude of different venues. Wicks (2010) stated, "there are many types of online learning programs such as virtual schools, charter schools, multi-district programs, single district programs, programs run by universities, blended programs, private schools, and consortium based programs to name some of the more common program types" (p. 11). These programs can be described by a series of defining dimensions such as comprehensiveness, reach, type, location, delivery, operational control, type of instruction, grade level, teacher-student interaction, and student-student interaction. This myriad of variations of online learning programs, coupled with the exponential growth of enrollment, has left policy-makers woefully behind. Policies are obsolete before they can even be implemented.

In its infancy, online learning served the nontraditional student (e.g. homeschool students, high school dropouts, those in need of credit recovery, those wanting to accelerate). These students constituted a very small percentage, and most traditional brick-and-mortar schools did little to accommodate their needs. There was no urgency for policy-makers to create governance structures or policy guidelines for online learning. However, increased pressure on public education to reduce costs while improving student outcomes forced many schools to start looking beyond the traditional classroom for more efficient solutions. Online learning was one supposedly more effective method of reaching students who were falling between the cracks in a more efficient way (Bakia, Shear, Toyama, & Lasseter, 2012). As enrollment numbers increased

exponentially, and online learning became a more popular option for nontraditional and traditional students, it became apparent that policies were needed to manage online learning.

The first policies created to govern online learning treated online learning the same as traditional learning. The policies were vague and reactive rather than proactive. The policies were not consistent from one state to the next (Beagle, Kiene, & Penrose, 2011). Policy-makers did not create policies that anticipated future issues because most did not imagine online learning would become an acceptable learning delivery tool. Realizing that online learning was something that needed to be accounted for, the National Association of State School Boards in 2001 warned, "in the absence of firm policy guidance, the nation is rushing pell-mell toward an ad hoc system of education that exacerbates existing disparities and cannot assure a high standard of education across new models of instruction" (p. 7).

Efforts have been made to be more proactive and to create policies that would support online learning. Colorado formed the Trujillo Commission to evaluate online learning and create a set of recommendations that policy-makers could use to create sound policy (Trujillo, Griffith, Snyder, & Urchel, 2007). The federal government, expert think-tanks, special interest groups, and academics have also offered suggestions to inform policy-makers. While each has offered their own individual variation of recommendations, similar components can be found in all of these efforts. The Foundation for Excellence in Education, one such group, published *Digital Learning Now*, to "develop the roadmap of reform for state lawmakers and policy-makers" (Bush & Wise, 2010, p. 6). Comprised of more than 100 leaders from government, education, philanthropy, business, technology and think-tanks, they created the 10 elements of high quality digital learning. Designed to provide a comprehensive framework that could be used to guide online learning policy, the 10 elements of high quality digital learning are:

- Student eligibility: All students are digital learners.
- Student access: All students have access to high quality digital content and online courses.
- Personalized learning: All students can customize their education using digital content through an approved provider.
- Advancement: Students progress based on demonstrated competency.
- Content: Digital content, instructional materials, and online and blended learning courses are high quality.
- Instruction: Digital instruction and teachers are high quality.
- Providers: All students have access to multiple high quality providers.
- Assessment and accountability: Student's learning is the metric for evaluating the quality of content and instruction.
- Funding: Funding creates incentives for performance, options and innovation.
- Delivery: Infrastructure supports digital learning. (Bush & Wise, 2010, p. 6)

Utah policy-makers were the first in the Nation to create a comprehensive online learning policy using these 10 elements of high quality learning as the backbone of the Utah Statewide Online Education Program (SOEP) (Bush & Wise, 2011).

The SOEP was created with the intent of giving students in Utah another educational choice, which in turn is meant to allow for greater "rights to education" and "rights in education." The right to education as a result of more option to access educational services, and rights in education by the creation of a system that allows individual students the opportunity to customize their educational plan. Utah Code § 53A-15-1203 clarifies the purposes of the SOEP:

- To allow funded online learning options to all students in Utah.

- To provide digital learning opportunities to all Utah students to acquire technology skills for today's world.
- To allow students the opportunity to create an individualized education in which they control content and pace.

Utah's SOEP is intended to mirror the recommendations of the 10 elements of high quality digital learning. Based on the limited literature regarding online learning policy and by adhering to these recommendations, the SOEP contains the necessary components to be a good online learning policy (Beagle et al., 2011; Trujillo et al, 2007; Watson, Murin, Vershaw, Gemin, & Rapp, 2011).

The SOEP has been touted as the most comprehensive online learning policy to date. Governor Jeb Bush of Florida and Governor Bob Wise of Virginia, who have been staunch supporters of online learning, said in the *Deseret News*:

> The Utah Senate passed legislation that will put Utah and its students at the forefront of K–12 digital learning policy in the country. Unleashing the power of technology in education expands access to high quality education regardless of a student's language, zip code, income levels or special needs. . . . Utah is on the verge of establishing the best K–12 online learning policy in the country and setting the standard for the rest of the Nation. (Bush & Wise, 2011, paras. 1, 8)

The construct of the SOEP and it outcomes will be closely watched by other states, as it is the first comprehensive K–12 online learning policy to date.

However, as is true of any policy, it must be implemented. Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) were the first to make clear the outcomes of a policy are contingent on the implementation, a process that is directly rooted in the fallibilities of the human being.

Outcomes are the direct result of individuals' interpretations and action. These interpretations and actions are the result of two powerful factors, capacity and will (McLaughlin, 1987). Capacity, which can be directly addressed by policy, is the means to implement a policy. Will, however, is the motivation or commitment to a policy, and directly affects the fidelity of implementation. For a policy such as the SOEP both capacity and will must be firmly established if it is to have any chance of success.

Problem Statement

Numerous research studies have been conducted that evaluated online learning as a viable option for student learning. There is also a large and rapidly growing body of research that examines online learning effectiveness. Within this body of research, attention has been given to online learning as a tool to address both the question of rights to, and rights in, education. Additionally, much work has been done to identify the many varied types of online learning that exist and how and when it is most appropriate to use them. Subsequently, there are many examples of what is believed should be included in online learning policy; indeed, the Utah SOEP may even contain all the necessary elements needed to be a successful online policy. However, the SOEP is reliant on secondary school principals for implementation, and as personal pedagogy and philosophy of education are at the very core of a school leaders decision-making process, the problem is the principals may not be implementing the program as directed because of a lack of will or "capacity."

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the Utah SOEP. First, examine the implementation of the SOEP in Utah schools, specifically looking at the will and capacity for implementation of Utah's secondary school principals. *Will* being the intrinsic motivation of the

implementer, and reflects their "assessment of value of a policy or appropriateness of a strategy" (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 172), and *capacity* being the ability to implement a policy by having sufficient resources to do so. Second, identify barriers that limit implementation of the SOEP. Third, establish baseline data of the SOEP that can be used for further studies of this policy and other online learning policies.

Research Questions

The following key questions guided this research:

1. To what degree does Utah's SOEP align with the 10 elements of high quality digital learning?
2. What are the barriers that limit the implementation of Utah's SOEP?
3. How willing are Utah's secondary school principals to implement the SOEP?
4. What level of capacity do Utah's secondary school principals have to implement the SOEP?

Methodology

This is descriptive research using a case study. It uses a multidimensional approach to answer the key questions. First, a comparative content analysis compared alignment of the SOEP with the 10 elements of high quality digital learning. Second, a Qualtrics survey measured the level of implementation of the SOEP within Utah's public schools by measuring both will and capacity of secondary school principals. This survey was sent to all Utah public school principals and directors. The survey collected information in the following areas, the school demographic, principal demographic, principal will, and principal capacity. This data was analyzed using descriptive statistics through Qualtrics software. Third, a two-stage extreme case sampling was used to identify clusters of similarity in the Qualtrics responses. Then using a

maximum variation sampling of each cluster the sample frame was created. A telephone interview was conducted with these administrators to further assess their will or capacity to implement the SOEP, and determine what specific factors are limiting their ability to implement the SOEP. This interview data was analyzed to illuminate common themes in both, will to implement, capacity to implement, and barriers to implementation. The interview data was disaggregated to determine if patterns could be identified in the respondent's interviews. Table 1 shows the research design framework for the study.

Table 1

Research Design Framework

Research questions	Type of data	Data source	Data collection	Data analysis
1	S. B. 65 10 Standards	State Code Foundation for Excellence in Education	Legislature website	Comparative content
2–4	Survey	Public high school principals in Utah	Qualtrics software	Descriptive statistics
2–4	Interview	Public high school principals in Utah	Phone, email, or in person	Thematic

Summary

Online learning is not going away. It will continue to gain popularity and will be used more by mainstream education as a medium to meet the needs of students. With the increase in popularity of online learning, the need will increase for policy-makers to formulate and implement sound policies to govern online learning. Policy-makers are going to need more than just think-tank recommendations and federal initiatives to guide them in formulating viable

online learning policies. Presently, there is very little research available to meet this growing need. Utah has stepped ahead of the rest of the country in an attempt to formulate and implement online learning policy. In taking the lead in this area, the SOEP will serve as one example other states may choose to utilize in formulating their own online learning policies. This study will provide important data concerning Utah's SOEP and will provide recommendations, if needed, which will improve the content, coherency, and implementation of this policy and others that may be formulated from this policy in the future.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The concept and development of online learning is relatively new. Modern technology, specifically the Internet, has created new opportunities for the delivery of education. In less than 30 years, online learning has spread globally, and can be found in all 50 states. In its many current forms, online learning must address the same issues found in traditional brick-and-mortar classrooms: funding, equal opportunity, quality of education, and policy governance (Beagle et al., 2011). This review of literature will not attempt to address any pedagogical or philosophical debates about online learning. Rather the focus of this chapter will be on the current state of policy and governance as it applies to online learning. However, certain contentious pedagogical and philosophical points concerning online learning will be noted as appropriate to the conversation.

This chapter has seven sections. First, a brief review of education, equal education opportunity, and rights, followed by a review of distance education and how the evolution of technology has changed the delivery of education. Third, online learning will be defined. Fourth, the current research of online learning will be reviewed, followed by an introduction of how online learning policy has evolved over the last two decades, with the present policies at the federal and state levels. Sixth, a detailed description of Utah's SOEP, and finally, a summary of the review of the literature.

Education, Equal Education Opportunity, and Rights

In 1948, the United Nations declared that, "everyone has the right to education." Furthermore, the right to education is expanded to include the parents' "right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." The universal importance placed on education

is given additional emphasis by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, n.d.):

> Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits. . . . Education is a powerful tool by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully as citizens. (paras. 1–3)

The right to education and the right to choose what that education looks like are two distinct ideas (Babaci-Whilhite et al., 2003). More simply stated, rights to education are issues of access, while rights in education are issues of quality. Education can only truly be a right if the following conditions are met. It must be available to all students free of charge. It must be accessible to all students and be non-discriminatory. It must be acceptable with relevant quality content. It must be adaptable to meet the ever-changing needs of students and society (Tomasevski, 2006).

Although there is no "fundamental right" to education in the United States under the US Constitution, there is a legal and cultural tradition in the United States that supports education for all (*San Antonio School District v. Rodriguez*, 1973). The right to education is protected under individual State Constitutions: "All State Constitutions contain provisions relating to education, and some state courts have viewed these as creating a fundamental right to education" (Abrahamson & Curtis, n.d.). XIV Amendment § 1, the equal protection clause, of the United States Constitution provides that "no State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States," "nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." However, should a state choose to provide an

education, that state then is subject to the Constitutional standards of the XIV Amendment as cited in Earl Warren's unanimous opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education*:

> Today education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in performance of our most basis public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principle instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, *is a right* [emphasis added]**,** which must be made available to all on equal terms. (*Brown v. Board of Education,* 1954)

Many laws have been established at the federal level to provide financial incentives to states to help disadvantaged children. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) protects individuals with disabilities, whereas Title IX makes sure there is gender equality. The existence of these laws demonstrates the evolution of education in the United States, and attempts to provide an equal education opportunity for all. Sadly, however, it also points out that there have been those who have been underserved in the past, necessitating the creation of these laws. Providing an equitable education for all means adapting educational opportunities, and responding to the specific needs of all learners, especially those learners who are most vulnerable such as students with disabilities, low-income students, homeless students, and students who do not speak English fluently (The Advocates for Human Rights, Adaptability of Education, 2009).

The state of Utah recognized the need for education even before formally joining the Union in 1896. In 1890, the first common schools were established (Buchanan, 1994). In 1894, the Enabling act was passed which paved the road to statehood. The enabling act allowed "The People of Utah to form a Constitution and a State Government, and to be admitted to the Union on an equal footing with the original States." The Utah enabling act, § 3, fourth, requires, "that provision shall be made for the establishment and maintenance of a system of public schools, which shall be open to all the children of said State and free from sectarian control." This is also mirrored in the Utah Constitution Article X § 1(a): "The Legislature shall provide for the establishment and maintenance of the state's education systems including: a public education system, which shall be open to all children of the state." *Pat Doe et al. v Utah State Board of Education et al.* (1994) further clarified in their permanent injunction "that the State must 'provide a system of public schools,' instead of 'provide systems' or simply 'provide public schools,' implies that there must be reasonable uniformity and equality of opportunity for all children throughout the State" (p. 29). While Utah is free to determine what that system of public schools should look like, all students must have reasonably equitable access to a quality public education.

The desire to provide learners with equitable access to education has been a moral imperative for many years in the United States, as well as in Utah for most. This was one of the driving influences in the creation of distance education. The ability to provide educational opportunities for students who could not reach the universities was considered a civic duty by certain individuals. The advancement of technology transformed the delivery of education, both in the traditional brick-and-mortar school and in distant education. Technological advancements

held the potential to increase equal education opportunities for many underserved students as well as students who do not do well in a traditional education setting.

Transformation of Education Through Technology

Distance education and the advancement of technology have both been instrumental in laying the foundations of online learning. Distance education has only been as effective as the ability to transfer information between the teacher and learner. Improved technology has made the transfer of information more efficient and, in some instances, more effective. Both Matthews (1999) and Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) divide the evolution of distance education into three stages that mirror the evolution of technology: the first phase was correspondence courses (postal mail), the second phase consisted of limited media courses (postal mailings reinforced with audiotape, video cassettes, compact discs, DVDs and television broadcasts), and the third phase included use of online education (Internet).

Examples of correspondence courses could be found as early as 1840, when "Sir Isaac Pitman, the English inventor of shorthand, came up with an ingenious idea for delivering instruction to a potentially limitless audience: correspondence courses by mail" (Mathews, 1999, p. 54). Pitman's idea was viewed by many as a revolutionary method to educate those who could not physically attend the university. In the United States, correspondence study was launched by Anna Elliot Ticknor in 1873 to provide women with a liberal education. The students were mailed syllabi and then were responsible for going through the material and returning their notes to be graded (Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006). While this was widely accepted as an inferior education to the classroom setting, it allowed those who were not in a position to enroll directly into universities to receive some education.

The second stage of distance education was the use of radio, television, and other technologies that allowed recorded lessons and prepackaged modules to be sent to the learner. This allowed the learner to be part of the lectures, if only a passive part. One of the first uses of this technology was the founding of the United Kingdom's Open University in 1969 (Matthews, 1999). The ability to prepare videos that corresponded to the learning allowed the learner to go beyond the classroom to experience educational opportunities from around the world. Other examples were found in closed caption television that played classes over and over again all day long so students could watch the classes when it was convenient for them. George Connick with the University of Maine made use of a low-level satellite system to allow students from all over the state to view classes being taught at the university, and to actively participate in them. Miller (2000), describing how this changed education, stated:

> The entire demographic of who went to college in Maine began to change. No longer was the average student a bright-eyed 18-year old boy. Housewives on remote islands came to the class in large numbers. They truly were ready to learn and yearned for a way to extend their lives. (p. 10)

In the early 1990s, the Internet created a method to transmit information very quickly to learners. This was the start of the third stage in the development of distance education. Immediately, classes were offered from numerous sources and the world saw the birth of online learning or learning via the Internet. This third stage of distance education has been the most utilized and quickest to evolve. "In sum, the Internet has given distance education a new appeal, either because it taps in unexplored instructional niches…or because it deals more effectively with limitations that traditionally have been attributed to distant learning" (Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006, p. 571). Distance learning is only as fast as the correspondence between

teacher and learner. The Internet allowed for a much more rapid exchange of data, and could allow real time interaction through email and other online communication services. The Internet also allowed teachers to provide much more content variety to their online instruction through access to massive digital libraries.

The introduction of the Internet has had a profound impact on education. Although it is relatively new, it has transformed the landscape of education forever (Christensen et al., 2008). The Internet was criticized by most as a novelty when it was first introduced, as it was not available to the masses on a large scale. The expense and technology required to use it were too great for the general public, but over time it became more affordable and more useable. As computers became smaller and more commonplace in homes and schools, the ability to view and log-on to the Internet became a reality for more students. The Internet was recognized for its value, and in turn became a marketable commodity that was commercialized and produced for the masses. It is now an integral part of life for most people. It is no longer a novelty; rather it is the technological platform that the world runs on. All of these changes have occurred in just a few decades and education has been disrupted by this new innovation (Christensen et al., 2008).

The Internet transformed distance education as well as the traditional brick-and-mortar classroom. Thirty years ago a teacher was limited to the resources that were in his/her school. They used textbooks, videos, slides, maps, and posters to try to bring the world into their classroom. Educators who made use of the Internet quickly learned that they could introduce unlimited quantities of information to their students. The value of the Internet as an educational resource was instantly recognized. The demand for better services drove the development of digital infrastructures within the school system. Today one would have to look far and wide to

find an educator in a traditional classroom that does not make use of the Internet in their instruction. This may or may not be an example of online learning.

Online Learning Defined

Online learning and similar terms have been difficult to define. There has been an evolving definition of what this means. Likewise, distance education has been called many different names. Shulte (2011) described the many different names that have been used to contextualize distant education over the years as follows:

> Beginning with simple postal correspondence courses, distance education was labeled with various monikers: independent study, correspondence education, correspondence study, home study, external study, teaching at a distance, off campus study, open learning, outreach education, and many others. The major component of all these programs was learning conducted over physical distance. (p. 35)

Online learning can be a form of distance learning, as it can provide learning conducted over physical distance. The term online learning is "used interchangeably with virtual learning, cyber learning, e-learning" (iNACOL, 2011, p. 8). It is defined as education in which instruction and content are delivered primarily over the Internet (Watson & Kalmon, 2005). The term does not include print-based correspondence education, broadcast television or radio, videocassettes, and stand-alone educational software programs that do not have a significant internet-based instructional component (U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development Policy and Program Studies Service, 2010). Like distance education, online learning in all its forms has a unifying component: each form requires learning to be conducted through the use of the Internet.

As stated earlier, most classes in a traditional brick-and-mortar school make use of learning through the Internet. While this can be defined as online learning, it leaves room for differing interpretations. The question of how much internet-based instruction is needed for learning to be considered online learning was a question many could not answer.

A common language has been difficult to develop, but a solid definition is essential for policy-makers in order to create sound policies to govern online learning. In 2011, the International Association for K–12 Online Learning published the *Online Learning Definitions Project*, "designed to provide states, districts, online programs, and other organizations with a set of definitions related to online and blended learning in order to develop policy, practice, and an understanding of and within the field" (p. 3). According to iNACOL, an online learning program, online program, or online course is "an organized offering of courses delivered primarily over the internet" (iNACOL, 2011, p. 7).

Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, and Rapp (2011) stated, "in order to understand the different types of online courses and programs, one must first understand the attributes that define online learning (p. 16)." As outlined in Vanourek (2011), online programs can be identified by 10 defining dimensions, namely, comprehensiveness, reach, type, location, delivery, operational control, type of instruction, grade-level, teacher-student interaction, and student-student interaction. Each of these dimensions describes one aspect of an online program. Distinction between programs can be determined by careful examination of the different dimensions that each program contains.

Comprehensiveness (supplemental versus full-time). The distinction must be made between full-time enrollment where the student receives a full course load from the online program, or the online program only provides a small number of supplemental courses for a

student enrolled in a brick-and-mortar school. Full-time online programs typically must follow the same accountability guidelines as brick-and mortar schools. Supplemental online programs often are used for credit recovery or acceleration purposes (Watson et al., 2011).

Reach. Online programs may operate within a school district, across multiple school districts, or across the entire state. Some programs are even accessible to students from across the nation. Policy makers must consider the reach of an online program; otherwise one may have a student in Utah taking a class from a program in Florida, being taught by a teacher in California. Who controls the policies that govern this type of program delivery?

Type. Online programs can be district programs, magnets, contracted programs, charter schools, private online schools, or home schools. Type refers to the students who can access the program. The literature can be confusing when the word "type" is used. Some literature will use "type" of online program to identify the body that has operating control. An online program may be called a district program because it is controlled by a local school district, but it is available to all students in the state, as is the case with Washington Online (Utah State Office of Education, 2012). Washington Online is a district online school, but it allows all students in the state of Utah to enroll in its classes. Therefore, the type of program would be state-wide, and the operational control would be the school district.

Location. Where does the student receive their online education? It can be at the school, the home, or some other location. Not all online programs or schools can be accessed from anywhere Internet is available. Some online programs or schools require the student to be in a specific location.

Delivery (synchronous versus asynchronous). If the teacher and student interaction is in real time or not determines the flexibility of the online program for the learner. Asynchronous

learning is defined as "communication exchanges which occur in elapsed time between two or more people, examples are email, online discussion forums, message boards, blogs, podcasts, etc." (The Online Learning Definition Project, 2011, p. 3). Synchronous learning is "online learning in which the participants interact at the same time and in the same space" (The Online Learning Definition Project, 2011, p. 8).

Operational control. The operational control refers to the body that governs the online school or program. Online programs can be governed by local school boards, consortiums, regional authorities, universities, the state office of education, or by independent vendors.

Type of instruction (from fully online to fully face-to-face). Instruction can be fully face-to-face, fully online, or any combination of the two across a continuum. All can take place in a brick-and-mortar school or in an online school. Many programs are now combining the best aspects of online and classroom instruction to create a variety of blended or hybrid learning experiences.

There are several categories of online learning opportunities available for students to choose from today. "As of late 2011, online and blended learning opportunities exist for at least some students in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia" (Watson et al, 2011, p. 4). District programs are programs that have been developed to provide online services for their own students. This type of program is the fastest growing online learning provider. It is worth noting that the majority of these programs are offering blended learning opportunities as the type of instruction rather than solely online instruction. Watson et al (2011) offered an explanation for this current trend, "Districts are often serving their own students, who are local, so there is limited need to bridge large distances" (p. 4). Ash (2010) offered additional rational for district use of blended learning citing the U.S. Department of Education online learning research which

found that "instruction combining online and face-to-face learning elements had a larger advantage than either purely online or entirely face-to-face instruction" (p. 1).

"The term blended learning, or hybrid learning, is being used with increased frequency in both academic and corporate circles" (Graham, 2005, p. 3). It is also the fastest growing area of online learning. A 2008 report sponsored by the North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) projected that "blended learning is likely to emerge as the predominant model of the future" (Watson, 2008, p. 3). There have been many attempts to define blended learning in the past and even today some express frustration with the simple catch-all definition that seems to be most widely accepted. Staker et al. (2011) define *blended learning* as "any time a student learns at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home and at least in part through online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace" (p. 5).

Grade level. What grade-level of students are served by the program? Are they elementary school, middle school, or are they high school students?

Teacher-student interaction. Is there a high, moderate or low level of teacher-student interaction?

Student-student interaction. Do students interact with other students in the online program? If so, is it a high, moderate, or low level?

Before policy can be formulated to govern online learning it is imperative that online learning can be clearly defined and the answers to the above questions are clear. Policy-makers must understand the different variations of online learning and the ten defining dimensions that describe online learning. It is important to understand that while online learning can be defined in one dimension, it may also be defined across multiple dimensions (Wicks, 2010).

Online Learning Research

There is a growing body of research that has looked at many aspects of distance learning, and specifically online learning. Many areas of online learning have been studied, namely: quality, cost-effectiveness, social equality, and OpenCourseWare. This research has mirrored the evolution of online learning.

As online learning gradually increased in popularity the first research was meant to compare the quality of learning between brick-and-mortar classrooms and online learning. In most of this research quality was a measure of the proficiency rates and median scores. It did not generally examine the quality of the education at an individual level, but rather, aggregate scores. The use of online learning has largely been led by higher education over the past two decades. In 2007, 61% of higher education institutions offered online courses as a form of distance learning (Parsad & Lewis, 2008). In its earliest forms, quality of learning in the online learning setting was not comparable to the traditional classroom. Yet, as it has evolved many types of online learning have improved dramatically. Studies have shown that currently there are no significant differences between learning in a brick-and-mortar classroom and online learning (Bernard et al., 2004; Cavanaugh, 2001; Machtmes & Asher, 2000; Zhao, Lei, Yan, & Tan, 2005). (It would be wise to note that these studies measure effectiveness as success on standardized tests. Many would argue that educational success is more than just a good test score and that education should be a more holistic experience [Mayes, Cutri, Rogers, & Montero, 2007].) The most effective form of online learning is blended learning, the combination of a face-to-face teacher-student interaction and online learning that is separated by place and time (Graham, 2005). Learning in this environment has proven to be equal to, or greater than, that of the traditional classroom (Day, Raven, & Newman, 1998; El-Deghaidy & Nouby, 2008; Englert,

Zhao, Dunsmore, Collings, & Wolbers, 2007; Schilling, Wiecha, Polineni, & Khalil, 2006). A study by the North American Council for Online Learning predicts that blended learning will be the predominant model of instruction for learning (Watson, 2008). It is important to clarify that blended learning is a type of online learning that utilizes both face-to-face instruction and online learning in partnership. The term blended learning may be used to indicate online learning, but online learning does not sufficiently describe blended learning.

As the popularity of online learning has increased, so has a growing body of research that is examining social equality. As discussed earlier, "rights in education" are, and should be, considered a top priority when developing an educational program. This research has taken a closer look at the quality of learning for individuals. Because online learning removes the learner from a face-to-face contact with the instructor, many have questioned the ability of online learning to meet the needs of the at-risk population. Special education students that need accommodations in their learning may not get them. Students who are culturally or linguistically diverse may not receive the help they need to overcome these challenges (Keeler & Horney, 2007). Low-income students may not be able to access the technology necessary to be successful in an online learning setting. Rogers (2006) showed that content and online instructional design must meet the individual needs of the students it is meant to reach.

In addition to the at-risk student, some have concerns that online learning will create a "diploma mill" with students focusing on only content, and missing out on the social experience of public school (Noble, 2001). These are but a small sampling of the many questions that researchers have investigated. For every study that makes one conclusion about the shortcomings of online learning, one can find another that will contradict it and laud online learning as a solution to the needs of the at-risk or demographical minority student (Carnahan &

Fulton, 2013; Journell, 2012; Vasquez & Straub, 2012). Often, social science research is more concerned with advocacy than with accuracy as is the case advocacy coalition research (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004).

Research has also examined the cost-effectiveness of online learning. Mixed results have emerged from these studies. Early studies showed that the technology needed to make online learning effective created costs too high to justify the use of online learning (Bartolic-Zlomislic & Bates, 1999; Rumble, 1997). More recent research contradicts these findings and actually places costs of online learning much lower than the traditional brick-and-mortar classroom. Much of this is attributed to the improvements in technology and the accessibility of technology to the general population (Journell 2012).

Researchers are also examining ways to improve online learning by improving the curricular content available online. One example of this is the creation of open courseware, which are free sources of information, classes, tutorials, and other educational resources that are being made available for access by anyone through the World Wide Web (Johansen & Wiley, 2011). This access to electronic resources is rapidly becoming a popular trend in brick-and-mortar schools as a way to save money and replace textbook expenses (Hilton & Wiley, 2011).

The predictions of the North American Council for Online Learning are proving to be prophetic as online learning is being integrated with traditional brick-and-mortar learning. The questions of quality and access, or rights in and rights to education, are being answered with an ever-growing body of research. K–12 school systems are the fastest growing sector of online learning users (Means, Toyama, Murphy, & Baki, 2013). How best to utilize this tool is the next question to be answered, and it is a question that can only be answered through sound policies

and sound policy research. Both are sorely lacking in this uncharted new direction that K–12 school systems are moving.

Policy Governing Online Learning

There are now online and blended learning opportunities for students in all 50 states as well as the District of Columbia (Watson et al, 2011). The Alliance for Excellence Education (2011) stated, "while most policymakers are only beginning to understand how technology and digital learning are integral to the transformation of the education system, many districts and schools already have implemented programs that are changing student outcomes and the teaching and learning process" (p. 3). Additionally, Watson and Gemin (2009) stated, "online learning continues to grow rapidly every year, with programs and states reporting annual growth rates of 15% to 50%. Yet many state policies are woefully behind this rapid growth" (p. 3).

In 2001, the National Association of State School Boards warned, "in the absence of firm policy guidance, the nation is rushing pell-mell toward an ad hoc system of education that exacerbates existing disparities and cannot assure a high standard of education across new models of instruction" (p. 4). The above forewarning has proven to be a very accurate portrayal of online learning policy-making over the last decade. The maturation rate of online education is much faster than the policy-making process. More than a decade later, many states still do not have policies to govern online learning, and of those that do, few are the same (Beagle et al., 2011). This is what the National Association of State School Boards was hoping to avoid when they created their list of recommendations in 2001. In the last decade others have also made policy recommendations intended to guide policy-makers as more states and districts create policy to govern online education.

Federal initiatives. As previously noted, public education is to be administered at the state and local levels. However, the federal government may influence education in positive or negative directions through its involvement (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). The creation of federal educational programs can create opportunity – mostly financial – for state and local educational leaders to create policy that will align with the federal programs, and in return receive federal monies that can be infused into the local school systems. Two such programs are the Race To The Top (RTTT), and Investing In Innovation (I3) (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). These programs provide financial awards for innovations that will create educational reforms that will serve as examples for other states and districts. Online providers are capitalizing on these, and other federal programs to create new methods of offering online programs.

In 2010, the federal government released two plans to help define the future of technology and online learning. First, the National Education Technology Plan focuses on five essential areas: learning, assessment, teaching, infrastructure, and productivity (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Second, "The National Broadband Plan," recommends the following for education: support and promote online learning; unlock the value of data and improve transparency; and modernizing educational broadband infrastructure (National Broadband Plan, 2010). Additionally, the Alliance for Excellent Education released the policy brief *Digital Learning and Technology: Federal Policy Recommendations to Seize the Opportunity – and Promising Practices that Inspire Them* which outlined the five following federal recommendations for online learning policy: infuse technology throughout education programs; provide a dedicated technology program to ensure leadership and innovation; encourage states to implement the 10 elements of high-quality digital learning; build on the National Education

Technology Plan and National Broadband Plan models and recommendations in new education legislation; and invest in ongoing research and innovation (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011).

The 10 elements of high quality digital learning were developed from the feedback and input of many leaders in the field of online learning. The elements were defined to help lawmakers and policy-makers create policy that would improve learning for all students. This includes technology-rich instruction in traditional schools, online learning, and blended learning.

State policies and challenges. Gene Wilhoit offered a historical perspective on how "good" state policies are defined very differently today from the way they were even 5 years ago.

> Historically, state policy would be considered "good" because it was very clear. It would help the state departments of education administer rules and regulations usually set outside the agency. A primary function of a state department of education was to be a keeper of established policies. Policies were often stated as institutional priorities or adult needs in the system. Policies defined how adults and students would act and the procedures to follow. States measured success by how well everyone was complying in carrying out policies in the same way. (Patrick & Sturgis, 2011, p. 14)

Wilhoit pointed out that departments of education must set a higher standard for good policy in today's world. Educational policies must change to meet the global skills demand, the shortfalls in educational funding, improve individualized instruction, and eliminate the achievement gap (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; Patrick & Sturgis, 2011; Wise & Rothman, 2010). Online learning proponents like Utah Senator Howard Stephenson, the sponsor of the SOEP, believe these perceived shortfalls can be addressed by allowing all students access to the benefits of online learning.

While every state has online learning opportunities (Watson et. al, 2011), not all states have policies in place to govern them (Watson & Gemin, 2009). Beagle et al. (2011) found only 15 states had policies to govern online learning on their department of education websites. Of those 15 states, each had a policy that was unique and individualized to that state. Tennessee and Montana were the only states that had similar language, and that was only in the area of professional development. Other states, such as Utah and Idaho, have online learning policy embedded in their state laws. Whether policy is created by departments of education, or by legislators, more and more states are recognizing the need for effective policy. Online learning continues to offer educational opportunities for an increasing number of students each year. This growth is starting to put online learning in direct competition with traditional brick-and-mortar education.

One challenge online learning presents to educators is the loss of student enrollment from traditional brick-and-mortar schools to online schools, which equates to losses in funding. Online schools, also known as virtual schools, which are "formally constituted organizations that offer full-time education delivered primarily through the internet" (iNACOL, 2011, p. 7), are starting to attract enough students, that traditional schools are starting to lose funding. This is a relatively new problem for traditional schools as online schools were created to cater to the non-traditional student, such as: home-schooled students, students seeking credit recovery, students trying to accelerate in school, or those students who had been removed because of discipline issues (Tucker, 2007).

Christensen et al. in *Disrupting Class* (2008) predicted that these online schools will exponentially grow and will change the landscape of education. Online schools found success initially by creating opportunities for a small number of underserved students. The low costs and

substantial benefits of online schools and online learning in general were found to have great value, and as such, they have grown in popularity. States and districts have started to provide more online learning opportunities for students by creating state and district online schools to compete with private online schools in order to keep enrollment numbers up and not lose funding.

Forty states have online or virtual schools (Watson et al., 2011). These are online schools that are funded and ran directly by the state's department of education or as charter schools. Students may enroll in these schools full-time or part-time. These state online schools "accounted for 536,000 course enrollments (one student taking one semester-long credit) in school year 2010–11, and annual increase of 19%" (Watson et. al, 2011, p. 5).

State laws are beginning to change as state legislators realize that online learning is not going away. Traditional brick-and-mortar schools are creating district and multi-district public online schools to better serve their students and to keep educational funding in their budgets. These represent the fastest growing type of online schools. Maine, Indiana, and Tennessee are among the states that are making changes to their laws to accommodate district online schools (Watson et. al, 2011). Michigan also has made dramatic changes to the rigid structure of traditional education as pointed out by the Alliance for Excellent Education in their 2011 policy brief titled, *Digital Learning and Technology: Federal Policy Recommendations to Seize the Opportunity—and Promising Practices That Inspire Them*:

> Michigan implemented the Seat Time Waivers (STW) program in 2007 to spur innovation in Michigan's public schools. By removing a primary barrier, Michigan has provided a significant opportunity for students to take online courses to meet state and district requirements for graduation. Michigan's goal is to develop competency-based

> models for students to complete the Michigan Merit Curriculum and to ensure that students graduate prepared for college and a career. Michigan has enrolled approximately 2,500 students in the program, with the majority being students who already have dropped out, are at risk for dropping out, or are homeschooled. The "10 Elements" from Digital Learning Council and the International Association for K–12 Online Learning (iNACOL) often cite the Carnegie unit or seat time requirement as a primary hindrance to implementing online learning. While many states and districts are struggling with these policies, Michigan has opened the door for students to participate in online courses to meet their needs through this waiver process. (p. 11)

Patrick and Sturgis (2011) stated that "it is not enough to simply create seat-time waivers. Performance-based learning requires a new set of practices and policies that is riveted on student learning" (p. 6).

Performance-based learning is also driving many states to make changes to their educational systems. Florida Virtual School offers 115 online courses that can be accessed by any student in the state. These classes are performance-based classes. The classes can be started at any time. Students move at their own pace, and completion of the course is dependent upon mastery of content. Funding for the course is paid after the student has successfully mastered the course standards (Patrick & Sturgis, 2011).

The current policy practices in the United States are antiquated and ill-suited to accommodate the recommended changes to govern online learning. All states have decided to allow online schools or programs. Yet, not every state has a policy to govern those schools or programs. Of those states that do have policies, there is very little consistency in those policies

from one state to the next. Finn and Petrilli (2011) criticized the current model of education in the United States and the barriers it presents to the implementation of change:

> But which government should write the ground rules for cyber-schooling and hold its vendors to account for their results? Who would set distance learning's academic requirements and assessments? And who would pay for kids to attend them or—in an even more complicated scenario—to take separate courses from several of them, in order to assemble a curriculum tailored to each student? Districts? States? The Federal Government? Encumbered by the old LEA model and its geographically bounded jurisdictions, we have no governance mechanism well-suited to answering these questions. Thus the potential for distance learning as an alternative to underperforming schools remains barely tapped, and its financing and rule-making remain absurdly complicated. (Finn & Petrilli, 2011, p. 7)

The questions posed by Finn and Petrilli (2011) are the same questions being asked by policy-makers across the United States. Who should govern online learning? What does quality online learning look like? Who should fund online learning?

State to state, district to district, policy-makers are working to define online learning, and how it should be governed. They are trying to make online learning fit inside the parameters of traditional education. These confines have stymied the potential of online learning to a great extent. Finn and Petrilli state, "It is no accident that all the major education reforms of the past quarter-century have come from outside of the traditional school-governance structure" (2011, p. 9). If policy-makers are going to create policy that will truly advance education, they must address the current structure of the system they are trying to improve.

History of Online Learning in Utah

Utah created its first online school in 1994. Electronic High School (EHS) was Utah's first online school (Webb, 2009). Developed largely to accommodate home-schooled students, and to offer credit recovery for students who had failed classes in traditional schools, EHS found a niche in Utah's educational system. The program is housed in the Utah State Office of Education and is funded by the State of Utah. The courses are self-paced and free to any Utah student (Watson, 2005). It received 2 million dollars in annual funding from 2007-2011 (Watson et. al, 2011). EHS was one of the first online schools in the nation and was Utah's only option for online courses for more than a decade. In 2005, EHS was the largest online program in the United States with more than 38,000 students. These students ranged from full-time students, to students taking a 1-credit class for credit recovery. From 2006 to the present, Utah's online offerings have increased at a similar rate of those of other states.

In 2006, three school districts joined together to create a multi-district program called the Utah Online Academies. An additional district later joined this group in 2007. The Utah Online Academies used materials from the for-profit company K12 Inc., and students were charged fees to take courses. Additionally, Park City Independent School District started Utah's first single district online program (Watson & Ryan, 2006).

In 2007, Utah created the Utah Virtual Academy (UVA), and four additional individual district programs for a total of five districts participating in an online learning program. UVA, a statewide charter school, was the first realistic option for students to take full-time classes online. The curriculum and services for UVA were provided by K12 Inc. The five district programs offered online course options for students within their own districts, mostly as a supplemental resource or for credit recovery (Watson & Ryan, 2007).

In 2009, EHS launched open source course content initiative called the Utah Electronic High School curriculum, which would allow teachers anywhere to access and improve upon EHS's courses for free. Professors at Utah State University initiated the Open High School of Utah, an online charter school. The number of district programs grew from 5 to 17 (Watson, Gemin, Ryan, & Wicks, 2009).

By 2011, Utah offered multiple options for online programs. EHS offers supplemental and credit recovery options for students. UVA and The Open High School, both online charter schools, offer students the opportunity to enroll full-time in online course-work. Utah legislators passed into law the SOEP, which went into effect July 1, 2011, "making Utah the first State in the nation to turn the Digital Learning Now 10 elements of high quality learning into a comprehensive state policy" (Watson et. al., 2011, p. 155). Multiple district programs provide services to students statewide for a per course fee set at the state level (Watson et. al, 2011). These courses may be taken online in lieu of the same course in a traditional brick-and-mortar school. The student does not need to withdraw from one school and enroll in the online course provider. The courses are offered as another option to the traditional school. State funding for these online classes follows the student.

Utah SOEP

Goals and purposes. The SOEP legislation was heavily debated by lawmakers in Utah. Senator Howard Stephenson was the sponsor for Senate Bill 65 and argued passionately for its approval. Senator Stephenson argued that the SOEP would provide greater opportunities to all students, and particularly to those students that do not have their individual rights met by the traditional public school. The bill was passed by the legislature and signed in law by Governor Herbert in 2011.

The purposes of SOEP, as stated in Utah Code 53A-15-1203, are:

- Provide a student with access to online learning options regardless of where the student attends school, whether a public, private, or home school.
- Provide high quality learning options for a student regardless of language, residence, family income, or special needs.
- Provide online learning options to allow a student to acquire the knowledge and technology skills necessary in a digital world.
- Utilize the power and scalability of technology to customize education so that a student may learn in the student's own style preference and at the student's own pace.
- Utilize technology to remove the constraints of traditional classroom learning, allowing a student to access learning virtually at any time and in any place and giving the student the flexibility to take advantage of the student's peak learning time.
- Provide personalized learning, where a student can spend as little or as much time as the student needs to master the material.
- Provide greater access to self-paced programs enabling a high achieving student to accelerate academically, while a struggling student may have additional time and help to gain competency.
- Allow a student to customize the student's schedule to better meet the student's academic goals.
- Provide quality learning options to better prepare a student for post-secondary education and vocational or career opportunities.

- Allow a student to have an individualized educational experience.

The SOEP allows students to choose an alternative to traditional brick and mortar (BAM) public schooling. They may choose to enroll in classes provided by an approved online school and have those classes paid for through state educational funding. Students can take two classes from an online provider rather than take these classes from their district school. The district school is defined as any school under the control of an elected local school board (Utah Code 53a-15-1202(1)).

Option to enroll in online courses. An eligible student, which is defined as "a student enrolled in a district school or charter school in Utah; or beginning July 1, 2013, a student whose custodial parent or legal guardian is a resident of Utah" (Utah Code 53A-15-1202(2)), may enroll in an online course through the SOEP if they meet the course pre-requirements, it is open for enrollment, the course aligns with the student's education/occupation plan, or the students individual education plan. The SOEP defines an online course as "a course of instruction offered under the SOEP that uses digital technology" (Utah Code 53A-15-1202(4)). A student may only enroll in 2 credits of online courses during the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years. This number will increase by 1 credit each year until a student may take 6 credits of online coursework beginning with the 2016–2017 school year. A student's local education agency (LEA), which "is the agency in Utah that has administrative control and direction for public education" (Utah Code 53A-15-1202-3), may allow a student to take more credits than specified if the courses better meet the student's academic goals (Utah Code 53A-15-1204). It is the responsibility of the primary LEA to work with the parent and student to develop a student's education/occupation plan. The primary LEA is the "LEA in which an eligible student is enrolled for courses other than online courses offered through the SOEP" (Utah Code 53A-15-

1202(5)). Primary LEAs may not coerce or dissuade students from utilizing the SOEP, and online providers may not offer incentives to students for the purpose of enticing student enrollment.

To allow LEAs and online providers the time to estimate the number of students that intend to utilize the SOEP, students must enroll or declare the intention to enroll in online course within the established registration period. This registration period is determined by the primary LEA and must be the same for online course registration as it is for traditional courses offered in the school. Students may alter their schedules during this registration window and drop traditional courses to enroll in online courses (Utah Code 53A-15-1212.5).

Authorized online providers. There are fifteen approved online course providers in the state of Utah (see Appendix A) as of December 10, 2012 (Utah State Office of Education, 2012, list of providers). This number has dropped from 18 online course providers when the bill was implemented in August of 2011. Students are free to choose from any of these schools, which vary greatly from one to the other. According to the SOEP an online course provider may be approved if it meets the following criteria: "a charter school or district school created exclusively for the purpose of serving students online, and a LEA program, approved by the LEA's governing board that is created exclusively for the purpose of serving students online" (Utah Code 53A-15-1205).

Funding. Funding for the online classes will follow the student. In other words, if a student takes one class from online provider A, and one class from online provider B, and the other five classes from their traditional district school then School A and B receive a predetermined amount of money for each of those classes and the district school will lose that funding from the weighted pupil unit from the state. Online schools do not receive complete

funding for students just enrolling in classes. When a student enrolls in a class from an online provider the online provider receives 50% of the predetermined class amount. Online class fees range from $200 to $350 dependent upon the class offered. Upon successful completion of that class by the student, the online provider will receive the remaining 50% of the class reimbursement from the state.

The SOEP was designed to incentivize online providers to help students complete their online courses. By withholding complete funding from the providers, the state is requiring a product from the online provider. Also, while allowing an environment where students can work at their own pace, the state has determined that a student must finish the credit in 1 year from the time they begin. For classes that are not 1-credit classes, but are 0.5-credit classes, the same rules apply but the student only have 9 weeks to complete these classes. Should a student not pass the course the online school can still receive 30% funding by remediating the student and the student successfully completing the course. A student may remain enrolled in the incomplete online course for their entire high school career but the online school can only receive 100% reimbursement if the student successfully completes the credit in the time allowed (Utah Code 53A-15-1206).

Students may withdraw from an online course within 20 calendar days of beginning the course. If a student withdraws within the first 20 days then the online provider will keep the fees paid for enrollment in that course. It is the responsibility of the online provider to establish a start date for a second semester of a 1 credit class. If a student withdraws from the second half of a 1 credit class within the 20 calendar day time period then the online provider must refund the state the portion of the money received for the second semester or .5 credits of coursework (Utah Code 53A-15-1206.5).

As provided in the Utah Code, the state must establish a plan for payment of online providers for homeschool and private school students that utilize the SOEP beginning July 1, 2013. "The State Board of Education shall deduct money from funds allocated to the student's primary LEA of enrollment under Chapter 17a, Minimum School Program Act, to pay for online course fees" (Utah Code 53A-15-1207). These funds are to be used to pay online providers for classes taken by these students and successfully completed.

Credit acknowledgment. A course credit acknowledgment between the online course provider and the primary LEA must be created prior to a student taking an online course under the SOEP. Either the primary LEA or the online course provider can originate the course credit acknowledgment. Once created it must be submitted to the state to acknowledge that the State Board of Education will deduct monies from the primary LEA for payment to the online provider for courses taken by the student. The primary LEA may only reject the course credit acknowledgment if the student does not meet the established criteria of an "eligible student". Otherwise, the course credit acknowledgment must be submitted to the State Board of Education within 72 business hours of receipt from the Board. Failure to submit the course credit acknowledgment within the 72 hours by the primary LEA will be considered acceptance. If the online course provider accepts the course credit acknowledgment then they must notify the primary LEA of the course start date. If the online provider rejects the course credit acknowledgment then an explanation as to why it was rejected must be sent to the primary LEA. Any individualized education program information or 504 accommodation information pertaining to the student enrolling in the online course must be sent to the online provider within 72 hours so appropriate accommodations can be made (Utah Code 53A-15-1208).

Online course credit hours included in daily membership. "A student's primary LEA of enrollment shall include online course credit hours in calculating daily membership" (Utah Code 53A-15-1209(1)). Students cannot count for more than one FTE unless they plan to graduate early as a part of their student's education/occupation plan. A student may not use the SOEP to accelerate graduation, unless predetermined in the student's education/occupation plan. If a student is enrolled in a release-time class they may not take more classes that would result in them being counted as more than one FTE. A student may not take more credits in a semester than a regular student could enroll in for one semester (Utah Code 53A-15-1209).

Administration of statewide assessments and report on performance. Any student who takes an online course for which a statewide assessment is required in a district school must also take the same statewide assessment. It is the responsibility of the state board of education to make rules for the administration of these assessments for online students. The rule must provide for the administration of a statewide assessment upon completion of the online course. It also must require the course to be proctored by the online course provider. This decreases the ability of a student to cheat on a statewide assessment, and forces online providers to facilitate a face-to-face testing environment. This may be through an independent testing center (Utah Code 53A-15-1210).

The SOEP also requires the State Board of Education and online course providers to work collaboratively to create a performance report. This report is intended to evaluate the SOEP and the quality of course providers. Utah Code 53A-15-1211(2) lists the requirements of the report:

- Scores aggregated by test on statewide assessments administered under Chapter 1, Part 6, and achievement tests, taken by students at the end of an online course offered through the SOEP.
- The percentage of the online course provider's students who complete online courses within the applicable time period specified in Subsection 53A-15-1206(4).
- The percentage of the online course provider's students who complete online courses after the applicable time period specified in Subsection 53A-15-1206(4)(c) and before the student graduates from high school.
- The pupil-teacher ratio for the combined online courses of the online course provider.

Once the report is created, the SOEP requires that it be posted in the SOEP website, which is a part of the Utah State Office of Education website.

The SOEP website is required by Utah Code as a means of disseminating information that can be used by parents, students, and LEA's in regards to the SOEP. The following information must be include in the SOEP website: a description and purposes of the SOEP, eligibility requirements, directory of online course providers, a link to the online providers course catalog, and the performance report of the online providers (Utah Code 53A-15-1212(1)(a-e)). In addition, SOEP requires that each online provider provide the same information on their own websites; including the scores earned by their students on the statewide assessments. Online providers must also make available the percentage of student who completed online course within the specified time, and the average pupil-teacher ratio for the online courses (Utah Code 53A-25-1212).

Conclusion

The literature indicates that online learning will continue to increase in popularity. It will be an integral part of education. Educational policy-makers will have to decide how online learning will be integrated into existing educational systems. They must then formulate the policies that will be implemented in schools, districts, and states. Formal policy to govern online learning is very new and little research has been done to evaluate online learning policies. As policy-makers wrestle with this new educational delivery system, quality policy evaluation will be needed to provide direction and insight. Utah's SOEP promises to be the standard for all other policies trying to integrate online learning into mainstream public education. Evaluating the quality of this policy and its implementation will provide valuable insight for policy-makers in Utah as well as other states grappling with the same issue.

Chapter 3

Methods

The literature is clear that the policy process is not simply a mechanistic, linear process of inputs, throughputs, and outputs, void of personal interests and bias, but rather, a socially dynamic and politically charged environment (Copper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Wise, 1991). To better understand this environment, current research is making use of the interpretive frameworks of qualitative analysis. The very nature of the policy process can be better understood by examining and understanding the social climate in which it is formulated and implemented. "Both the normative standards brought to bear on an evaluation, as well as the understanding of the situation to which they are applied, are grounded in the subjective perspectives of the actors involved" (Fischer, 2006, p. 76). This then raises the concern of the validity of qualitative policy research. Palumbo and Nachmias (1982) stated, "it is not possible for the evaluator to be independent or engaged in scientific 'objectivity'" (as cited in Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984, p. 183). Yet, Fischer (2006) argued that, "concerns of validation are theoretically informed by the 'phenomenological' approach to social research" (p. 76). Interpretive social research attempts to explicate empirically the normative values that drive the decision-making of social actors or policy stakeholders (Cooper et al, 2004; Ellis, 1998; Fischer, 2006).

Research Design

This research is descriptive research utilizing quantitative and qualitative data using a state-level case study of the SOEP. Fischer (2006) stated the following concerning case studies as an appropriate qualitative methodology for examining policy:

> The case study is most typically the structural form of a qualitative or interpretive investigation. Most fundamentally, it is a means by which a particular policy objective and the specific circumstances of its implementation can be examined and documented in fine detail, especially over time. Many policy evaluators trained in economics and statistics have rejected the case study method as failing to meet the rigorous tests of empirical methodologies. However, its ability to get inside of a situation and to grasp its dynamics on its own terms can evocatively facilitate understanding. (p. 78)

Furthermore, Fischer (2006) presented a four-discourse method for evaluating policy in a manner that allows the researcher to "evocatively facilitate understanding."

The goal of this research is to determine what barriers exist in the implementation of the SOEP by secondary school principals. To determine if the SOEP contains the necessary elements to be successfully implemented based on recommendations of think-tanks and federal initiatives. Fischer's (2006) discourses of policy evaluation are verification, validation, vindication and social choice. The first two discourses constitute "first-order evaluation," or a "focus on specific program outcomes and the situational context in which they occur" (p. 18). The last two discourses or "second-order evaluations" focus "on the instrumental impact of the larger policy goals on the societal system as a whole" (pp. 18–19). This method of evaluation then works on two levels, the micro, and the macro. One concerned with the program, its outcomes and purposes, the other, more concerned with its impact at the level of the societal system in which it is implemented. This multi-level approach to evaluation allows the researcher to better prepare a complete picture of the policy. This research alone is not sufficient to fully utilize the second-level discourses presented by Fischer. This research establishes a preliminary database that answers the research questions presented to guide this study. This preliminary

groundwork lays the foundation for future studies that examine the macro-level implications of this policy on the societal system as a whole. That is not to say that aspects of Fischer's second-level discourses, namely vindication, cannot offer valuable insights into this research. As this research uses Will and Capacity as conceptual constructs of implementation, understanding how LEA's view the SOEP, and its value to society as a whole, may offer an insight into their Will to implement.

First-order evaluation. Verification is the most common of the discourses or evaluation approaches. Largely concerned with measuring the efficiency of program outcomes, questions used to guide verification research are:

- Does the program empirically fulfill its stated objective?
- Does the empirical analysis uncover secondary or unanticipated effects that offset the program objectives?
- Does the program fulfill the objectives more efficiently than the alternative means available? (Fischer, 2006, p. 20)

The second discourse, validation, shifts its focus from goals and outcomes to whether or not programs objectives are relevant to the situation. Not concerned with the empirical measurement of outcomes, but a focus on the assumptions underlying the program. Validation then centers on the following questions:

- Is the program objective(s) relevant to the problem situation?
- Are there circumstances in the situation that require an exception to be made to the objective(s)?
- Are two or more criteria equally relevant to the problem situation? (Fischer, 2006, p. 21)

Second-order evaluation. Vindication is the third discourse and focus within this discourse shifts from concrete context to the societal system as a whole. The goal of vindication is to determine if the program objectives address a valuable function of society. Vindication measures not the outcomes nor the implementation, but the consequences of a program in terms of the whole society. It is organized around questions such as:

- Does the policy goal have instrumental or contributive value for society as a whole?
- Does the policy goal result in unanticipated problems with important societal consequences?
- Does a commitment to the policy goal lead to consequences that are judged to be equitably distributed? (Fischer, 2006, p. 21)

This study did not delve into the third discourse in great detail, but utilized to further probe both administrators' and legislators' views of the SOEP and its societal value in general. This information will be utilized in cross tabulation tables to identify both will and capacity of those charged with implementation of the program.

The final discourse is social choice. Social choice seeks to create a method for analyzing how a societal system makes rational choices. It focuses on interpreting policy based on the rational way of life or the good life (Fischer, 2006). This is problematic as ideology from one person to the next is very different; let alone one community to the next. Because the potential problem of defining the good life in and of itself is so difficult, it is beyond the scope of this research. Thus, the discourse of social choice was omitted from this study.

Using the first two discourses allowed for sufficient opportunity to evaluate the current level of implementation of the SOEP. By moving beyond simple linear empirical evaluations of

policy, this research was more effective in providing worthwhile recommendations for policy-makers to improve the SOEP. A shift from a positivist view of policy evaluation to a more transformational approach supports this process. Fischer (2006) clarified:

> Such social science seeks to clarify and theorize about the processes, both intellectual and material, through which political actors form, function within, dissolve, and restructure political worlds. To be sure, empirical research is important to such inquiry. But its importance lies in its ability to inform a larger and more encompassing normative deliberation, not in its empirical predictive powers per se. (p. 23)

A case study is ideal to investigate the SOEP utilizing Fischer's first three discourses as a framework, and allows the freedom to draw from multiple sources of information. The following key research questions will provide the framework for this study:

1. To what degree does Utah's SOEP align with the 10 elements of high quality digital learning?
2. What are the barriers that limit the implementation of Utah's SOEP?
3. How willing are Utah's secondary school principals to implement the SOEP?
4. What level of capacity do Utah's secondary school principals have to implement the SOEP?

Table 2 shows the research design framework for the study.

Table 2

Research Design Framework

Research questions	Type of data	Data source	Data collection	Data analysis
1	S. B. 65 10 Standards	State Code Foundation for Excellence in Education	Legislature website Website	Comparative content
2–4	Survey	Public high school principals in Utah	Qualtrics software	Descriptive statistics
2–4	Interview	Public high school principals in Utah	Phone, email, or in person	Thematic

Source of Data

The comparative analysis utilized the information found in the 10 elements of high quality digital learning, which can be accessed on the Digital Learning Now website (http://www.digitallearningnow.com/10elements/). This provides a list of the 10 elements, and a clear explanation of what indicators of each element might look like. The Internet was also used to access the state code and description of the SOEP (http://le.utah.gov/code/TITLE53A/htm/53A15_120100.htm).

A Qualtrics survey was distributed to the principals of Utah's public high schools. Public high schools in Utah can be charter schools or traditional brick-and-mortar schools. The target population for this study was all public high school principals in the state of Utah. The term principal, for this study, included headmasters and directors. This list of names and email addresses was obtained by a search of the Utah State office of Education website (http://USOE.org). The master list containing all charter schools and high schools can be found

on this website. The high school master list identifies the principal of the each school and provides their email address. The same information can be found on the charter school master list. However, not all schools on the charter school master list serve high school age students; this list was further refined to include only those that service students in grades 9-12. To refine this list, search parameters on the Utah Office of Education website were defined to only include charter schools that serve students in grades 9-12. These two lists are inclusive of all public secondary schools in Utah and were used as the population of this study. In total there are 123 public high schools and 36 public charter high schools.

Data Collection

This research used three different data collection methods: first, a comparative content analysis, second, a Qualtrics survey, third, an interview. A comparative content analysis of the SOEP and the recommendations of the 10 elements of high quality digital learning was written using information from the Digital learning website, and the Utah State Code found online.

An online Qualtrics survey (see Appendix B) was the primary method of data collection. Qualtrics allowed for an efficient, uniform method to measure principals' level of understanding of the SOEP, and to what extent has been implemented. The survey addresses key research questions 2, 3, and 4. It consists of five sections: school demographics, principal demographics, implementation of the SOEP, principal will, and principal "capacity." Each section was designed to survey for specific information. The first section identified the school demographics such as: number of students, location (rural, suburban, urban), type of school (traditional, charter, virtual), percent of students identified as low socioeconomic standard, percent of minority students, and percentage of students participating in the SOEP program. The second section identified the principals' age, familiarity with technology, years of experience as an

administrator, and experience with online learning. The third section used a Likert scale to survey the principals' implementation of the SOEP as a measure of their consistency in following the directives of the program. The fourth section surveyed principal "will." A Likert scale allowed principals to indicate their beliefs in the purposes of the SOEP. The final section of the Qualtrics survey used a Likert scale to measure the capacity of principals to implement the SOEP. In this section the focus was placed on identifying any barriers that would make implementation difficult.

The use of will and capacity as indicators to measure for implementation is founded in the works of first generation policy analysts. Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) showed that implementers control outcomes. Even the best designed policies and programs are subject to those who are left with the task of implementing them, McLaughlin (1987) states, "This first generation of implementation analysis showed how local factors such as size, intra-organizational relations, commitment, capacity, and institutional complexity molded responses to policy" (p. 172). Policy implementers are human and as humans they are capable of making choices as to how, when, and what they are going to implement in any given policy or program. McLaughlin (1987) further clarified that "policy success depends critically on two broad factors: local capacity and will" (p. 172).

Capacity, which is the ability to implement a policy by having the sufficient resources to implement such as: training, time, facilities, manpower, or technology to name a few, is something that the policy can address. Money can be placed aside for materials. Trainings can be offered. Manpower can be hired, and technology can be purchased. Will on the other hand is not something that policy can control. Will speaks directly to the intrinsic motivation of the implementer, and reflects their "assessment of the value of a policy or appropriateness of a

strategy" (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 172). This "assessment of value" largely controls the level of implementation of implementers. Second-generation policy analysts discovered policy incentives only motivate implementers to a certain level, but if they feel the policy is not in line with their personal beliefs they will be resistant to implementation (McLaughlin, 1987; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980).

The use of will and capacity as indicators to measure the level of implementation of the SOEP, and to identify barriers to implementation that may exist fit nicely into Fischer's policy analysis framework. It also makes sense to use will and capacity as indicators of implementation because this research of the SOEP is novel, and as such using outcomes as a measure of implementation success would be inappropriate (McLaughlin, 1987).

The invitation to take the Qualtrics survey was sent via email to all principals in the target population. The email addresses of all public high school and charter school administrators were obtained from the Utah State Office of Education website. The principals had one week to respond to the survey. The researcher monitored responses using Qualtrics software. Every week an invitation to participate was resent. This continued for one month, at which time the survey was closed.

Third, an interview was conducted to further identify the barriers of implementation. The sampling fame for this interview was created using a two-stage sampling method utilizing responses from the Qualtrics survey. A value was given for each principal response on a Likert scale, 1 for *strongly agree* to 5 for *strongly disagree*. Averages scores were compiled for will and capacity. In stage one an extreme case sampling was used to create clusters from the respondents of the Qualtrics survey. Two clusters were created using the Likert responses. Cluster 1 included those principals indicating they had a concern with implementation because of

issues of will or capacity. Cluster 2 included those principals who indicated a high level of will and capacity to implement the SOEP based on their Likert responses. A maximum variation sampling was then used in stage two to ensure that demographical variations were accounted for. In each cluster one principal was selected to represent the following demographic variations, age (young or old), sex (male or female), ability to use technology (below average or above average), and type of school they work at (urban or rural). An interview was conducted with these principals to determine what specific factors are limiting their ability or desire to implement the SOEP (see Appendix C). The interview protocol included a brief explanation of the interview, followed by four open-ended questions. The responses were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

A comparative content analysis was used to determine how well the SOEP aligns with the 10 elements of high quality digital learning. This is essential to answer key research question 1. Each element of the 10 elements of high quality digital learning was analyzed individually against the SOEP statute. Using the SOEP, it was determined if provisions to meet the stated element are present in the SOEP statute. A narrative was written that compared the goals, purposes, and stated statutes of the SOEP to the individual element being analyzed. Admittedly, this is a very subjective process, which leaves the results of such a data collection method open to questions of validity. To improve the validity of this process, experts in both policy evaluation and digital learning at Brigham Young University reviewed the researcher's comparative content analysis independently. Additionally, the researcher acknowledges his own background and personal experiences as a Utah public school administrator will influence how

the SOEP statutes are interpreted, but every effort was taken to increase the validity of this analysis.

The survey was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The survey was analyzed using a scoring system that gave a numerical value to the Likert scale responses. The survey utilized a five point Likert scale, *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*. Qualtrics software designates *strongly disagree* as 1 point and *strongly agree* as 5 points. The average score of each statement was utilized to identify the general feelings of the respondents. Additionally, each section of the survey was examined independently to identify average response scores. The combined mean response scores for will and capacity were further analyzed using descriptive statistics. Namely, a one-way ANOVA was performed for each demographical category to determine if there were statistically significant differences between groups within each category. This process was also performed for each category using only the will mean response scores and the capacity mean response scores individually.

The interview responses were sorted by clusters and analyzed. This analysis included sorting interview responses into themes by interview question. This was done in a simple excel spreadsheet that allowed the researcher to appropriately identify themes based on respondents answers. This method was chosen by the researcher to ensure that isomorphic and heteromorphic responses were placed in the appropriate themes. This created a list of the most common themes in each response.

Conclusion

This study focused primarily on the implementation of the SOEP utilizing Fischer's (2006) policy evaluation framework. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were utilized in this case study to create a multi-dimensional perspective to better evaluate Utah's

SOEP. Specifically, this study utilized a comparative analysis of the SOEP and the 10 elements of high quality digital learning to verify that the program follows the established recommendations of experts and think-tanks in the field of online learning. A Qualtrics survey of Utah's public high school principals was used to validate the level of implementation of the program focusing specifically on will and "capacity." Additionally, a follow-up interview further vindicated, at a minimal level, the societal value of the program to provide information that was used to better understand the factors that affect the will and capacity of the policy implementers. All of these methods were used in an effort to more accurately inform law-makers of any recommendations that might improve the implementation of Utah's SOEP and provide data for future online learning policy and policy research.

Chapter 4

Results

This research evaluated the Utah SOEP. First, a comparative analysis was used to evaluate the content of the SOEP. Second, implementation of the SOEP in Utah schools was evaluated using will and capacity of Utah's secondary school principals as indicators of implementation. Third, specific barriers were identified that limited effective implementation of the SOEP.

This research was done in three stages. First, a comparative content analysis was done to evaluate how closely the SOEP aligns to the 10 elements of high quality digital learning, which are considered the framework by which quality digital learning should be measured. Second, survey data was collected from Utah secondary school principals measuring perceptions of will and capacity to implement the SOEP. Third, interviews were conducted to more deeply understand how the SOEP was being implemented and the specific implementation barriers, if any, that the SOEP created for Utah's secondary school principals.

Stage 1: Comparative Content Analysis

Alignment with the 10 elements of high quality digital learning. The first key research question asked was "To what degree does Utah's SOEP align with the 10 elements of high quality digital learning?" This was answered using a comparative narrative. The researcher compared each of the 10 elements of highly effective digital learning (Bush & Wise, 2010) to the SOEP. The researcher evaluated if the SOEP provided conditions for the individual element of high quality digital learning to be supported. Table 3 shows whether each element was met, partially met, or not met by the SOEP.

The criterion for determining if the SOEP met the requirements of each element was determined if the researcher could identify evidence within the SOEP that allowed for the full implementation of the element. An element was determined to be only partially met if the SOEP addressed the needs of the element to the point where it could be potentially implemented, but did not specifically identify or define sufficient evidence that the element had been addressed. If the SOEP did not provide any evidence that it provided for the successful accounting of the requirements of an element it was determined not to be met.

Table 3

Content Analysis Comparing the Ten Elements of High Quality Digital Learning with the Components of the Utah SOEP

10 elements	Meets standard	Partially meets standard	Does not meet standard
1. Student eligibility: All students are digital learners.	X		
2. Student access: All students have access to a high quality digital content and online courses.		X	
3. Personalized learning: All students can customize their education using digital content through an approved provider.		X	
4. Advancement: Students progress based on demonstrated competency.			X
5. Content: Digital content, instructional materials, and online and blended learning courses are high quality.			X
6. Instruction: Digital instruction and teachers are high quality.		X	
7. Providers: All students have access to multiple high quality providers.	X		
8. Assessment and accountability: Student learning is the metric for evaluating the quality of content and instruction.	X		
9. Funding: Funding creates incentives for performance, options and innovation.	X		
10. Delivery: Infrastructure supports digital learning.			X

Element 1. Student eligibility: All students are digital learners. A student is eligible to enroll in an online course offered through the SOEP if they are enrolled in a district or charter school in Utah. Any student that attends a private school or is home schooled may also enroll as long as their custodial parent or a legal guardian is a resident of the state of Utah. Students must also meet the course prerequisites. If a student has an individualized education program, then the online course must be consistent with the plan. Courses must align with student education/occupation plan. If the student is participating in a baccalaureate program, the online courses must be consistent with that program (Utah Code 53A-15-1202, 53A-15-1204). Because the SOEP allows access for all students, it meets the standard.

Element 2. Student access: All students have access to a high quality digital content and online courses. Utah's SOEP does not have a provision that accounts for high quality access to online courses. Students may take online courses with high quality content in lieu of traditional brick-and-mortar classes, but access to technology and Internet is not addressed. Students without computers or Internet may be eligible for online classes under the SOEP but in reality would not be able to take advantage of any of the programs benefits as a result of insufficient access. The SOEP only partially meets this standard. Element 10 more specifically addresses the issue of infrastructure access to digital content. The SOEP does not adequately make provision for all students to have equal access to digital learning as long as there are students without the technology to do so.

It is recommended that the SOEP must make it possible for all students to access high quality digital content and online courses by providing the technology and access to Internet services. That would make it possible for all students to make use of the SOEP if they so

desired. Removing the barrier of insufficient technology will equate to sufficient access. There are a number of ways that this could be accomplished:

- Allocate funds for all students in secondary schools to have one-to-one devices.
- Guarantee that the LEA provides the needed technology for any student who chooses to utilize the SOEP.
- Allow students access to technology and an area within the brick-and-mortar school to take their online courses through the SOEP.

Element 3. Personalized learning: All students can customize their education using digital content through an approved provider. SOEP makes it possible for students to determine what classes they would like to take and from what online provider they would like to take them. A student may take most of their classes in a traditional brick-and-mortar classroom but may elect to take certain classes online as part of their student's education/occupation plan. A student in a rural school may now take an advanced placement class from an online provider of their choice. Students with an IEP may now customize their learning to suit their individual needs as learners. A student's primary Local Education Agency (LEA), which is the approved agency in Utah that has administrative control and direction for public education, must work in conjunction with students and parents to prepare and implement a student's education/occupation plan. This means the primary LEA must assist and counsel students about courses that are best for them to accomplish their desired educational goals. This includes online options. The primary LEA may not impose restrictions on students for choosing online providers rather than choosing courses within the traditional schools, nor may they force a student to choose one online provider over another (Utah Code 53A-15-1202, 53A-15-1204).

The SOEP dictates that a student may enroll in no more than 2 credits of online classes in the 2011–12 school year. This number of credits is to increase by one credit each year until the 2016–17 school year in which a student may take up to six credits of online courses. A student may not enroll in more online course credits at any given time, than would be taken by a student in a traditional classroom. A student's primary LEA may allow a student to take more than the specified number of online credits, but only if this is part of the student's Student Education Occupation Plan (Utah Code 53A-15-1209, 53A-15-1202, 53A-15-1204). Utah's SOEP limitation to the number of digital courses that a student can take only partially meets the standard.

The SOEP would completely meet the standard of element 3 if students were not limited by number of courses that they are allowed to take at any given time. Complete alignment of the SOEP to the 10 elements of high quality digital learning can only exist if students can move as fast or as slow with their courses as they feel is appropriate.

Element 4. Advancement: Students progress based on demonstrated competency. Student progress and competency are solely the determination of the online provider. The SOEP makes no stipulations or mandates as to how that progress is determined or monitored. The only requirement in the SOEP that would possibly monitor competency is the requirement found in Utah Code 53A-15-1210 that requires any student that takes an online course that would normally require a state test to take that test which must be proctored by the online provider. The SOEP does not meet this standard because the SOEP does not stipulate that online providers must allow students to advance if competency can be demonstrated.

To meet element 4 students must be allowed credit for demonstrating competency. Courses offered through the SOEP must be standards-based and provide authentic assessments

that students can take to demonstrate competency of individual standards or multiple standards up to and including complete competency of the course learning objectives.

Element 5. Content: Digital content, instructional materials, and online and blended learning courses are high quality. The SOEP states one of its purposes is to "provide high quality learning options for a student regardless of language, residence, family income, or special needs" (Utah Code 53A-15-1203(3)(b)), but unlike the element 5 in the ten elements of quality digital learning which defines what high quality the SOEP does not. There is no definition of what "high quality" is, nor is there any language in the SOEP that specifically explains what high quality digital content, instructional materials, and online and blended courses look like. For this reason the SOEP does not meet the standard.

The SOEP must provide provision for the vetting of course content that requires it to meet a minimal standard. Online providers must be required to qualify their content through local LEAs to guarantee that the quality of the digital content meets an equivalent standard of quality. Training and collaboration must be provided to create a rubric for consistent vetting of the content by LEAs, and to ensure that online providers have some guarantee that LEAs are not intentionally undermining their courses to limit student access to courses.

Element 6. Instruction: Digital instruction and teachers are high quality. The SOEP does not define high quality instruction nor does it define high quality teachers. Although for a course to be considered accredited, it must be tied to an instructor that is highly qualified to teach the course based on Utah's teacher licensing rules and guidelines. The SOEP's lack of clear definition of what high quality teachers and instruction are and a guarantee to ensure it means that it only partially meets the standard.

The SOEP must go beyond just stating that a licensed teacher assigned to the course qualifies the instruction and teacher as high quality. An accreditation process must be created that requires oversight and monitoring of both content (element 5) and the instruction of that content by highly qualified instructors. Also, students must have access to those teachers. Currently, the SOEP allows online courses that are completely independent of an instructor. These courses are stand-alone courses that a student takes with no support or help. These types of courses can provide quality content if prepared well, but will never provide high quality instruction by a high quality teacher. To meet element 6 the SOEP must eliminate these type of courses.

Element 7. Providers: All students have access to multiple high quality providers. According to Utah Code 53A-15-1205 online charter schools, online district schools, and online LEA programs would all be considered authorized online course providers. To ensure high quality, online schools must adhere to the same procedures and processes as other public education accredited schools. Utah State Board of Education rules (R277-413) require schools that serve grades 9–12 to be accredited via the Northwest Accreditation Commission and comply with Utah State Board of Education standards. One accreditation indicator that is particularly important is that schools have the ability to grant high school diplomas. Online schools serve full-time students. Full-time students have greater than 160 days of membership at the school. Online schools receive Clearinghouse reports, accountability reports, graduation rates, etc. (Utah State Office of Education). As of October 7, 2014 there were 13 authorized online providers in the state of Utah according to the Utah State Office of Education website, usoe.org. The SOEP meet this standard by allowing access to multiple providers, but the question of high quality still cannot be guaranteed.

Element 8. Assessment and accountability: Student learning is the metric for evaluating the quality of content and instruction. Utah Code 53A-15-1210 requires the State Board of Education to "make rules providing for the administration of a statewide assessment to a student enrolled in an online course." The SOEP requires all online providers to report student results. This is intended to create transparency and allow students and parents adequate information to choose the providers that will best meet their needs. The report on performance of online providers must include; scores aggregated on statewide assessments, percentage of students who completed within the specified 1-year time period, the percentage of students who complete online courses after 1-year time period and before they graduate from high school, and pupil-teacher ratio of all online courses provided by the online course provider. This report must be posted by the Utah State Board of Education on the SOEP website (Utah Code 53A-15-1211). This standard is met because all students in online courses must take all required State assessments.

Element 9. Funding: Funding creates incentives for performance, options and innovation. The funding structure of the SOEP makes it a landmark program, and makes it a unique state policy governing online education opportunity. "Funding follows the student down to the course level; from primary Local Education Agency (LEA) of enrollment to Provider LEA" (Watson et al., 2011, p. 155). The provider LEA is the provider of the online course being taken by the student. This funding structure makes it possible for students to take classes from multiple providers at the same time. Traditionally, online providers only receive funding from the state for those students who were enrolled fulltime in their courses. Students could not take classes from both their primary LEA and an online provider at the same time, unless they pay for the additional online course.

According to the SOEP, online providers will be paid a certain fee per course taken by a student. Online providers do not receive the same weighted pupil unit equivalent per course of state funding as is allocated by the state for a primary LEA. Upon enrollment an online provider will receive 50% of a predetermined fee for an online course. This fee ranges from $200 to $350 depending on the course. Once a student successfully completes the course the online provider will receive the remaining 50% of the fee. "Beginning with the 2013–14 school year, the online course fees . . . shall be adjusted each school year in accordance with the percentage change in value of the weighted pupil unit from the previous school year" (Utah Code 53A-15-1206(3)).

Should a student not complete the online course in the 1-year time period allowed, the SOEP provides an incentive for online providers to allow students time and opportunity to complete the credit prior to graduation from high school. If a student does complete the credit before they graduate from their primary LEA, the online provider will receive 30% of the remaining 50% of the course fee. This incentive is meant "to encourage an online course provider to provide remediation to a student who remains enrolled in an online course . . . and avoid the need for credit recovery" (53A-15-1206(5)(b)).

The SOEP also allows students who are home schooled, or attend private schools, publicly funded access to online providers in the same manner as traditional students. Prior to July 1, 2013, a private school student or a home-schooled student could not take online courses outside of traditional school without paying for these courses on their own. Now they can enroll in their primary LEA and then enroll in courses under the SOEP guidelines just as a traditional student would. These students do not have to enroll full-time in their primary LEA in order to receive these educational services. The primary LEA manages the credit earned through online course work and provides guidance and counseling for the student in choosing those classes that

will accomplish their goals as specified in their student's education/occupation plan. The primary LEA receives funding for this service by receiving the remaining portion of the weighted pupil unit that was not provided to the online provider for the course fee (Utah Code 53A-15-1207, 53A-15-1208). This standard is met because the SOEP clearly allows funding for any students to take online courses of their choosing.

Element 10. Delivery: Infrastructure supports digital learning. SOEP does not address support for infrastructure. Online providers are responsible for creating and supporting their own infrastructure and students are responsible for having access to sufficient technology to participate in online courses. Utah Senator Howard Stephenson, who sponsored the SOEP, believes that primary LEA's should make their computer equipment and Internet services available to students to take advantage of online course offerings under the SOEP. Primary LEA's argue that it is not their responsibility to provide these services for students to take courses from other LEA's. They argue that the online provider is receiving funding for that course. Therefore, the primary LEA has no responsibility to accommodate that student for that coursework (Schencker, 2011). This does not meet the standard because the SOEP does not address any infrastructure concerns.

Again, element 10 is closely tied to element 3. Inequality of access to technology and an infrastructure to support digital learning equates to disparity to access for all students. The SOEP must be backed by a commitment to funding from the State to provide both technology and infrastructure for all students as recommended in element 3.

Stage 2: Principal Will and Capacity to Implement the SOEP

Will and capacity defined. Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) were the first to make clear the outcomes of a policy are contingent on the implementation, "a process that is directly rooted

in the fallibilities of the human being." Outcomes are the direct result of individuals' interpretations and action. These interpretations and actions are the result of two powerful factors, capacity and will (McLaughlin, 1987). Capacity, which can be directly addressed by policy, is the "means" to implement a policy. Will, however, is the motivation or commitment to a policy, and directly affects the fidelity of implementation. For a policy such as the SOEP both capacity and will must be firmly established if it is to have any chance of success.

To measure will and capacity of principals to implement the SOEP, the wording of the SOEP statue was used to create a survey that allowed principals to indicate if they felt they had both the desire and means to implement the program. Will was measured by allowing principals to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement to the stated goals and purposes of the SOEP. Capacity was measured allowing principals to indicate their agreement or disagreement to the means provided for the implementation of the program. The principals' responses were then reported as a mean response score of both "will" and "capacity." The principals' responses were also reported as a mean response score for only "will" and only "capacity."

Survey Population and Response Rate

The Qualtrics survey used in stage one was opened in May 2014, and closed 7 weeks later in June 2014. The entire sampling frame consisted of 147 Utah secondary school principals. This was inclusive of all secondary school principals that had a 12^{th} grade in their school. Seven of those principals could not be contacted via the email addresses provided from the Utah State Office of Education. Of the 140 principals that received the survey invitation, 71 participated in the survey. Six respondents did not complete all questions in the survey and their responses were only used when all questions in a section were completed and the data from that

section were being analyzed independent of any other responses. This left an overall response rate of 51%.

Survey Instrument

Respondents completed a 43-question survey. Questions 1–12 asked respondents to select the demographic information that best described themselves and the schools that they administrated The remaining questions on the survey sought to examine implementation SOEP, and the barriers that may have limited that implementation. Specifically, questions 18–27 and 38–41 measured principal will, questions 28–37 and 42–43 measured capacity, will being the intrinsic motivation of policy implementers to implement the policy and capacity having the necessary resources to implement. Table 4 summarizes the relationship of survey questions with the key research questions guiding this study. The entire survey can be found in Appendix B.

Table 4

Survey Questions Key Research Question

Key research questions	Survey questions
1. Demographic information (used only for the disaggregation of data)	1–12
2. What are the barriers that limit the implementation of Utah's SOEP?	13–43
3. How willing are Utah's Secondary school principals to implement the SOEP?	18–27, 38–40
4. What level of capacity do Utah's secondary school principals have to implement the SOEP?	28–37, 41–42

Survey Descriptive Data

School demographics. The respondents in this study represented a diverse cross-section of Utah secondary schools. Of the 71 respondents, 83% of the respondents were from traditional public schools, 14% were principals of charter schools, and 3% were from online schools. There

was a relatively equal distribution between rural (40%) and suburban schools (44%) represented, but only 16% of the respondents indicated they were from urban schools. This provided a good representation of the overall percentages of the schools in Utah. The percentage of each type of high school in Utah is currently 45% Rural, 37% Suburban, and 18% Urban (Brough, 2015). Enrollment demographics showed that 46% of the principals worked in schools with over 1000 students. Looking at free or reduced populations in the schools showed that 55% of the schools represented had between 25 – 50% of their students qualifying for this service. Sixty-six percent of the schools had minority populations less than 25%, with 70% of the schools having English Language Learner populations less than 15%. All but 6% of the respondents indicated that they had students utilizing the Utah SOEP. However, within these schools, 65% of these schools had less than 10% of their population taking online classes through the program. Table 5 shows the totals for all school demographic information.

Table 5

School Demographics

Demographic	Option	Response	Percent
School type	Traditional	59	83%
	Charter	10	14%
	Online	2	3%
School location	Urban	11	16%
	Suburban	31	44%
	Rural	28	40%
School enrollment	< 150	8	11%
	151–400	15	21%
	401–1,000	15	21%
	> 1,000	33	46%
Free and reduced lunch population	< 25%	21	30%
	25%–50%	39	55%
	> 50%	11	15%
Minority population	< 25%	47	66%
	25%–50%	18	25%
	> 50%	6	8%
# of students that participate in online classes through the Utah SOEP	0%	4	6%
	1%–10%	46	65%
	11%–25%	20	28%
	> 25%	1	1%
English language learner population	< 15%	50	70%
	15%–25%	13	18%
	>25%	8	11%

Principal demographics. The majority of the respondents were male (80%), and 70% were over the age of 45 years old. Sixty-five percent of the principals that were surveyed indicated they had more than 10 years of experience as administrators. When asked how they viewed their own level of expertise with technology, 94% felt they were at or above average. Additionally, 68% of the respondents had taken one or more online classes, and of those principals that had not taken an online class themselves (32%), all knew individuals that had taken online classes. Table 6 summarizes the principals' demographics.

Table 6

Principal Demographics

Demographic	Option	Response	Response
Sex	Male	57	80%
	Female	14	20%
Age	25–35	2	3%
	36–45	19	27%
	46–55	35	49%
	> 55	15	21%
Years as an administrator	1–5	7	10%
	6–10	18	25%
	11–15	20	28%
	> 15	26	37%
Level of technology expertise	Below average	4	6%
	Average	47	66%
	Above average	20	28%
Experience with online learning	Has taken multiple online classes	32	45%
	Has taken one online class	16	23%
	Have never taken an online class, but is familiar with people who have	23	32%
	Have never taken an online class and do not know anyone who has	0	0%

Principal willingness to implement. Principal's willingness to implement the SOEP was measured in two separate sets of questions in the survey. First, questions 13-17 asked principals questions that measured whether specific actions had been taken in their schools that would indicate a willingness to implement the SOEP. These responses were measured using a Likert scale. The Likert scale allowed the respondents to indicate whether they strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statements. These responses were then combined into three groups: implementing, not implementing, and don't know (see Table 7). Second, questions 18–27 asked principals to express how closely their personal beliefs mirrored the goals and purposes of the SOEP (see Table 8). These questions

were also answered using the same Likert scale as questions 13–17. Each Likert response was given scaled numeric values. These values were as follows: strongly agreed was given a value of 5 points, agreed 4 points, neither agreed nor disagreed 3 points, disagreed 2 points, and strongly disagreed 1 point.

Question 13 asked if students are informed of their options to utilize online classes through the SOEP. Seventy-five percent indicated they were implementing, 12.5% were not implementing, and 12.5% didn't know if this was happening in their school.

Question 14 asked if students were only allowed to utilize the Statewide Online Education Plan only if the classes aligned with the student's education/occupation plan. Twenty-four percent were implementing, 46.5% were not implementing, and 29.5% didn't know.

Question 15 asked if the school did not allow students to accelerate using online courses unless stated in their education/occupation plan. Fifteen percent were implementing this rule, 64.5% were not choosing to implement this rule, and 20% didn't know.

Question 16 asked if students were allowed to take more courses through the SOEP than were allowed for traditional students. Fifty-seven percent were allowing students to take more classes than the traditional student, 6% were not, and 37% didn't know if they did or didn't.

Question 17 asked if the school required a course credit acknowledgment form to be signed by student staking online courses through the SOEP. Forty-six percent indicated they were requiring the forms, 14% were not, and 36.5% didn't know if the forms were being signed.

Table 7

Degree of SOEP Implementation by Principals

Question	Implementing	Not implementing	Do not know
13. Students are informed of their options to utilize online classes through the SOEP.	53 75%	9 12.5%	9 12.5%
14. Students are only allowed to utilize the SOEP if the classes align with the students' SOEP.	17 24%	33 46.5%	21 29.5%
15. Students are not allowed to use the SOEP to accelerate, unless they have been approved to graduate early.	11 15.5%	46 64.5%	14 20%
16. Student's number of online course credits exceeds the maximum allowed for the year for a regular student.	40 57%	4 6%	26 37%
17. A course credit acknowledgment is signed and submitted to the State for each online class taken.	33 46.5%	10 14%	26 36.5%

The responses for questions 18–27 can be found in Table 8. The results were consolidated for reporting as all of the questions asked principals to indicate their agreement or disagreement to the stated goals and purposes of the SOEP. Approximately 80% of the responses indicated that principals' beliefs matched the goals and purposes of the SOEP. Only 6% of the principals disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the stated goals and purposes. Fourteen percent neither agreed nor disagreed. The responses that solicited the most agreement with principals were the beliefs that "students should be provided with high quality learning options regardless of language, residence, family income, or special needs," and "students should be provided learning options that allow a student to acquire the knowledge and technology skills necessary in a digital world." Principals agreed with these two beliefs 100%.

Principals disagreed the most with the belief that "students should be allowed access to online learning options regardless of where the student attends school, whether public, private, or home school." Thirteen percent of principals found this to be contrary to their own personal beliefs. Also, 13% of the respondents indicated that they disagreed with the belief that "students

should be allowed to utilize technology to remove the constraints of traditional classroom learning allowing students to access learning at any time and any place."

Table 8

Principals' Agreement With Goals and Purposes of the SOEP

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
18. Students should be provided learning options that allow a student to acquire the knowledge and technology skills necessary in a digital world.	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	42 61%	27 39%	4.39
19. Students should be provided high quality learning options regardless of language, residence, family income, or special needs.	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	34 49%	35 51%	4.51
20. Students should be provided greater access to self-paced programs enabling high achieving students to accelerate academically.	0 0%	5 7%	11 16%	43 62%	10 14.5%	3.84
21. Students should be provided a personalized learning, where a student can spend as much or as little time as needed to master the material.	0 0%	6 9%	12 17%	42 61%	9 13%	3.78
22. Students should be allowed to utilize the power of technology to customize education so that a student may learn in the student's own preference and pace.	0 0%	7 10%	10 14.5%	42 61%	10 14.5%	3.80
23. Students should be allowed to utilize technology to remove the constraints of traditional classroom learning, allowing students to access learning at any time and any place.	1 1.5%	6 9%	15 22%	37 53.5%	10 14.5%	3.71
24. Students should be allowed to have an individualized educational experience.	0 0%	1 1.5%	15 22%	41 59.5%	12 17%	3.93
25. Students should be allowed to earn high school graduation credit through the completion of publicly funded online courses.	3 4%	1 1.5%	10 14.5%	41 59.5%	14 20%	3.90
26. Students should be allowed to customize their schedule to better meet their academic goals.	0 0%	1 1.5%	14 20%	41 59.5%	13 19%	3.96
27. Students should be allowed access to online learning options regardless of where the student attends school, whether public, private, or home school.	3 4%	6 9%	9 13%	41 59.5%	10 14.5%	3.71

Principal capacity to implement. As with "will," capacity was measured using two sets of questions. First, a Likert scale was used for questions 28–37 to measure how well and to what degree the objectives of the SOEP were being achieved in each school. The Likert scale allowed the respondents to indicate whether they strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the statements. Each Likert response was given scaled numeric values. These values were as follows: strongly agreed was given a value of 5 points, agreed 4 points, neither agreed nor disagreed 3 points, disagreed 2 points, and strongly disagreed 1 point. Second, questions 38–42 measured if principals had the resources to implement the SOEP. These questions were asked to see if funding and resource allocation was affecting their ability to implement the program as it was mandated in the legislation. Questions 38–42 were answered using yes, no, or I don't know.

Table 9

Principal Capacity to Implement the SOEP

Question In my school the SOEP . . .	Strongly agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
28. enables eligible students to earn high school graduation credit through the completion of publicly funded online courses.	0 0%	7 10.6%	10 15.2%	37 56%	12 18.2%	3.82
29. provides students access to online learning options regardless of where the student attends school, whether public, private, or home school.	0 0%	8 12.3%	19 28.8%	30 46.2%	8 12.3%	3.58
30. provides high quality learning options to for a student regardless of language, residence, family income, or special needs.	0 0%	13 20%	13 20%	31 47.7%	8 12.3%	3.52
31. provides online learning options to allow a student to acquire the knowledge and technology skills necessary in a digital world.	2 3%	5 7.7%	19 29.2%	32 49.2%	7 10.8%	3.57
32. utilizes the power of technology to customize education so that a student may learn in the student's own preference and pace.	1 1.5%	7 10.8%	17 26.1%	35 53.8%	5 7.7%	3.55
33. utilizes technology to remove the constraints of traditional classroom learning, allowing students to access learning at any time and any place.	1 1.5%	8 12.3%	17 26.1%	34 52.3%	5 7.7%	3.52
34. provides personalized learning, where a student can spend as much or as little time as needed to master the material.	1 1.5%	4 6.1%	26 40%	29 44.6%	5 7.7%	3.51
35. provides greater access to self-paced programs enabling high achieving students to accelerate academically.	1 1.5%	5 7.7%	16 24.6%	39 60%	4 6.1%	3.62
36. allows students to customize their schedule to better meet their academic goals.	0 0%	5 7.7%	16 24.6%	38 58.5%	6 9.2%	3.69
37. allows a student to have an individualized educational experience.	0 0%	4 6.1%	19 29.2%	36 55.4%	6 9.2%	3.68

As shown in Table 9, the responses to questions 28–37 given by the principals showed that 63% agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to meet the objectives of the SOEP.

Twenty-six percent neither agreed nor disagreed, and 11% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they could meet the objectives of the SOEP. The statement that had the greatest disagreement was question 30 it asked if the SOEP provided a high quality learning option for students regardless of language, residence, family income, or special needs, 20% of the principals disagreed that this was true or happening in their school.

Questions 38-42 asked additional questions regarding the principal's implementation of the SOEP. Question 38 asked principals if their school had at least one person to monitor the SOEP, 87.5% said yes, 9% said no, and 3% didn't know.

Question 39 asked if principals had one or more members of their staff who had received formal training specific to the SOEP procedures and policies. Seventy-five percent indicated they had, 17% had not, and 8% didn't know.

Question 40 asked if the principals allowed students access to technology inside the school to take courses utilizing the SOEP. Eighty-two percent indicated they did, 11% said they did not let students use school technology, and 6% didn't know if they did or did not.

Question 41 asked if their school had been affected by losses in funding as a result of the SOEP, 40.5% indicated they had, 37.5 % said they had not, and 22% did not know if they had or had not lost funding.

Asked further, in question 42, if their schools had sufficient funding to allow students to access technology and take online classes through the SOEP in the school building, 53% said yes, 42% said no, and 5% didn't know.

The final question, question 43, was an open-ended question that asked the principals what was the greatest challenge to implementing the SOEP. Forty-eight percent of the principals surveyed responded to the prompt, 41% of the responses indicated that loss of funding was the

greatest challenge to implementation. Twenty-nine percent of the responses pointed to a lack of support within their schools as the greatest challenge. Principals also, listed access within their building and personnel to monitor and run the program as the areas of support they needed more help with.

Analysis of Principal Responses

The principal's mean responses to the Likert questions were analyzed more closely to determine if any significant differences in implementation existed between different demographic categories. Questions 13-17 assessed compliance of the principals to observe the mandates of the SOEP. Questions 18-27 measured will and questions 28-37 measured capacity of principals to implement the SOEP. Collectively, these questions all provide insight into the level of implementation by the principals. All of the questions asked were analyzed with a Likert scale that allowed respondents to indicate whether they strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the statements. Each Likert response was given scaled numeric values. The values assigned to these preferences are as follows: strongly agreed 5 points, agreed 4 points, neither agreed nor disagreed 3 points, disagreed 2 points, and strongly disagreed 1 point. This allowed for ease in working with the responses for sorting and statistical purposes.

The Likert responses to questions 18–37 were converted to numerical values and the mean response value for each principal was calculated. These mean response values were then ordered from low to high. Figure 1 shows the mean value of each principal's responses. Only responses from principals that had completed questions 18–37 were used in this analysis. Seventy-one principals responded to the survey, of those, 64 (90%) had answered questions 18-37. The average mean for the 64 respondents that had answered questions 18–37 was 3.56. The

highest mean score was 4.64, and the lowest was 2.72. The standard deviation in mean scores was 0.41 (see Figure 1).

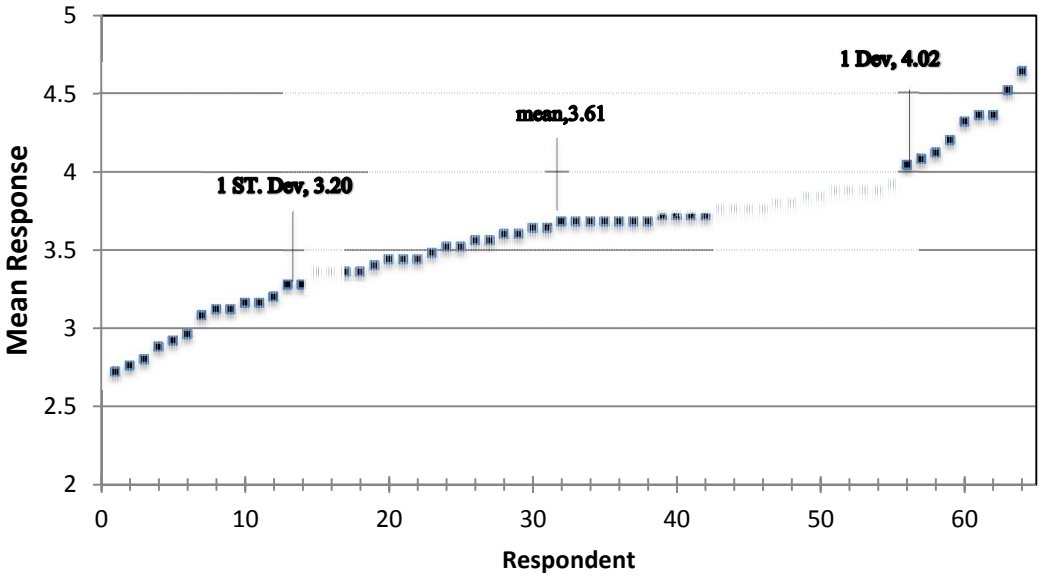

Figure 1. Mean score for principal responses to implementation survey of Utah's SOEP.

The combined mean responses of questions 18–27 (will) and questions 28–37 (capacity) were analyzed directly to each demographic category using a one-way ANOVA. Additionally, the mean responses of questions 18–27 and 28–37 were analyzed individually using the same one-way ANOVA to determine if there was a statistically significant difference among demographic categories in either will or capacity mean responses.

To ensure the validity of the results of the one-way ANOVA, the mean responses were explored to guarantee they met the conditions needed for a one-way ANOVA:

- There are no significant outliers in the data.
- The dependent variable should be normally distributed.

- There is a homogeneity of variance.

Outliers were assessed by inspection using a boxplot. Normality was tested using a Shapiro-Wilk test of normality, and homogeneity of variance had to have a *p*-value greater than .05. Additionally, each demographic category showing a statistical difference was further analyzed using a Tukey post hoc test to determine differences within groups (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Will and capacity mean responses combined. The combined mean response for principals was (3.61 ± .41). The will mean response alone was (3.60 ± 0.37) and a capacity mean response alone was (3.73 ± .42). There was no significantly statistical difference between the will and capacity mean responses and the combined mean response value. However, when the will mean response value was separated into mean responses for questions 13–17, which asked principals to indicate how well they were actually following the mandated directives of the SOEP, and questions 18–27, which asks if principals agree with the beliefs of the SOEP, there was a large difference in the will response value. The response value for questions 13–17 was (2.88 ± .44) and for questions 18–27 was (3.96 ± .51). This indicates that principals believe the SOEP has good goals and purposes, but they are not willing to follow the directives of the program. There could be numerous factors to explain this large difference in will indicators among principals.

Principals might be sympathetic to the goals and purposes of the SOEP because they mirror the general wishes that most educators have for students; the need for more individualized education and opportunities for students to become empowered in their own educational decisions. However, when asked if they are doing those things that they are specifically supposed to be doing within their schools, they are below the implementation threshold. This

may be due to a lack of education of what is expected of them or simply they don't want to lose enrollments because of fear of lost funding to their schools.

The data was analyzed further to investigate if there were statistically significant differences between the groups of each demographic category. Because a one-way ANOVA requires three groups, principal gender and type of school were both analyzed using an independent sample *t*-test to determine if there were significant differences between the groups within these categories. This test was deemed most appropriate for comparing school type even though there were three school types. Online school was removed as only two principals represented online schools, this number was then thrown out, and rather than using a one-way ANOVA, a *t*-test was more appropriate to compare the other two groups represented. The *t*-test for both showed no statistically significant difference between principals from charter or traditional schools nor was there differences between male and female principals.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if differences in mean response existed between schools with different enrollments. Principals of schools with enrollments between 401–1,000 students showed the highest level of implementation. Small schools with enrollment of less than 150 students showed the lowest implementation. Again, a possible cause for lower implementation by small schools could be the fear of lost funding which would be much more costly to a small school than a large school. Another factor could be reduced access to technology and infrastructure for students to effectively utilize the SOEP. Participants were classified into four groups: less than 150 (n = 7), 151–400 (n =15), 401–1,000 (n = 13), and greater than 1,000 (n = 29). There were two outliers, as assessed by boxplot, but both fell within 1.5 box lengths and were normally distributed as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk test ($p>.05$); and there was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Lavene's test of homogeneity of variances

(p=.545). Data is presented as mean ± standard deviation. Mean response values for implementation increased from enrollment of less than 150 (3.2 ± .42), to 150–400 (3.5 ± .41), to greater than 1,000 (3.6 ± .36), to schools with enrollments of 401–1,000 students (3.9 ± .40). There was a statistically significantly difference between the means of schools with different size enrollments $F(3,60) = 4.125$, $p < .05$, $\omega^2 = .128$. Tukey post-hoc analysis revealed that within the group school enrollment there was a statically significant difference between mean response values of schools with less than 150 students and schools with enrollment of 401–1,000 (-.61, 95% CI (-1.09 to -.13), $p = .007$).

A one-way ANOVA indicated a statistically significant difference between the mean response values for years of experience of principals. Principals with more experience tended to have a higher mean response value than those who had less administrative experience. Respondents were classified in four categories: 1–5 years' experience ($n = 6$), 6–10 years' experience ($n = 16$), 11–15 years' experience ($n = 18$), and 15 years or more of experience ($n = 24$). There were two data points that were outliers, as assessed by boxplot; these were included in the analysis because they were less than 1.5 box lengths and were normally distributed for each group, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk test ($p > .05$); and there was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Lavene's test of homogeneity of variances ($p = .372$). Mean response values were statistically significantly different between the categories within the group $F(3,60) = 5.467$, $p < .005$, $\omega^2 = .173$. A Tukey post-hoc analysis revealed that an increase in years of experience as an administrator from 1–5 years to 6–10 years, -.69, 95% CI (-1.16 to -.21) was statistically significant ($p = .002$), as well as the increase from 1–5 years to 15 or more years, -.57, 95% CI (-1.02 to -.11), $p = .009$, but no other group differences were statistically significant.

Will mean responses. The only demographic category that showed a significant statistical difference when only looking at the will mean responses was school enrollment. As with the combined mean response, the groups showed the same trend as they did in the combined mean response values. The schools with enrollment of less than 150 (3.36 ± .29) showed the lowest implementation followed by schools with enrollments of 150–400 (3.61 ± .32), schools of greater than 1,000 students (3.55 ± .37), and finally the schools with 400–1,000 students (3.81 ± .44). The only statistically significant difference between the groups was between the schools with less than 150 students and the schools with enrollments of 400 and 1,000 students, .45, 95% CI(.04 to .89) p =.04, ω^2 = .08. Supposition as to why this would be the trend of smaller schools being less willing to implement the SOEP than larger schools, again might be the fear of lost funds, a lack of understanding of the program, or possibly just being understaffed and unwilling to commit the resources to the allow the program to be successful.

Where most school in Utah that have enrollments less than 150 students are rural, one would think that the opportunities for additional course options that the SOEP would offer for students would have increased the principals interest in utilizing the program as a supplement for the school. This is not the case. The rural will response value (3.58 ± .38) is statistically the same as both urban (3.57 ± .19) and suburban (6.00 ± .39). This would indicate that small schools that are not necessarily rural must have less will to implement the SOEP than small rural schools. One possibility would be suburban and urban charter schools that have low enrollments.

Capacity mean responses. One-way ANOVA tests were used to analyze all individual demographic categories using only the mean response values for capacity. It revealed no statistically significant differences existed between groups within any category. Multiple *t*-tests

were used to analyze the demographic categories of gender and school type as this was the most appropriate test for comparing means in categories with only two groups.

Stage 3: Qualitative Results

Participant selection for interviews. The results of the survey used in stage two were used to identify those individuals that would be interviewed in stage three to provide a deeper and richer understanding of principal's perceptions, understanding, and feelings about Utah's SOEP.

A two-stage extreme cluster sampling method was used to create the sample frame for the follow-up qualitative interview (Corbetta, 2003). Two clusters of principals were created, one to represent those principals with a high mean response value and one to represent the principals with a low mean response value (see Figure 2). The high mean cluster participants were those principals that had mean response values roughly one standard deviation ($SD = 0.41$) or higher than the mean of the values. The low mean cluster were those respondents who were, near to, or below one standard deviation below the mean of the response values. Using those respondents that fell into the two clusters, the study tried to maximize the number of demographic categories represented.

The demographic categories that were used to represent the population were those found on the survey in questions 1–12. There was a possibility of forty different demographic categories that were surveyed. In creating the sample frame for the interview, every effort was made to make sure that every category was represented within both clusters. However, this proved not to be feasible.

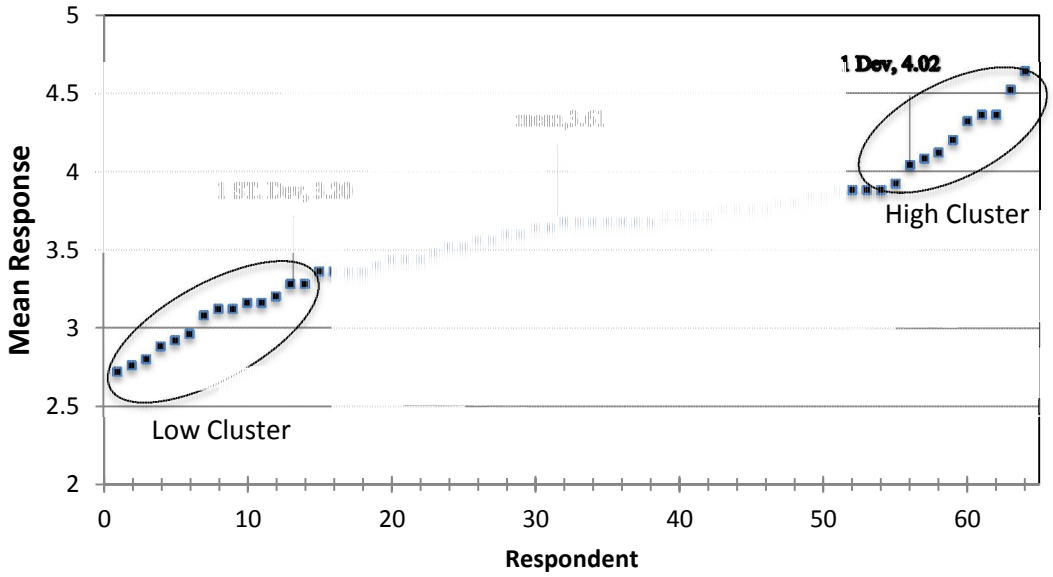

Figure 2. High and low clusters for interview sample frame.

In the high mean cluster, the demographics that could not be represented because there was not a respondent close to one standard deviation from the mean were principals from online schools, principals older than 56 years of age, and principals that had never taken nor knew anyone that had taken an online class. Only two online school principals participated in the survey, and as would be expected both of these principals had mean scaled scores that fell well above the average score for implementation. Even with 21% of the respondents to the survey being over the age of 56 years, none of the mean values of these principals were low enough to be incorporated into the high mean cluster. Finally, there were no respondents to the survey that indicated that they had never taken an online class nor did they know no one that had. This demographic category then, in fact, was not applicable to the population surveyed.

In the low mean cluster, principals from schools with enrollments less than 150 students were not represented. Neither were principals from schools that had greater than 25% English language learners. Finally, principals between the age of 25–35, and principals with less than 5 years' experience did not have mean response value low enough to be part of the cluster.

The sampling method created a sample frame of 20 principals for the qualitative interview, ten principals from the high mean cluster and ten principals from low mean cluster. The mean values in the high mean cluster ranged from 3.76 to 4.64. In the low mean cluster, response values ranged from 2.72 to 3.44.

Four of the 20 principals were not available for the interview, two principals from the low mean cluster and two from the high mean cluster. One principal from the low mean cluster would not respond to any attempts to contact and the other was no longer with the school and contact information was not available. In the high mean group, two of the selected principals had retired and were not available for interviews. This reduced the sample frame from 20 to 16 with 8 principals in each cluster. It was decided not to replace them in the sample frame with other principals because to do so would have required using principals that were too close to the mean and thus violating the fidelity of the two-stage sampling method.

Interview protocol. The 16 principals selected for the qualitative interview were interviewed using a 4-question protocol (see Appendix B). The first question asked the principals how the SOEP contributed to the common good of society and to provide specific examples of how it did this. The second question, questioned if the principals had noticed any unintended consequences and what those were. Third, principals were asked if the SOEP created unequal educational opportunities and to give examples of these opportunities. Lastly, the

principals were asked if they felt that the goals and objectives could be met in a more efficient manner.

Answering the qualitative research questions. The four qualitative survey questions were asked as yes or no questions, respondents were also asked to give explanations to their responses. Because the interview protocol was to allow the principals to respond freely to the interview questions without any probing, leading or clarifying questions, responses were recorded through email correspondence and phone interviews. The email correspondence was at the request of certain principals that felt it was much more convenient method to respond to the interview questions. Table 10 lists the initial response to each interview question.

Question 1 asked principals if they believed the SOEP contributed to the common good of society. Sixty-nine percent of the responses answered yes, 13% said no and 19% were not sure if it was or was not. Question 2 Asked principals if there were unintended consequences resulting from the SOEP. Sixty-nine percent said yes, 19% said no, and 13% did not know. Question 3 asked if the SOEP creates unequal educational opportunities for students. Forty-four percent said yes, and 56% indicated it did not. The final question asked principals if the goals and objectives of the SOEP could be met more efficiently in other ways. Sixty-three percent of the principals stated it could, 13% did not think so, and 25% did not know. A further discussion of principals' explanations of their responses can be found in the subsequent sections.

Table 10

Qualitative Interview Responses

Question	Yes	No	I don't
1. Does the SOEP contribute to the common good of society?	11 69%	2 13%	3 19%
2. Are there unintended consequences resulting from the SOEP?	11 69%	3 19%	2 13%
3. Does the SOEP create unequal education opportunities for students?	7 44%	9 56%	0 0%
4. Could the goals and objectives of the SOEP be met more efficiently in other ways?	10 63%	2 13%	4 25%

The responses that were collected were recorded with a recorder, or through email, and were transcribed for thematic analysis. Table 11 shows the different themes that were mentioned in the responses to each question. Not all respondents chose to offer more than a Yes, No, or I don't know answer to each question. Additionally, some responses included multiple themes. Each time a theme was mentioned it was tallied. It is also worth noting that Table 11 is only meant to identify the themes that principals indicated. It does not identify whether the theme was indicated as a contribution to support agreement or disagreement to the questions asked.

Table 11

Frequency of Thematic Interview Responses

Q1: Contributions to the good of society		Q2: Unintended consequences		Q3: Unequal educational opportunities		Q4: Recommended changes	
Theme	Frequency	Theme	Frequency	Theme	Frequency	Theme	Frequency
Access	4	Funding	7	Low income	4	Training/education	3
Flexibility	5	Unfinished courses	4	Funding	4	Funding	4
Rural students	5	Loss of social skills	1	Rural access	3	Selective enrollment	4
Student choice	3			ELL Students	1	Course quality	1
Credit recovery	1					Rural access	1
Challenge for unmotivated students	3						

Contributions to the good of society. Question one of the qualitative interview asked, "Does the SOEP contribute to the common good of society? If yes, how exactly does the SOEP do this?" When asked if principals felt the SOEP contributed to common good of society, 69% felt that it did, 13% did not, and 19% did not know if it did or did not.

When looking at the responses by cluster, high mean respondents accounted for all but one principal who indicated that the SOEP did not offer any contributions to society. Furthermore, those in the low mean cluster that did believe it did have a benefit could not articulate well how it did this. Their responses were more guesses than informed confident answers. One example of such a response was, "I guess it does for some of those students that can't fit some courses into their schedules" (Interview 10). The low mean cluster also accounted for all the principals (19%) that indicated they did not know if it benefited the common good or not.

High mean cluster responses were starkly different. All but one respondent from this cluster indicated that the SOEP did contribute to the common good of society. These respondents clearly articulated how and gave specific examples. The following is an example of a high mean cluster response:

> The Statewide Online Education Program is good in that it gives students an opportunity to gain educational materials through a non-traditional medium. In an alternative setting many students feel that online is preferable to working with a teacher face to face; students feel more in charge of their education. However, this same freedom presents problems for the alternative student, as many are not motivated nor do they have the organizational abilities to adequately complete the course. (Interview 15)

The other specific themes that emerged in the responses from the respondents as to why they felt the SOEP was beneficial are: access to improved curriculum, flexibility in scheduling, and students choice were the most frequently cited benefit. Also, rural schools and students of rural schools were specifically mentioned as the greatest beneficiaries of the SOEP. Speaking to the value of the SOEP for students in small rural districts, one principal responded, "there are some course availability that fit into students' [education/occupation plan], which small districts cannot provide" (Interview 14). This idea of providing additional educational opportunities for students through the SOEP was repeated numerous times in the responses.

Unintended consequences. Question two investigated if respondents believed the SOEP created unintended consequences, and if so what those consequences were. The majority (69%) believed that it did, 19% believed it did not and 13% didn't know. Again, the responses from cluster A were starkly different from those in cluster B in that they lacked any sort of evidence to back them up. Even though there were similarities between both cluster responses, cluster B

responses offered solid evidence that supported their beliefs. The most often cited consequence was that funds were being diverted from the traditional public school. Twelve of the sixteen respondents stated that there were unintended consequences, over half of the respondents expressed there were unintended consequences indicating that funding was the major issue of the SOEP. The second most frequently noted unintended consequence was a feeling that many students taking online courses through the SOEP were not finishing the courses and then would return to their brick-and mortar school further behind. One principal from the high mean cluster stated the following:

> The unintended consequence that I have observed is that it (SOEP) can provide a false sense of security to students who are struggling in school. Specifically, I can think of instances when students fail courses, fall behind in graduation, and then confidently tell me that it is OK because they are going to take care of it completely through Online High School. My experience tells me that this never works out that way. These students would be better served by selecting a credit recovery option that provides more supervision and direct monitoring of their learning. I think, sometimes, that there has been a disconnect between the design of the online program and the clients who actually use it. Online education requires a great deal of self-direction on the part of the student, and yet, very often the students who attempt it are the least self-directed learners. I have also seen students who have been enrolled in online programs return to traditional high school with a false sense of their abilities and academic skills. (Interview 13)

With the exception of one principal, all responses of unintended consequences fell into one of these two themes.

Unequal education opportunities. The principals noted three areas where inequality was created or was reduced. First, funding loss was mentioned as a concern because with the loss of funding for traditional schools came the reality of servicing the remaining students with less funds. Second, low social economic status was a theme in principal responses. Interestingly, this was seen as both an area where inequality was both increased and decreased. One principal from the low mean cluster stated, "almost none of my students have the hardware or internet connectivity to enable them to do online coursework at home" (Interview 3). Yet another from the high mean cluster stated:

> If by unequal opportunity it is assumed only white and upper middle class or higher students can access the opportunity, that is a false assumption. The more the SOEP is developed, students of all levels and ethnicities will be able to access coursework on personal devices that appear to have proliferated irrespective of these sociological labels. (Interview 16)

Third, two principals felt that the SOEP provided increase access to courses for rural students that may not have a wide variety of course offerings. Another principal believed that access for rural students would be difficult, but did not elaborate as to why or how.

Recommended changes. The final qualitative question asked principals to identify any recommended changes to the SOEP. Nineteen percent of the principals asked for more training and education about the SOEP. Twenty-five percent wanted to see some way that they could provide online opportunities to their students without losing funding for their school. One principal #4 responded, "I would like to know more about the SOEP and how it is set up" (Interview 4). Another stated, "can we have access to it (SOEP) for all our students without taking resources from schools" (Interview 6). Twenty-five percent also felt there needed to be

more accountability and monitoring of the students that are utilizing the SOEP. They felt that students were being set-up for failure because they did not have the skills to be successful in an online setting. One commented:

> I believe the mission and goals of the State Online Program are valid. I do think that careful consideration should be given to address the needs of the population of students that are using it. From what I have read, online programs that are balanced with direct teacher monitoring are always more successful. And students who enroll with a history of failing courses need this more than others. I am not aware that any differentiation of student services currently exists, but it might be something to consider in the future. (Interview 13)

Summary of Results

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the SOEP and the implementation of the program. The content of the program was evaluated, as was the willingness and capacity of Utah's secondary school principals to implement the SOEP. The barriers to implementation that these principals encountered were also identified.

The content of the Utah SOEP did not meet all 10 national standards of quality digital learning. Four standards were met. These included student equity, access to multiple providers, assessment and accountability, and funding, Three standards were not met. No evidence existed that high quality instruction could be guaranteed, nor could the quality of the teachers be guaranteed. Additionally, the SOEP does not address the issue of infrastructure needed for digital learning success. Only three standards were partially met. These included student access, personalized learning and advancement.

Principals possessed the will to implement the SOEP as was evidenced by their beliefs in the purposes and goals of the SOEP, but many fell short of actual implementation when asked about following it's directives with fidelity. Principals also indicated they believed they had the capacity to implement the SOEP, but when further questioned, they expressed concerns about barriers that needed to be addressed to improve their ability to implement the program. Many were hesitant about the quality of the online courses being taken. They worried that students were being set up for failure and that they would have to pick up the pieces when the student returned to their schools. Many principals also worried about the effects of the loss of funding their schools would experience when students chose to utilize the SOEP.

School enrollment was the only demographic category that showed a statistically significant difference to implementation. Not only was it a factor in the combined mean response but also showed a direct influence on will to implement. Individual demographics showed no statistically significant differences in principal capacity to implement the SOEP.

When looking at the data collectively, a statistical positive association collaborated that principals overwhelmingly agreed that there is a place for online learning in the traditional brick-and-mortar school. Some have incorporated the program into their schools and they use the program to meet the needs of students that they may not be able to address in their schools. Some are not implementing the program at all in their schools, or are only partially following the program. The greatest difference between those implementing and those not implementing is the level of understanding of the program and what it really is, and can do for students.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

Utah's SOEP was established by the Utah legislature in 2011 to allow students to earn high school credit through the completion of online courses that are funded through public education dollars. The program was meant to allow students the ability to access high quality learning regardless of location or circumstances and individualize their education to meet their specific needs. The SOEP was labeled as one of the most comprehensive online education legislation in the United States (Bush & Wise, 2011). It was crafted using the 10 elements of high quality digital learning as the framework. This descriptive research explored the Utah SOEP using a multidimensional, mixed-method case study.

The following key research questions guided this research. First, to what degree does Utah's SOEP align with the 10 elements of high quality digital learning? Second, what level of capacity do Utah's secondary school principals have to implement the SOEP? Third, how willing are Utah's secondary school principals to implement the SOEP? Lastly, what are the barriers that limit the implementation of Utah's SOEP?

Summary of Findings

The comparative content analysis showed that the SOEP only partially aligned with the 10 elements of high quality digital learning. The SOEP is available to all students in the State of Utah. It also provides a funding plan that removes funding as a barrier for students to take online courses. Students can select the approved online provider that best fits their needs and online providers are encouraged to base their pacing and grading of students competency on what they know rather that amount of time in front of a computer.

The following are areas the SOEP falls short of the meeting the 10 elements of high quality digital learning. The ability to measure, monitor, define, or guarantee high quality are lacking, whether that is in course material, teachers, or online providers in general. Also access that allows all students to effectively utilize the SOEP is not appropriately addressed. Issues ranging from computer and Internet access to support and socio-economic factors make it all but impossible for many students to legitimately utilize the program.

Utah secondary school principals were in agreement with the goals and purposes of the SOEP. They believe that students should have more individualized educations that mirrored the needs and circumstances of each student. They felt that online education does have a place in the future of what has been termed the traditional educational setting. The ability for students to be able to access educational content that may not be available to them without the use of online providers was also widely favorable to principals. The reality, however, is that even though principals seem to be very much in agreement with the SOEP's goals and purposes, it is not translating into a will to implement the program with fidelity.

Principals widely cited funding as a major resource hindering the implementation of the SOEP. Specifically, the fear that their individual school would suffer from lost funding that was diverted to online providers if they have students utilizing the SOEP. Utah secondary principals also had serious concerns that the SOEP was not an equitable resource for all students because of the technology required for a student to successfully access the program. They believed that students from low socio-economic environments did not have access to the computers, Internet access, or technological support that those students from more wealthy environments might have.

Upon initial inspection of the data from the Qualtrics survey, and the follow-up interview, it appeared that will for implementation would be very high and the capacity for

implementation would be very low. This was based on the agreement of principals with the goals and purposes of the program, an indicator of "will," and their overwhelming concern of having the resources to implement the program, an indicator of "capacity." After disaggregating the data, the conclusion was quite the opposite.

Even though principals agreed with the goals and purposes of the program and wanted to provide students with the very best educational opportunities they could, they largely refused to comply with the minimal mandates and directives of the program. In other words, they think it is a good idea, but not good enough to guarantee they implement the program with fidelity. Contrariwise, the fear and concern that the principals had regarding loss and lack of resources really did not affect the reality of their capacity to implement the program. While many worried about the loss of funding their school would experience, none could verify that their school had actually experienced a noticeable impact on their budgets. Also, many schools made accommodations for their students to access the program using the schools' technology resources.

It is in this paradox that the barriers to complete and effective implementation of the SOEP can be found, and recommendations for improvement to the program and the implementation by secondary school principals in Utah can be made. Why do principals believe in the goals and purposes of the program, yet, lack the will to do those things that are required of them by the program? A lack of confidence in the quality of the online course content, access, and support that their students will receive, and sense that many students are being permitted to take courses that they will ultimately fail. Why do principals feel that the SOEP cannot be implemented in their schools because of a lack of resources, yet, there is very little evidence that

any school has yet to experience the effects of those concerns? They have not been educated about the program.

Principals want to provide the best education they can for their students. Although budgets are tight in Utah and resources are scant, principals in this study seemed to want to do whatever they can to give their students the best education possible. They want students to have and individualized experience, and many see online education as one tool that must be incorporated into the traditional school setting. The problem is that Utah's secondary school principals have very little confidence in the quality of the online education that students are accessing through the SOEP. One huge indicator of this can be found in the will to implement mean response data when broken down by demographics.

The comparative content analysis of the SOEP also supports the need for more assurance of quality in online courses. The areas where the SOEP did not meet or only partially met the 10 elements of high quality digital learning were those areas that called for high quality, high quality teachers, high quality digital content and courses, and demonstrated competency through quality assessments. Twenty percent of the principals indicated in the Qualtrics survey that they disagreed that the online courses were high quality, and 20% could neither agree, nor disagree about the quality. The follow-up interview responses also supported the concern of principals with regard to the quality of online courses. Principals are concerned about the number of students that are not finishing the online courses and those students that are choosing to take online courses that are ill equipped to master a self-paced computer course. They feel that many students are falling behind because they choose to utilize the SOEP option and then are not completing the courses, at which point the student returns to the brick-and-mortar school credit deficient and responsibility for remediation falls back to the primary LEA. The 2013–14 school

year report on providers confirms this concern, reporting that only 52% of students completed their online courses taken through the SOEP (Utah State Office of Education, 2015).

In addition to an assurance of quality learning in online programs, principals need more training and education about the program. Specifically, they do not understand how the program should work, and furthermore, they do not have the training and education to see how the program can be an additional tool they can use to help their students.

When asked in the Qualtrics survey, "What is the greatest challenge to implementation of the SOEP?" principals responded overwhelmingly that the loss of funding their schools would experience would be devastating. Yet, very few could state that their school in reality had suffered financially by students utilizing the SOEP. Some responded that they needed more training to better implement the program. Both of these responses stem from a true understanding of the program, and definitely do not drive principals to actively promote or encourage students to utilize this educational option.

Those principals that have worked hard to understand the program were more likely to implement the program, as was evidenced by the depth and understanding of the responses in the interview by those principals that were in the high mean cluster. These principals could clearly articulate both the pros and cons of the program, and were finding ways to overcome any perceived barriers to implement the program at a higher level. Many schools and districts that are trying to be proactive and avoid losing funds have created their own online schools to offer as an option to their students. One response to the survey question in regards to the greatest challenge to implement stated, "students have been very successful in our district online program; however, students using other programs have not had the same support and success

rate." This proactive approach to utilize the SOEP as an addition educational tool is one example of increased understanding of the program leading to a higher level of implementation.

This is the gap that needs to be bridged. How can students, parents, and schools utilize this valuable tool that improves choice, without sacrificing quality? On one side online providers are working to provide online courses that have the content, support, and accessibility that will allow them to capture as many student enrollments as possible. On the other side you have traditional public education, which has quality of content and support, but is battling to evolve to remain relevant, and struggling to meet individual students needs under the restrictive and antiquated governances of state law. Between them somewhere is the blended learning of the future that Christensen et al. (2008) spoke of, an evolution of public education to meet the individual needs of students at a student-by-student level, rather than a one-size fits all system. This cannot happen in Utah if education laws are not changed. Traditional public schools need to have the flexibility to grow, stretch, and evolve to allow students to achieve the same goals and purposes that the SOEP means for them to have. Rather, than penalizing public education for not being flexible, schools should be supported in their efforts to accommodate the individual needs of every child.

Recommendations

To increase the will for implementation among Utah's secondary school principals, measures must be taken to ensure that students are receiving high quality instruction from high quality instructors. Principals need to see students being successful utilizing the SOEP courses. Many principals have taken matters into their own hands and are incorporating more blended learning opportunities in their schools, or creating online course offerings in their buildings that students can take. This offers many benefits for the school including: retention of funds within

the school, increased opportunities for students, flexibility in scheduling and course offerings, and freedom for students to work at their own pace. This also allows the school to guarantee the support for the student that many principals feel is lacking in outside online courses.

The fear of losing funds to the SOEP will only continue to grow in the future. Each year students will be allowed to take more and more online courses as per the SOEP. Principals are aware of this and envision the possibility that at one point they will be losing students to online providers completely. This is the "disruptive innovation" Christensen et al. (2008) described. Principals that are adapting to capitalize on the SOEP in the traditional brick-and-mortar schools are able to retain students in their buildings by meeting the needs of those students that otherwise might look outside their doors.

Education and funding sources need to be explored that will help the current secondary school principals understand more clearly how to evolve their current schools into schools that utilize blended learning in the classroom and better accommodate the goals and purposes of the SOEP. If principals can do this they can transform the face of public education from one of online versus brick-and-mortar, to one that offers the benefits of both without competition, and particularly, the fear of lost funding.

Utah's SOEP has forced Utah's public schools to acknowledge that there are numerous students that are not getting their educational needs met. And that more of the same will not solve this problem. Free market competition for student enrollments has many public educators questioning and challenging the way they do business. No school in Utah can say, "This will not affect us because we are the only game in town." Utah's SOEP has brought an alternative educational choice to every student in the state of Utah that can access a computer and the Internet.

The Utah legislators can increase the implementation of the SOEP and thus guarantee the goals and purposes of the program can be realized by all students by implementing the following recommendations.

Support technology funding that would guarantee full access to the Internet for all students. Infrastructure and technology resources must have ongoing allocated funding. Every student must have access to the technology and Internet services necessary to utilize online learning if the SOEP is going to better address the issues of access for all students. Consideration of funding within the weighted pupil unit for one-to-one technology would guarantee a device for all students and working to develop cooperative programs with local Internet providers to allow inexpensive access for students.

Move to a performance-based assessment system. While the SOEP and the 10 elements of high quality digital learning both call for performance-based assessment. All education in Utah, online and traditional, needs to be freed of the antiquated practice of seat-time. Students must be allowed to move at the speed of proficiency, and schools must be allowed to create courses that will flourish within this type of structure. By allowing both online learning and the traditional classroom to be freed of these constraints both will benefit. Traditional classrooms will be able to more quickly evolve to utilize the power of online learning in the form of blended learning, and online learning would need to evolve to provide a higher quality product to compete with the new "traditional" classroom. This would also answer the question of quality. Quality would be based on proficiency and mastery of defined standards and competencies, rather than completions of modules where success is based more on doing than learning**.**

Support the in-service and professional development for both principals and teachers. Principals and teachers need to be provided with clear, comprehensive, and timely professional development concerning not only the SOEP, but also best practices for utilizing blended learning in every classroom. By helping principals and teachers understand the value of online learning and helping them to see the potential benefits for students, will and capacity to implement the program with fidelity will increase. Attention to these areas would hasten the shift from the traditional educational environment to a more contemporary environment better suited to accommodate the needs of all students.

The SOEP is not a stand-alone program for online education. It is meant to be a supplement to the traditional classroom. As long as the traditional school principal is tasked with implementing the program, it cannot be viewed as a replacement for traditional schooling. Implementation and success for the SOEP is 100% contingent on the value placed on it by the traditional school. This is why it is so fundamentally important that traditional education be allowed to evolve alongside of online learning. If principals can be allowed to educate students using the same goals and purposes as stated in the SOEP, then they will openly accept the benefits it will provide their schools and more importantly their students.

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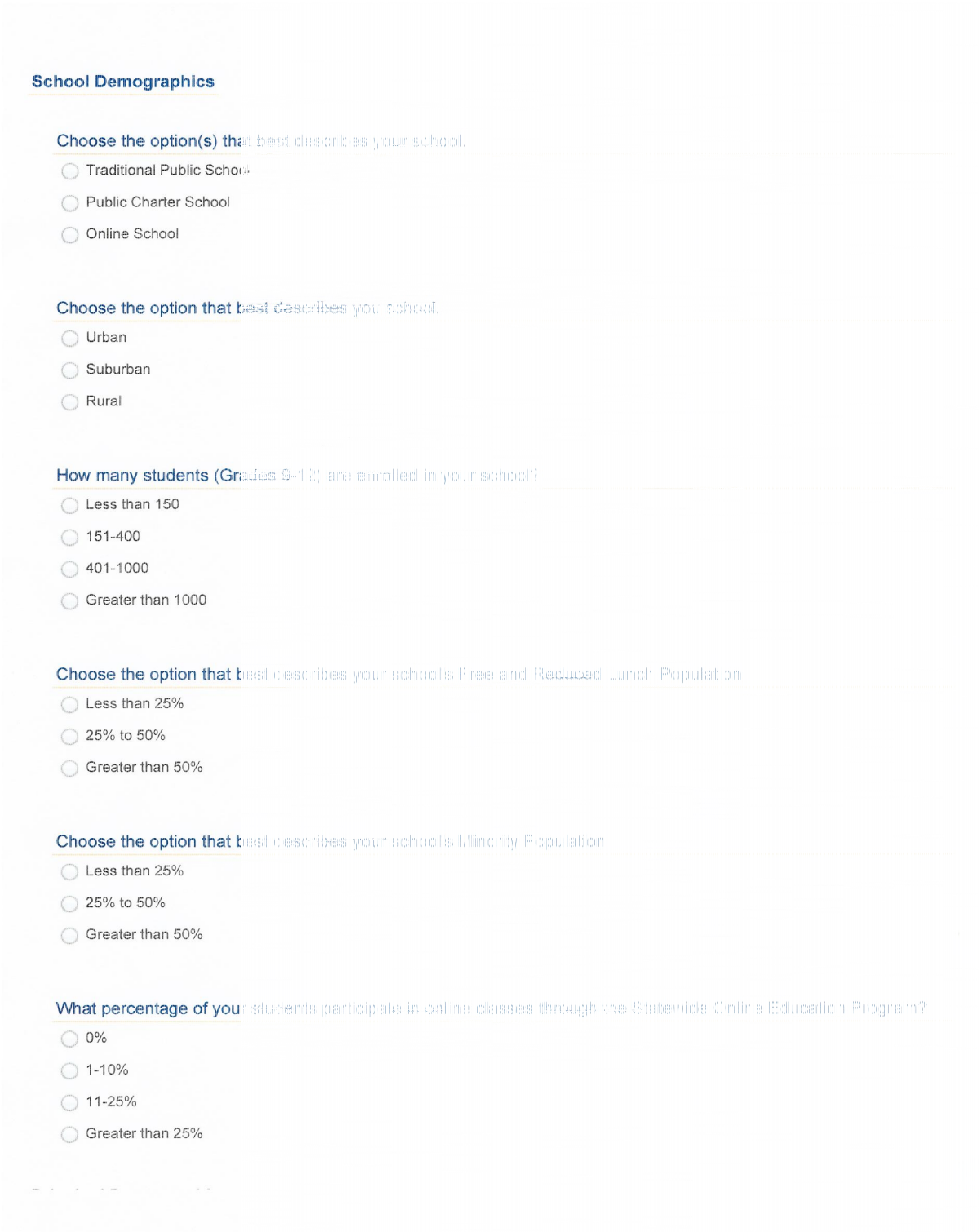
Appendix A

List of All Approved Online Education Providers for the Utah SOEP

1. Ashley Valley Education Center - Uintah Online
2. Cedar Ridge High - Sevier Connection Online 9-12
3. Delta High School - Millard Education Online
4. East Shore High School - Alpine District eHigh School
5. Entrada High School - Canyons Virtual High School
6. EskDale High School - Millard Education Online
7. Juab High School - Wasp Online
8. Millard High School - Millard Education Online
9. Open High School of Utah - Open High School of Utah
10. Provo eSchool - Provo eSchool
11. Utah Connections Academy - Utah Connections Academy
12. Utah Virtual Academy - Utah Virtual Academy
13. Wasatch High School - Wasatch High eSchool
14. Washington County Online School - Washington Online High School
15. Weber School District - Weber Online

Appendix B

Qualtrics Survey Tool



School Demographics

Choose the option(s) that best describes your school.

- Traditional Public School
- Public Charter School
- Online School

Choose the option that best describes you school.

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

How many students (Grades 9-12) are enrolled in your school?

- Less than 150
- 151-400
- 401-1000
- Greater than 1000

Choose the option that best describes your schools Free and Reduced Lunch Population

- Less than 25%
- 25% to 50%
- Greater than 50%

Choose the option that best describes your schools Minority Population

- Less than 25%
- 25% to 50%
- Greater than 50%

What percentage of your students participate in online classes through the Statewide Online Education Program?

- 0%
- 1-10%
- 11-25%
- Greater than 25%

Principal Demographic

Which best describes your age?

- 25-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56 or greater

Which best describes your years of experience as an Administrator?

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 15 or more

Which best describes your level of comfort with technology?

- Below Average
- Average
- Above Average

Which best describes your experience with Online Learning?

- I have taken multiple Online Classes.
- I have had one Online Class.
- I have never taken an Online Class, but I am familiar with people who have.
- I have never taken an Online Class, and do not know anyone who has.
- What is an Online Class?

Implementation

Please choose the response that best defines your school's implementation of the Statewide Online Education Program.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students are informed of their options to utilize online classes through the Statewide Online Education Program.	○	○	○	○	○
Students are only allowed to utilize the Statewide Online Education Program if the classes align with the students' SEOP.	○	○	○	○	○

Students are not allowed to use the Statewide Online Education Program to accelerate, unless they have been approved to graduate early.	
Students number of online course credits exceeds the maximum allowed for the year for a regular student.	
A course credit acknowledgement is signed and submitted to the State for each online class taken.	

Principal "Will"

Please choose the response that best matches your beliefs.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
students should be allowed to earn high school graduation credit through the completion of publicly funded online courses.					
students should be allowed access to online learning options regardless of where the student attends school, whether public,private, or home school.					
Students should be provided high quality learning options regardless of language, residence, family income, or special needs.					
Students should be provided learning options that allow a student to acquire the knowledge and technology skills necessary in a digital world.					
students should be allowed to utilize the power of technology to customize education so that a student may learn in the student's own preference and pace.					
students should be allowed to utilize technology to remove the constraints of traditional classroom learning, allowing students to access learning at any time and any place.					
students should be provided a personalized learning, where a student can spend as much or as little time as needed to master the material.					
Students should be provided greater access to self-paced programs enabling high achieving students to					

accelerate academically.

students should be allowed to customize their schedule to better meet their academic goals.

Students should be allowed to have an individualized educational experience."

Principal "Capacity"

Please choose the response that best matches your opinion regarding the following objectives of the Utah Statewide Online Education Program (SOEP).

"The Statewide Online Education Program ...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
enables eligible students to earn high school graduation credit through the completion of publicly funded online courses."					
provides students access to online learning options regardless of where the student attends school, whether public,private, or home school."					
provides high quality learning options to for a student regardless of language, residence, family income, or special needs."					
provides online learning options to allow a student to acquire the knowledge and technology skills necessary in a digital world."					
utilizes the power of technology to customize education so that a student may learn in the student's own preference and pace."					
utilizes technology to remove the constraints of traditional classroom learning, allowing students to access learning at any time and any place."					
provides personalized learning, where a student can spend as much or as little time as needed to master the material."					
provides greater access to self-paced programs enabling high achieving students to accelerate academically."					
allows students to customize their schedule to better meet their academic goals."					
allows a student to have an					

individualized educational experience."					

Principal "Capacity"

Please choose the response that best describes each of the following statements concerning the Statewide Online Education Program (SOEP).

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My school has at least one person who monitors student use of the SOEP.					
My school has NOT been effected by loss of funds to the SOEP.					
My School allows students access to school technology to take courses through the SOEP.					
One or more members of my staff have received formal training specific to the SOEP procedures and policies.					
Technology in my school is sufficient to allow students access and support to take courses though the SOEP.					

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

All responses are to be conducted in person or over the phone, and are to be recorded and transcribed for theme frequency analysis.

Question 1: Does the Statewide Online Education Program contribute to the common good of society? If yes, how exactly does the SOEP do this?

Question 2: Are there any unintended consequences resulting from the Statewide Online Education Program? If yes, what are these unintended consequences create unintended consequences?

Question 3: Does the Statewide Online Education Program create unequal education opportunities for students? If so, give some examples.

Question 4: Could the goals and objectives of the Statewide Online Education Program be met more efficiently in other ways? If yes, what are some specific ways this can be accomplished?