

Online Learning: Student And Environmental Factors And Their Relationship To Secondary School Student Success In Online Courses

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Reports from online schools suggest that success in online high school courses may be dependent upon many variables. This case study was designed to identify student and environmental factors that are related to success in online high school courses. Azalea Online School, located in a large urban area in Oregon, is an online high school program that provides online courses primarily to students in the Rhododendron School District. Two areas of emphasis in this study include the identification of student characteristics associated with online course success and an analysis of the online program and how it functions within its district. Success in an online course, as defined for the purpose of this study, was when students completed an online course with a passing grade.

This study is significant because it identifies factors that impact online course completion. Azalea Online School course participants included students ranging from grades 2-12 with the numbers of participants increasing with grade level. For the purpose of this study, only students in grades 9-12 were included in the data analysis, although there were a number of students taking online courses who were in 2nd through 8th grade.

Variables with a significant relationship to course success include grade level, reason for taking an online course, GPA, reading ability, and the total number of courses a student was enrolled in (both online and face-to-face). There was no significant relationship between course success and gender, writing ability, technological confidence, computer skills, access to online courses from home, or extracurricular activity level.

In addition, qualitative methods were used to document the traits of the online program featured in this study. The descriptive case study uncovered issues related to program planning and support, student support, student-teacher communication, counseling issues, course characteristics, course offerings, and course completion.

The findings related to these topics may help local and online schools as they begin to identify and implement strategies and policies to support a diverse student audience in their online learning endeavors.