



Transcript of podcast with:

Susan Patrick, President and CEO of the [International Association for Online Learning](#)

Chauncy Rucker (CR): Welcome. I'm Chauncy Rucker. I'm at the 2008 Technology Innovators Conference hosted by the National Center for Technology Innovation. The theme this year is "Thriving in a Global Marketplace." I'm having a conversation now with Susan Patrick. Susan is the president and CEO of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning. Susan I'd like you to give us an introduction to the material you covered on online learning, both nationally and globally.

Susan Patrick (SP): Thank you. We're seeing all over the world, certainly across the U.S. as indicated in Clayton Christensen's recent book [Disrupting Class](#) that online learning is a powerful innovation that has the power to help us reform our K-12 schools. I'd like to take a look from an international perspective from meetings that I've had from ministries of education as well as an international survey that our organization iNACOL did on what other countries are doing as well as get a snapshot of what's happening across the U.S.

Quickly, other countries are centering their education reform strategies on using e-learning. The World Future's Society has named the top ten breakthroughs for life as we know it globally and the only item that appears on that top ten list is virtual learning. Why? Because both developing countries and developed countries are going to fundamentally shift their delivery model for education. Many countries have problems with hiring highly qualified teachers, teacher shortages in math, science and other areas. India, for example, in order to reach their goal in ten years of universal access to education has to build 200,000 new schools. They have serious teacher shortages. How are they approaching this? With the new [EduComp](#) project they're digitizing curriculum, but they're basing that curriculum on an international benchmark of academic excellence. They're digitizing the curriculum. They're going to train teachers to teach online in hopes that they can change that distribution and delivery model to meet their goals of educating all of their students in the next ten years.

Another example is China which five years ago digitized their entire K-12 content curriculum that's online. Right now they're training master teachers to teach online. They have an education strategy to help reach more students not just in their urban areas but also in their rural areas who do not have access to education today. What's interesting is that you might think that well how is China going to reach these students with the Internet connectivity? But in the next two years, Wi-Max technologies, 3G, 4G



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technologies... Wi-Max in particular is high speed wireless broadband access that reaches 50 kilometers or 30 miles in radius so the Chinese ministry, the Chinese, what they call their rock star teachers or their famous teachers, across all areas and their plan is to, in the next ten years, reach 100 million new students that aren't being educated today. This is the scale that we're looking at globally.

I have other examples. In the last three years, Turkey, one of our members-our organization's members-three years ago they had no online learning program and they built a public-private partnership where they built gold standard online classes. They're training their teachers today. In three years they're educating 15 million students through online courses and online learning so the key issues are: what is the quality? Are we training the best teachers to reach our students at anyplace, at anytime but rethinking the inequities that exist in the system and finding a new way to reach students and also to provide new professional opportunities for teachers?

The last example I'll give you is in the European Union where the International Baccalaureate program is based. Many of our U.S. schools also offer the IB program, they have offered starting this fall an international diploma program online. They started working with 26 different countries to train master teachers. They've digitized their content into what we call gold standard IB classes and now they're able to offer that IB diploma program online to 126 countries so students across the world are able to enroll in online classes, collaborate, do projects, communicate, learn from teachers and other students around the world. When we're living in the age where there's a global economy and certainly a global citizenship, helping prepare our students for the world that they live in today is very important.

One last piece on where the U.S. is. The United States has seen tremendous growth in K-12 online learning at about 30 percent annually which is a very fast adoption for any innovation in K-12 education. That's sort of the nature of Clayton Christensen's book on Disrupting Class. However, with that said, it's uneven state-by-state depending on state policies funding and regulations whether any student can access an online course or not. 32 states have policies or statewide virtual schools offering courses statewide. If you're in Georgia, or Louisiana, or Michigan or Idaho, any student in that state can access a course whether it's online physics, online Algebra I. Many of our states are starting to offer Mandarin Chinese such as Michigan and Kentucky, Virginia and others. So while 32 out of 50 states is pretty good, we need to ensure that every single student can access a world class education. And last, only 18 of our 50 states allow full-time online learning opportunities, that is for a student to enroll full-time which is simply an option to students and parents who want that in an area or if there's specific student needs where that would help them.



CR: What about home schooling then? Wouldn't that be a huge area for online learning?

SP: Yeah, a lot of people think that that's a primary focus. That's a small percentage of the total. What we're talking about when we're using those numbers are students enrolled mainly in public institutions. There are more and more private schools delivering online courses and full online courses. We work with Seven Star Academy and a number of other private schools and parochial schools that are offering online curriculum whether its individual courses or full-time programs. Certainly anybody involved in the home schooling movement is free to choose whatever curriculum they want and teach it in whatever way they want. We're really focused on systemic reform, especially in public education. So when you're involved in public education you're still in the U.S. having to follow the state mandated academic curriculum, you're still having to hire highly qualified and licensed teachers in that state that meet those requirements and then third, those students are still required to follow all of the federal and state testing and report on that testing.

CR: Just one last thing. Is there a difference in terms of the online learning as applied to people with disabilities?

SP: That's a great question and the difference is that all of our schools – we have a white paper on encouraging access, accessibility for all students to access online learning. The first step, and this is a basic step, is to have policies in place to address students with learning disabilities or special needs. We're seeing online learning address some needs very well such as homebound students who can't access or it's hard from them to travel. For students with those types of special needs, they're needs are being met very well by online learning. In some other cases, it can be more difficult and [require] different kinds of accommodations. We're working now to try to find ways to identify what is the best instructional design in online learning for blind students for other students so different types of accommodations are very important in this environment. Thanks.

CR: Thank you. Fantastic.