



APPENDIX C: NOTIFICATION LETTERS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

[letter to be sent to developer after initial phone call to determine willingness to participate in the case study sample]

[date]

Dear [name of director of development]

Thank you for participating in the Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning, a study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the study is to document characteristics associated with prevalent types of online learning and to gather evidence-based practices that strengthen implementations of online learning. In addition to analyzing the research literature for characteristics of promising online learning programs, we are meeting with developers, providers, and the districts, schools, and students using online learning materials. We expect to visit twenty developers to gain in-depth understanding of the design of online learning interventions. The site visits will include interviews with key development staff and observations of the intervention (virtually or on site).

The case study data collection will take place during the 2007-08 school year. During our visit we would like to talk to you and any key staff that participated in designing and developing the intervention.

We greatly appreciate the time and energy required from you and your staff to participate in this study. Your participation is vital in developing case studies of research-based practices in online learning. We will work closely with you and your staff to establish a site visit schedule that will minimize the burden associated with our data collection activities. We will notify participants when the report has been made public by the U.S. Department of Education.

The study is being conducted by SRI International under contract with the U.S. Department of Education. One of the evaluation researchers will contact you shortly to begin making arrangements for data collection. If you have any comments or questions regarding the study, please contact the Project Co-Director, Marianne Bakia, at 703-247-8571 or via e-mail at marianne.bakia@sri.com. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Timothy J. Magner
Director, Office of Educational Technology

Alan Ginsburg
Director, Policy and Program Studies
Service

[letter to be sent to schools after initial phone call to principal to determine willingness to participate in the case study sample]

[date]

Dear [name of principal]:

You have been selected to participate in the Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning, a study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the study is to document characteristics associated with prevalent types of online learning and to gather evidence-based practices that strengthen implementations of online learning. In addition to analyzing the research literature for characteristics of promising online learning programs, we are meeting with providers of online learning activities and the districts, schools, and students who use these products. We expect that twenty schools will be visited to gain in-depth understanding of the implementation of online learning interventions. The site visits will include interviews with key staff, focus groups with students and observations of the intervention (virtually or on site).

Your school has been selected because of its use of [software/online program.].The case study data collection will take place in during the 2007-08 school year. During our visit we would like to talk to you and interview the following members of your school staff: your technology coordinator (if this position exists in your school), key decision-makers in choosing the intervention, and any teachers using the online learning materials. During our visit, we will conduct student focus groups to collect data from students about their experiences using the online offering.

Responses to this data collection will be used only for statistical purposes. The reports prepared for this study will summarize findings across the sample and will not associate responses with a specific district or individual. We will not provide information that identifies you or your district to anyone outside the study team, except as required by law. Participating schools will be acknowledged in the final report for their cooperation, but they will not be identified in the text of any report unless model practices are highlighted, in which case permission will be obtained from you before the information is included in the reporting. All participants will be informed of the purposes of the data collection and the uses that may be made of the data collected, and provided with a consent form that outlines privacy rights.

We greatly appreciate the time and energy required from you and your staff to participate in this study. Your participation is vital in developing case studies of promising practices in online learning. We will work closely with you and your staff to establish a site visit schedule that will minimize the burden associated with our data collection activities. We will notify participants when the report has been made public by the U.S. Department of Education.

The study is being conducted by SRI International under contract with the U.S. Department of Education. One of the evaluation researchers will contact you shortly to begin making arrangements for data collection. If you have any comments or questions regarding the

study, please contact the Project Co-Director, Marianne Bakia, at 703-247-8571 or via e-mail at marianne.bakia@sri.com. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Timothy J. Magner
Director, Office of Educational Technology

Alan Ginsburg
Director, Policy and Program Studies
Service

[explanatory letter to be sent to parents of participating in focus group interviews]

[DATE]

Dear Parent:

SRI International, a not-for-profit education research firm, is conducting a study that involves **[NAME OF SCHOOL]**. The study, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is evaluating the use of online classes/programs in schools throughout the country.

Your child's online class/program has been selected as part of this evaluation. The purpose of these small group interviews is to ask students about their experiences participating in an online class. The interviews with students will be conducted in groups of five to eight students. The interviews will be conducted during the school day, will be audiotaped, and will last no more than sixty minutes. In addition to conducting these group interviews, interviewers may visit a few select classrooms and take notes on the real and virtual classroom practices and activities they observe.

The purpose of this letter is to ask for your permission to interview your child as part of this research activity. We will not be administering any tests. Interviewers will take notes during the interview sessions, but there will be no record of comments attributable to individual members of the group. All information will be kept in locked files on SRI premises, and it will be used only by SRI for this study. The audiotape of the interview will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Responses to this data collection will be used only for statistical purposes. The reports prepared for this study will summarize findings across the sample and will not associate responses with a specific district or individual. We will not provide information that identifies you or your district to anyone outside the study team, except as required by law.

Participation is completely voluntary: no students will be included without their parent's permission. In our reports, we will not use any students' names.

Your child's school has approved our plans. If you have any questions about this study, you may call Karla Jones at SRI International at (703) 247-8609. If you have questions about your school's participation in this project, please call the principal of your child's school.

*If you agree to allow your child to participate in these research activities, please sign and return the next page of this letter to **[COORDINATOR OR OTHER APPROPRIATE PERSON]** by **[TWO WEEKS AFTER DATE ABOVE]**. Students will be selected for the small group interviews at random, from among those with letters signed by their parents. If the letter is not returned to us, your child will *not* be selected.*

We hope that you will allow your child to participate in this very important study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'MB', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marianne Bakia
Barbara Means
Co-Project Director

[informational letter to be sent to superintendent in districts where only the school will be a case study site]

[date]

Dear [name of superintendent]:

[SCHOOL NAME] has been selected to participate in the Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning, a study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the study is to document characteristics associated with prevalent types of online learning and to gather evidence-based practices that strengthen implementations of online learning. In addition to analyzing the research literature for characteristics of promising online learning programs, we are meeting with providers of online learning activities and the districts, schools, and students who use these products. We expect that twenty schools will be visited to gain in-depth understanding of the implementation of online learning interventions. The site visits will include interviews with key staff, focus groups with students, and observations of the intervention (virtually or on site).

[SCHOOL NAME] has been selected because of its use of [software/online program]. The case study data collection will take place during the 2007-08 school year. Responses to this data collection will be used only for statistical purposes. The reports prepared for this study will summarize findings across the sample and will not associate responses with a specific district or individual. We will not provide information that identifies you or your district to anyone outside the study team, except as required by law. Participating schools will be acknowledged in the final report for their cooperation, but they will not be identified in the text of any report unless model practices are highlighted, in which case permission will be obtained from you before the information is included in the reporting. All participants will be informed of the purposes of the data collection and the uses that may be made of the data collected, and provided with a consent form that outlines privacy rights.

We greatly appreciate the time and energy required from you and your staff to participate in this study. Your participation is vital in developing case studies of promising practices in online learning. We will work closely with you and your staff to establish a site visit

schedule that will minimize the burden associated with our data collection activities. We will notify participants when the report has been made public by the U.S. Department of Education.

The study is being conducted by SRI International under contract with the U.S. Department of Education. One of the evaluation researchers will contact you shortly to begin making arrangements for data collection. If you have any comments or questions regarding the study, please contact the Project Co-Director, Marianne Bakia, at 703-247-8571 or via e-mail at marianne.bakia@sri.com. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

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