

Complete Guide to  
**ONLINE**  
High Schools

Distance learning options for teens & adults



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Thomas Nixon

# Complete Guide to Online High Schools

Distance Learning Options for  
Teens & Adults

Second Edition

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Degree Press  
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Complete Guide to Online High Schools, 2nd Ed.  
By Thomas Nixon

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**Warning:** The author has attempted to accurately portray each school. However, the author will gladly post corrections on his blog at BestOnlineHighSchools.com.

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To Sarah

and

To David

and

To Maria

Amazing children all. Thank you for making my life richer.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Introduction

When *Complete Guide to Online High Schools* came out in 2007, it was the first and only book dedicated to showcasing online high school programs. It was a small book of only 154 pages. In the four years since that time, the field has grown significantly as, hopefully, has the book.

So what has changed?

One noticeable change is size of the book. At over 200 pages, I suspect we still have left out some online high schools (which I hope to capture in the next edition). Rest assured, though, this is the same book with the same solid advice about online high schools.

- There are more online high schools than ever before and that number continues to grow. This book now lists more than 260 such schools. (And, if your school is not listed, let me know!)
- A dramatic increase in the number of free options. There are now so many that I am at work on another book, *Free Online High Schools*, that looks at only those options. Expect that book in winter of 2013.
- In addition to the increase in the number of schools, there has been a marked growth in the number of part-time and full-time programs offered by public school districts. While, for the

most part, I ignore these programs, they can be a good option if you are a student in a district that offers such courses.

- Blended learning - the morphing of the online with the traditional classroom - is becoming increasingly common. While there is some thought with certain people that online learning will be affected by traditional learning, the opposite is likely true. Increasingly, online courses will move into traditional high schools and traditional classrooms. You heard it here first!

## Chapter I: Choosing an Online High School

*This is the first time in history that the teacher, student, and content do not have to be in the same place.*

--Willard Daggett, President, International Center for Leadership in Education

While there have been online high schools around, in some form, for quite some time, over the last six or seven years, the numbers of these schools has exploded. There are a number of reasons for why this has happened, but it really falls into three groups:

- Homeschoolers who want to use digital content;
- Students who need an alternative location due to interests in sports or visual/performing arts; or
- Students and families who have concerns about the traditional public school system.

That being said, there are as many reasons for wanting an online education as there are people seeking one.

Online high schools are becoming the schools of choice for a diverse population of students. For some, they provide a way out of traditional high schools and for others they offer a second chance at earning a diploma. Whatever the reason, online programs can be a convenient and sensible solution for many students.

However, it is not necessarily an easy task to determine which are good choices and which are not.

And, should you have any doubt, making the right choice is the difference between a piece of paper that is worth something and one that is not. All things being equal, and in this case they must be, it is much better to choose carefully.

How you go about selecting an online high school can depend significantly on what your ultimate goal might be. While there are many possible goals, they tend to break down into two distinct choices:

- You wish to earn a high school diploma to improve your chances at getting a job or entering the military (see Chapter 2). College, at this point, is not something you are actively considering; or
- You wish to attend a college and you either feel the need or it is a stated requirement that you first earn a high school diploma.

Certainly both are valid reasons for considering earning a high school diploma online.

### **Criteria**

Whatever the reason, choosing a school requires that you look at a number of criteria. The criteria below are the minimum acceptable standards for selecting an online high school and exhibit changes from the 2007 edition of this book:

- The school should be accredited by a regional or national accreditor recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation or by the U.S.

Department of Education (See Chapter 5). Other possible recognition includes that from state departments of education and public school districts.

- For full-time schools, there is a marked preference for schools to have been in operation for at least two years. That being said, what is more important is that the system has experience offering high school courses.
- You should be able to determine through its website or printed materials who owns and/or operates the school. This should include the names of employees.
- It should have printed materials. While this may seem simplistic, schools that have printed materials tend to be more established and much less likely to be a poor choice.

As has been explained, these are minimum requirements. If you have questions about specific schools, posting a question or two at [BestOnlineHighSchools.com](http://BestOnlineHighSchools.com) is a good place to start.

### **The Good Online Candidate**

After determining whether it is a good choice in general, you should also determine if it is a good choice for you and whether you are a good choice for online learning.

The first place to start is to determine if you are an independent worker. It takes more dedication to complete an online course than it does to complete a traditional classroom-based course. If you are not able

to work independently, you are opening yourself up to a major challenge.

Online courses come in two basic formats: limited time and less-limited time. In other words, some courses are structured within traditional quarters or semesters, while the completion date for others is farther in the future. Neither is better than the other, but understanding your own learning style can help you make better choices with regard to time.

If you find that you work better when you have very specific deadlines, a more traditional schedule likely works best for you. However, if you like things to be more open-ended or there is the possibility that you might need extra time, you should consider that second option. Be careful with that second option, though, because this can be one of the ways that students never finish their courses.

As mentioned before, online courses require real dedication to finish. How can you know if you are able to do this? Take a look at what you have accomplished in your life. Have you ever:

- worked for yourself? The same skills that are required to be your own boss are what are required to be a successful online student.
- completed tasks on a regular basis without being asked? The key component there is “...without being asked.”

What are some other possibilities? Climbing a mountain is a good metaphor for what you will need to endure. You get the idea. You can be successful if you have not done these sorts of things, but it certainly makes it all that much harder.

## **The Role of the Family**

If you find yourself lacking in the skills necessary to be a good online candidate, all is not lost. Many of the more successful online learners rely on their families, whether that is parents or spouse, to provide them with the necessary support to be successful. Sometimes all it takes is asking for the extra help.