

Future of education is online, Web-school pioneer says

NEWSMAKER Q&A

Damian Creamer, founder of Primavera Online High School, was the guest last week on Live Talk Wednesday, talking about secondary education via the computer.



Damian Creamer

Creamer formerly was an enrollment counselor at the University of Phoenix.

"Their (online) program was in its infancy and it was a unique opportunity to be involved with such a dynamic organization as they pioneered online education at

the post-secondary level," he said.

Afterward, he helped a small charter school in the West Valley found two additional charter schools.

Creamer opened Primavera Technical Learning Center (the predecessor to Primavera Online High School) in 2001.

"In its first year, Primavera had a few hundred students. Last year, I believe that we carried an average daily membership of 2,700 students," Creamer said.

Last year, Primavera graduated 469 students, according to Creamer.

Info: www.primaveratech.org.

Find the entire Live Talk at aztalk.azcentral.com.

1. What does the first day of school mean to you?

Primavera Online High School is a year-round school operating on a block schedule with new blocks beginning every two weeks. So the first day of school is a regular occurrence as students enroll throughout the year. The blocks are six weeks in length and students are required to stay on pace with peers and complete the course in the six weeks' time. They are also required to spend at least four hours per day in instructional activities. Primavera offers students a flexible program wherein students can access their courses anytime, anywhere, and yet it contains the structure students need to be well-rounded and successful.

2. I'm sure you get your share of doubters who wonder about the quality of education via the Internet. But your high school is accredited, right?

Yes. Primavera is accredited by the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA), an alliance of the largest American school accrediting associations. CITA is recognized as an accrediting authority throughout the United States and around the world. Primavera meets the standards for accreditation as a distance-learning school and is listed online (www.accreditedschools.org). Primavera Online High School is also accredited by the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), a regional non-government, non-profit organization. Founded in 1895, the NCA CASI's high standards go beyond state requirements to meet nationally and internationally recognized levels of excellence. Maintaining our accreditation shows our school and staff are committed to quality education and continuous improvement.



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3. What kind of students take online courses for high school? And what are their ages or other characteristics?

We see that all types of students are interested in online education. One of the greatest qualities about online education is it really helps to democratize the educational landscape.

We have students from all walks of life who take online courses. There are students who need distance learning because they have fallen behind in their education and need to recover credits or whose home schools might not be able to provide them with a full range of curricular options. Many of our students are mainstream students who simply prefer the online environment. We also have students with unique circumstances, like parenting teens, teens who need to work to support their families or special-educational-needs students. We even have students who are involved with competitive sports and acting. Primavera Online seems to be an ideal fit for many students with many different educational scenarios.

4. What percentage of online graduates goes on to college? And presumably, it's not necessarily online college, right?

A large majority of our graduating students go on to post-secondary education. Recent surveys conducted on our graduates indicate that two out of every three graduates continue their education in a post-secondary environment. We have students that have gone on to all three major state schools and other universities throughout the country.

5. But isn't there something impersonal about online high school? Isn't the interaction between student-teacher essential?

This is a common myth about online education that many people share. However, the amount of teacher-to-student direct communication and instruction is very high. At Primavera, our stated goal is to provide each and every student with a personalized education. Our teachers and students maintain daily and weekly communication through phone and e-mail conversations. Everyday there are at least two discussion boards that students must participate in with other students and their teachers. The discussions are designed to develop the student's higher-level cognitive skills of synthesis and evaluation.

6. What's the future of online education?

I think the future of education is online. Today, the vast majority of post-secondary universities offer online education as an option to their students. I wouldn't hesitate to say that almost all universities offer their students and faculty access to an online learning management system. I believe someday all schools will be able to offer an online component to their students, either by creating their own programs internally or partnering with other schools to form consortiums.