

## Chapter 4.14

# Reaching Beyond Bricks and Mortar: How Sylvan Online Expands Learners' Options

**Saul Rockman**  
*Rockman et al., USA*

**Lynn Fontana**  
*Sylvan Learning, USA*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sylvan Learning has set the standard for personalized, after-school, academic support programs for students in elementary grades through high school. It has been in business for 30 years and was one of the earliest programs to demonstrate that providing direct supplemental instruction services could be successfully scaled nationally. The nearly 1,100 Sylvan centers provide academic assistance to thousands of students each day and have helped more than 2 million students reach their full academic potential. A relatively little-known but growing component

of Sylvan Learning's offerings is Sylvan Online, a one-to-one academic assistance program that is offered to students at home in association with their local Sylvan Learning centers. This Internet-based service provides the same type of individualized academic support as the centers, yet it affords greater flexibility and access. Using proprietary technologies, Sylvan Online makes it possible to reach learners—no matter their geographic area or proximity to a Sylvan Learning center—and helps them receive the kind of academic support necessary to succeed in school. This chapter describes the program and attributes of Sylvan Online and situates the program within the larger context of extended-day academic programs.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60566-876-5.ch013

## BACKGROUND

Extended-day or supplemental academic programs have been part of the educational landscape for decades, often existing—and even flourishing—without any evaluation of their actual or potential impact. Some students attend these programs because they need to address gaps in basic skills, while others may have to develop more effective learning strategies. Still others want to learn and practice the skills necessary to improve test scores, and others wish to accelerate their course work and master the content more quickly. Meeting the varied needs of students and helping them to succeed academically is the purpose of these after-school supplemental programs. In recent years, research on after-school academic programs has identified the attributes of programs that are likely to be effective in reaching the goals set for students participating in them. Incorporating these attributes, programs achieve success both for the students and in the marketplace. Over the past decade, Sylvan Online (the online program highlighted in this case study) has focused on incorporating these attributes and, as a result, provides academic interventions that make a difference for students. Furthermore, the organization continues to explore what other factors can make this program even more effective and accessible. Building on Sylvan Learning’s 30 years of experience, Sylvan Online is developing the potential to be even more successful for its students and within its marketplace by helping students develop the skills, habits, and attitudes needed for lifelong success.

The attributes of effective extended-day academic programs are what drive the approach utilized by Sylvan Learning and Sylvan Online. The case study developed below focuses on how these attributes come into play and how the strategy taken by Sylvan Online builds on them. Among the critical elements are:

- Experienced **staff**, especially those who know how to work both with children who have diverse learning styles and children who do not necessarily thrive in traditional learning environments. Equally important, staff should receive comprehensive training and ongoing support.
- Quality **curriculum**, aligned to school curriculum, as well as to local, state, and national curriculum and standards. Curriculum should be age/grade-level appropriate and delivered with effective **instructional techniques**, including standardized assessments and varied pedagogical styles that meet the needs of different learners (e.g., personalized instruction, engaging activities, and interactive learning experiences).
- Programs that provide adequate **structure** for participants but also offer flexibility and provide sufficient time for learning (in session length and program duration).
- Strong and positive **partnerships** with classroom instructors and connections to the learning community, including parents and schools.
- Quality **resources**, including technology and facilities that foster sustained levels of involvement in a safe and healthy environment.
- Well-aligned **evaluation** and/or research components to provide feedback on the program.

Before beginning to delve into the attributes of effective academic support programs and the Sylvan Online model, a bit of background is needed. Over the years, Sylvan Learning’s instructional system has demonstrated that it helps children improve and accelerate their academic performance while also discovering their love of learning. However, not all of those who needed the academic support that supplemental education offered could easily attend a program at a

11 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/reaching-beyond-bricks-mortar/41393](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/reaching-beyond-bricks-mortar/41393)

## Related Content

---

### Fostering Higher Knowledge Construction Levels in Online Discussion Forums: An Exploratory Case Study

Khe Foon Hew and Wing Sum Cheung (2010). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies* (pp. 44-55).

[www.irma-international.org/article/fostering-higher-knowledge-construction-levels/52598](http://www.irma-international.org/article/fostering-higher-knowledge-construction-levels/52598)

### Analysis of Artificial Intelligence Technology and Its Application in Improving the Effectiveness of Physical Education Teaching

Rui Guo (2024). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies* (pp. 1-15).

[www.irma-international.org/article/analysis-of-artificial-intelligence-technology-and-its-application-in-improving-the-effectiveness-of-physical-education-teaching/335115](http://www.irma-international.org/article/analysis-of-artificial-intelligence-technology-and-its-application-in-improving-the-effectiveness-of-physical-education-teaching/335115)

### Investigating Higher Education and Secondary School Web-Based Learning Environments Using the WEBLEI

Vinesh Chandra, Darrell Fisher and Vanessa Chang (2012). *Technologies for Enhancing Pedagogy, Engagement and Empowerment in Education: Creating Learning-Friendly Environments* (pp. 93-104).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/investigating-higher-education-secondary-school/58006](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/investigating-higher-education-secondary-school/58006)

### MOOC Bullying in Schools: The First Experience in a Portuguese Tertiary Inst

Ana Luísa Torres, Nuno Bordalo Pacheco, João Galego, Teresa Pacheco, José Mauricio Dias and Cristina Maria Novo (2015). *Furthering Higher Education Possibilities through Massive Open Online Courses* (pp. 211-224).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/mooc-bullying-in-schools/137324](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/mooc-bullying-in-schools/137324)

### E-Learning and New Teaching Scenarios: The Mediation of Technology Between Methodologies and Teaching Objectives

Cecilia Mari, Sara Genone and Luca Mari (2008). *Web-Based Education and Pedagogical Technologies: Solutions for Learning Applications* (pp. 17-36).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/learning-new-teaching-scenarios/31275](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/learning-new-teaching-scenarios/31275)