

Cisco WebEx: Learning Busts Out of the Classroom Walls

What do a bout of mono, a broken leg, and a winter storm have in common? They can all keep students out of the classroom, sometimes for an extended period. Now schools around the country are delivering the classroom experience to these students in their homes, letting them participate with voice, video, and web sharing as if they were physically present.

The Virtual Classroom Comes of Age

"An illness or other circumstances keep many students away from the school campus for a short time, or even for their entire time in the school system," says Bob Lee, education solutions manager, Cisco. "Cisco WebEx Training Center lets teachers replicate the classroom learning experience for students in any location."

Students need only a computer, broadband connection, phone, and optional webcam. A few minutes before class begins, they click a link to connect to the live class session over the web, with voice, video, and content sharing. Online students can hear and see everything that's going on in the classroom, including the teacher's lesson and questions from other students. The teacher can choose what appears in students' browsers, such as:

- Live streaming video of the teacher or the entire classroom
- Content being shared on the teacher's PC or an interactive whiteboard
- Prerecorded video
- Text chat and Q&A
- Quizzes and tests

Remote students can engage in classroom activities as well. To ask a question or make a comment, they click a button to raise their hand, adding their name to a list. When called on, students can speak it into the phone or type it into a chat window.

And when the online students need to give reports, the teacher can give them control of the online session, allowing them to share what's on their desktops, including documents, PowerPoint presentations, videos, and website content. The class session can also be recorded for playback and review at any time.

Students in Any Location

Some schools combine students who are physically present with others who connect over the Internet. "What's exciting is that you can integrate remote students into the traditional classroom, engaging them with an interactive learning experience," Lee says.

Other schools are doing away with physical classrooms entirely, moving part or all of their curriculum online. The teacher conducts the class from any location, including a home office, and all students connect over the Internet.

Can I See Your Notes?

Schools' motivations for using Cisco WebEx are varied:

- **Helping students who miss class:** They can catch up later by watching and listening to the recorded Cisco WebEx session.
- **Accommodating different learning styles:** Some students learn better if they can listen to a recorded classroom session or lecture more than once. Others are more alert at different times of day. "Cisco WebEx not only bridges distance barriers, but also time barriers," Lee says.
- **Sharing teachers across schools:** Teachers in some subjects may be scarce due to budget or other constraints. With Cisco WebEx, these teachers can teach classes in multiple locations at the same time over the Internet. The teacher can call on students in any classroom to speak or share a written document.
- **Enabling continuous learning:** In Wisconsin, 10 students from 12 different school districts are using Cisco WebEx Connect to work on a robotics project. A student who wants feedback at 8 p.m. can check to see which other students are currently online, send an instant message, and click to escalate the instant message conversation to a phone call, a video call, or a full-blown Cisco WebEx session that also includes web sharing. The other students can catch up on the conversation by reviewing the recorded session, then add their input in a discussion forum.

Learning Continuum

"Education is escaping narrow definitions of place and time to become a continuum," says Lee. "Students can learn in the traditional classroom, in virtual classrooms using Cisco WebEx Training Center, in small online study groups at a specified time using Cisco WebEx Meeting Center, and in impromptu groups any time they're inspired, using Cisco WebEx Connect."

For more information about Cisco WebEx learning solutions, visit: www.webex.com/how-it-works/for-training.html

For more information about Cisco WebEx Connect, visit: www.webex.com/enterprise/cisco-webex-connect.html

For information about how educational institutions are using Cisco WebEx, visit:
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