



EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY

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Experts Tout Virtual Education

By Eliza Krigman

Leaders of online education gathered Thursday to discuss the role that virtual learning must play in our nation's future, saying brick-and-mortar classrooms won't become obsolete but will be complemented by blended and virtual learning models.

"We [the United States] were great at creating human capital but the rest of the world is catching up," said **Paul Peterson**, executive editor at *Education Next* during a forum at the Heritage Foundation. According to Peterson, virtual learning will allow for the personalization of education and save costs.

Across the country, virtual education is growing at 30 percent annually, said **Susan Patrick**, president of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning. The majority of the online learning sector is managed privately, but Florida Virtual Schools, founded in 1997, is run by the state. In the 2008-2009 school year, more than 71,000 students enrolled in Florida virtual program.

Despite its promise, the panelists said they don't expect a rapid expansion of virtual learning in the public sector. They say this is due in large part to what they see as unfriendly state and local policies.

"What we have in education is a government monopoly," said **Adam Schaeffer**, a policy analyst at the libertarian think tank, the Cato Institute. Schaeffer argued that more involvement by the private sector is essential for virtual education to grow.



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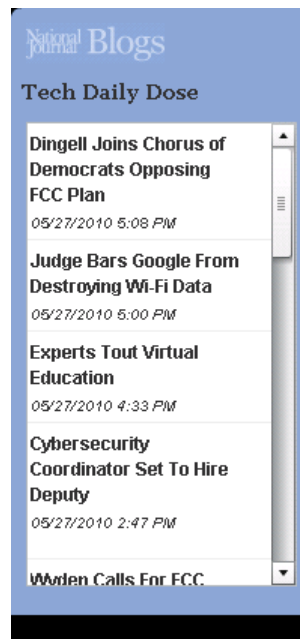
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