



Initial Guidelines for Online Physical Education

A Position Paper from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education

Technology and the Internet have dramatically changed education in the United States. Distance education, virtual high schools, E-learning, interactive video, and online courses are prominent features of the educational landscape. As a result, states, districts, and individual schools are examining the opportunities and challenges of online education for each subject matter area to include physical education. Required physical education credits can now be earned online in 12 states, and half of these states claim comprehensive online physical education (based on state and national standards). Moreover, six of these states permit any student to take online courses, while three states require students to write a request prior to approval. Only seven of the twelve states require certified physical education teachers to teach the online courses (NASPE, 2006).

While some physical educators have embraced online courses, an equal number are unconvinced of such approaches. Online physical education is neither inherently good nor bad, and the value of any new educational technology or pedagogical strategy must always broach the question of learning. Commonly accepted types of technology (Internet, video, computer assisted instruction, heart rate monitors, pedometers, PDA's, etc.) are encouraged by NASPE and should be considered by physical education teachers as tools to enhance learning. Nevertheless, many physical educators still advocate face-to-face teaching to ensure that learning takes place and that motor movements and exercises are performed efficiently, correctly, and safely. Paradoxically, many educators and parents see school physical education and physical activity in competition with the Internet and other visual media for a youth's precious time to learn (Buschner, 2006). Any new technology must be examined from political, economic, social, and ethical perspectives.

After a careful review of the empirical literature concerning online and distance learning in the field of education (Grades 7-12), no significant differences in learning were found when comparing face-to-face learning with online approaches (Mclsaac & Gunawardena, 1996; Russell, 2001). Similarly, there are no empirical studies in physical education comparing face-to-face learning with online approaches, but the need to initiate future research in this area exists. Current physical education research for effective teaching and learning is based on face-to-face student and teacher interaction (Rink, 2003). At this point in time, online physical education is an exciting and attractive, yet untested, alternative method to delivering quality physical education. And, NASPE guidelines suggest that quality physical education programs must include opportunity to learn, meaningful content, appropriate instruction, and student and program assessment (NASPE, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c).

With this backdrop, a discussion of online physical education opportunities and challenges set the stage for NASPE's *Initial Guidelines for Online Physical Education*. These initial guidelines are intended for thoughtful educators who are considering the multitude of implications for preparing and teaching online physical education courses at the high school level. These guidelines do not include the elementary school, middle school, and higher education levels.

NASPE operationally defines online education as student learning using a Web-based format and the Internet with no requirement to attend classes in person (Maeroff, 2003). At a minimum this instructional alternative allows students to access and submit course requirements, e-mail the teacher and classmates, link to other online resources, and participate in online discussions (Mupinga, 2005). Finally, NASPE supports a National Education Association (2006) position that "it is critically important that school systems and school administrators contemplate such issues before launching online courses or enrolling significant numbers of their students in such courses" (preface).

Online Physical Education Opportunities

Many school districts originally developed online education and physical education courses to reach the needs of diverse students. Online courses in physical education, if designed and implemented appropriately, may serve as an appropriate method of instruction for individuals who are unable to be in school-based settings, such as students located in remote geographical areas, students with special needs, or working students. The most advantageous opportunities for online physical education courses may be for schools that lack certified teachers or have inadequate facilities and equipment. A quality online course might serve as a vehicle to provide increased opportunities for physical education in a different and new learning environment.

The most commonly provided online physical education courses, often provided by universities, are physical activity electives and/or fitness courses. These are most effective after completion of an in-person comprehensive physical education program by providing additional opportunities for students to participate in physical activity outside of the school day. Likewise, online courses might fit a school district's need for elective courses, beyond the required courses in physical education.

Online courses might promote relevance and positive attitudes for some students. An overweight student may be motivated to take an online fitness course, which may be less intimidating, thus enhancing self-esteem and contributing to exercise adherence. In addition, an online course might encourage family involvement in a student's fitness efforts and might actually lead to the engagement of other family members. This is of particular importance since the student participating in an online fitness course will be participating in fitness-related activities requiring parental oversight. This individual goal setting is also an important component for becoming physically active for life (Standards 3 and 4, NASPE, 2004b).

Online programs might allow some students to work independently (self-paced) and may match one's learning style, combined with the flexibility of time to achieve

appropriate physical education learning tasks and course requirements. Often students are on a college preparatory track for high school graduation and need to take some courses during the day and others online after school hours.

There are a variety of online courses that may be offered. Currently, these include a school district course, a state course offered through the state education agency, and open courses, which are typically provided through institutes of higher education. The district-level courses tend to have the most flexibility for the Hybrid or Blended model (Kachel, Henry, & Keller, 2005; Oblender, 2002) of courses.

NASPE perceives the Hybrid or Blended model (Kachel, Henry, & Keller, 2005; Oblender, 2002) for online learning in physical education to be a reasonable instructional alternative for this subject matter until further research is available. This model requires face-to-face classes by a certified physical education teacher that are amplified with online assignments, readings, movements, chat rooms, and examinations.

Online physical education courses, including required face-to-face meetings, may help students to better achieve NASPE (2004b) Standard 5 (exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in physical activity settings) and Standard 1 (demonstrates competency in motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities). Periodic instructional days, assessments, and a proctored final evaluation, can be done during face-to-face meetings.

Online Physical Education Challenges

While there are opportunities when offering online physical education courses there are challenges for school districts and teachers to address. State education agencies have just begun to develop state standards for online courses. These standards are best practices and have yet to be tested. Therefore, programmatic research, to include standards, is warranted to provide a better understanding about the effectiveness of online physical education courses on student learning.

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) publication, *Standards for Quality Online Teaching* outlines 11 standards that states can use to guide academic preparation, content knowledge, online skills and delivery, and other elements of quality online teaching. These standards were developed through a collaboration among the Southeastern states to help examine the essential components of quality online courses in the context of today's learners and the increased emphasis on accountability. It also addresses the need for state-level policies regarding online course quality (SREB, 2006).

Research conducted by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2006) has shown the following:

- When students enroll in online courses as a matter of choice, they frequently do so because of scheduling conflicts or availability issues. The courses they typically enroll in are those that enrich or expand their learning;
- When students enroll in online courses as a matter of necessity, they frequently do so for credit retrieval or because of incarceration, illness, pregnancy, or failure to thrive in classroom situations; and
- Online learning is not always the most effective or appropriate mode of instructional delivery for certain content or students. There are times and contexts when in-classroom instructional delivery predominates and the end-goal of online instructional delivery is to enhance or widen the educational experience.

Most children need to become more physically active and research reports that sedentary lifestyles are a contributor for obesity. Excessive time spent on the computer diminishes time that students might spend being physically active. Moreover, it is difficult for teachers to determine if students enrolled in online courses are actually participating in physical activity. While physiological measuring devices may exist, online physical education teachers often must rely on activity logs and the “honor system” to assess if students are physically participating. Aside from the submitted signature logs, the integrity of online cognitive assessments is difficult for teachers to monitor.

Overcoming technical difficulties can be an important factor in students’ success and satisfaction with online programs. If there are technological problems with the materials used in the course, even the best of students tend to become discouraged and have trouble refocusing or finishing the course, even after the technical problems have been resolved (Roblyer and Marshall 2002). Also, Roblyer (1999) found that not all students who have distance-learning options will choose this strategy and others may choose it but are unsuccessful with it. His research suggests that students who are required to take distance learning courses are less likely to be tolerant of technical problems. This finding makes it clear that online physical education should not be a student’s only option for completing physical education requirements. Pilot testing for comprehensive physical education is important to determine the success of students in an online physical education course.

Like other online courses, the burden of self-organization, self-discipline, and self-responsibility rests with individual students to complete learning tasks and manage time. Online courses may eliminate or minimize a physical education teacher’s use of verbal and visual cues, combined with the ability to give immediate and specific feedback to students who are having difficulty learning. Student readiness (e.g., experience with technology, responsible) and self-motivation must be an essential component of online learning and needs to be assessed by the teacher before permitting a student to take an online physical education course.

Initial Guidelines for Secondary Online Physical Education

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The following “initial” guidelines are offered to assist secondary school administrators and teachers to determine if online physical education courses are an appropriate instructional alternative. Such decisions must be made after examining the local school environment. For schools and teachers already offering online physical education courses, these guidelines might serve as a checklist for improving the quality of physical education for students. We have used the term “initial” due to the current lack of empirical evidence supporting online physical education for secondary students.

Student Prerequisites:

It is important for students to go through an approval process for taking online courses to assure students have successful learning opportunities. Students who elect to take online physical education courses should secure permission from parents, teachers, and administrators. Prior to enrolling in online physical education courses, students should have an adequate level of knowledge and skill in both physical education and technology. Students should have completed, and passed, a developmentally appropriate elementary and secondary physical education program based on NASPE’s standards (NASPE, 2004b).

- Students should have completed or passed a physical education program which demonstrates competency in basic movement concepts and motor skills, including an assessment of physical fitness, and a foundational knowledge of physical education.
- Students need to learn how to navigate through the Internet, download instructional (digital) videos, and participate in webinars and pod casts.
- Students should have access to, and familiarity with, computer technology, the Internet, and basic software such as Microsoft Word and PowerPoint.
- Students should demonstrate an understanding of safety procedures and protocols when performing movements and exercises.
- Students should demonstrate time management skills to work independently for a self-paced online course.
- Students and parents should complete an honor code contract, which includes information on Internet safety, plagiarism guidelines, Internet copyrights, and accurately documenting physical activity time for the student.
- Teachers should require an initial parent/student orientation meeting. This must be in person rather than by phone so that future opportunities for in-person student-teacher meetings are scheduled before the student completes the course.

- Parents must agree to supervise and assist when needed with online physical education learning.

Teacher Prerequisites:

Many teachers, even veterans, lack the technological, pedagogical, and/or communication skills and abilities to teach quality online physical education courses. Teachers should have adequate professional development and training specific to online instruction and must be aware of the required time commitment to work in an online environment. More importantly, an enriching online learning experience for all students requires a certified physical education teacher who is experienced in the traditional classroom and gymnasium setting. These teachers should serve as positive role models for students by taking an online course before teaching their own course to learn/experience it.

- The teacher should teach using the same goals/objectives/performance expectations in the online learning setting as that used for the school-based physical education classes.
- The teacher should use appropriate instructional strategies, provide clear expectations to students, interact frequently, monitor student work, offer immediate and specific feedback, and provide support and resources to students.
- The teacher should belong to professional organizations, participate in ongoing professional development, keep an updated portfolio, and demonstrate subject matter currency to ensure accurate course content and meaningful instructional practices.
- The teacher should be able to troubleshoot his or her technical problems and also help students with technological problems and issues that arise during the course.
- The teacher must set and keep hours of availability.
- The teacher should have access to technical support.

Curriculum and Instruction Prerequisites:

The online quality physical education course should be aligned with the national standards for physical education (NASPE, 2004b). The curriculum, and courses, should not only be standards-based, but should be relevant, meaningful, and challenging. A variety of sport, dance, aquatics, outdoor, and exercise courses might be offered at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels.

- The curriculum should be research-based, follow best-practice guidelines, and be aligned with national, state, and local standards.

- Instructional strategies should engage students mentally, physically, and socially. The instructional design should allow for ongoing communication with the teacher. The student should receive instruction in the utilization and protocols for chat rooms, appropriate use of e-mail, and requirements for the submission of student work.
- Learning activities should encourage student partnerships for safety, enjoyment, and social support.
- Student physical activity plans should be developmentally and age appropriate, progressive, and provide both formative and summative assessment information for the student and teacher.

Assessment

Accountability for learning and student motivation are two reasons for assessment. If there are no opportunities for hybrid courses and in-person assessment, alternative assessment should be used. Nevertheless, teachers must set realistic, appropriate, and incremental goals for student learning.

- It is essential to provide a variety of performance-based skill assessments such as logging activity time, providing evidences from heart rate monitors, student-generated PowerPoint presentations, pod casts, digital video, and multi-media presentations, as well as knowledge assessments should be administered (and presented) to demonstrate student success.
- Samples of authentic assessment should include the provision for monitoring heart rates or movement such as pedometer assessments. These results could be included in the student's individual workout log or portfolio.
- Student completion rates of physical activity should be calculated and discussed as part of course content.

Class Size

The number of students taking an online physical education course can and does affect the quality of teaching and learning, including the amount/quality of feedback offered by the instructor. Other class size determinants may depend on the following:

- The amount of time the online teacher is being paid to teach the class (as to allow for enough time for meaningful interaction with all students).
- Teacher's experience teaching online courses or the course being taught in particular.
- The number of assignments that will be presented by students may impact the number of students that an online teacher can handle in one course load.

- Whether there is any in-person instructional time.
- Student-teacher ratio in an online environment should be less than in a traditional class setting, as it takes time to grade students' assignments online, as well as initiate frequent student contact.

Time Allocation

Students and teachers will need to adjust to a new schedule and online courses will have different demands when compared to face-to-face teaching. Students and teachers alike must commit sufficient time to online courses.

- Course duration should reflect NASPE guidelines for quality physical education, a minimum of 225 minutes per week (NASPE, 2004a).
- Students enrolled in online courses are provided with an opportunity to work independently and at their own pace. However, it is critical that students are assessed on a regular basis, and through a variety of assessment techniques, such as written, oral, or other authentic assessments, to ensure student comprehension and course integrity.

Availability of Community Facilities

Both school and community facilities should be available for learning.

It is the parents' responsibility to make sure that facilities are safe and available and the student's responsibility to have the knowledge to access it. However, the teacher should become familiar with the facilities students will be attending. Limited access to facilities may pose problems for students who are required to perform activities without the appropriate learning resources.

- Facilities should be available to students with guidelines for accessing local facilities integrated into the curricula.
- If students are required to participate in activities in an environment outside of the home/yard, then access to safe facilities, such as parks, recreation centers, or fitness gyms will be necessary, especially in the evening hours and on weekends.

Equipment and Technology Systems

School districts, students, teachers, and parents must share the responsibility of assuring that equipment and technology systems are accessible, working properly, and safe.

- Students should be able to access all course materials.

- Heart rate monitors or other physical monitoring systems would be essential to ensure that physical activities are followed.
- Video technology should be utilized to teach physical education skills and knowledge and to monitor students' progress.
- Adequate equipment should be available for students needing equipment, and safety guidelines should be provided when students have to create their own equipment (e.g., sit-and-reach boxes for fitness assessment).
- Technological platforms with tech support should exist to provide consistent online instruction. This would enable a student whose home computer is having difficulty interfacing with the school's computer system. This would also allow a student who "lost" work while engaged in an online lesson to retrieve his or her work.
- Student access to technology tools such as access to live television broadcasts, streaming audio/video, DVD/CD-Rom, video conferencing, webinars or the Internet should be safe and in working order.

Program Evaluation

Course and program evaluation are critical for the development, validity, and relevance of the online learning:

- Students should complete a formal evaluation at the end of each course to provide feedback about teacher performance and course content.
- An evaluator with expertise in physical education, as well as the school district's online technology coordinator, should conduct annual program evaluations. Outside of the school system evaluators should be considered also.
- Course curriculum should be evaluated on an annual basis when introducing a new curriculum and upgraded as needed.

Students with Special Needs

Online physical education courses should serve and be available for students with special needs including disabilities and language barriers.

- The IEP or 504 team should work collaboratively with the physical education teacher to provide reasonable accommodations and modifications for exceptional children enrolled in online courses.
- Accommodations must be made for students with disabilities to ensure that both cognitive and physical abilities are met as required in IDEA.

- To ensure safety during physical activity, supervision of students with special needs during self-paced physical activity should be considered.
- Instructions and other written materials should be clear, and students should have access to online dictionaries and other resources to limit language barriers.
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act requires access to electronic and information technology procured by federal agencies. The Access Board developed accessibility standards for the various technologies and play space for students with disabilities covered by the Rehabilitation Act. These standards should be considered for special needs students in online courses (<http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/1194.22.htm>).

Youth are more likely to become healthy and happy adults when they learn the value and enjoyment of participating in a healthy, physically active lifestyle. The foundation for a lifetime of physical activity begins in childhood, and physical education is a key strategy for preventing childhood obesity and reducing chronic disease risk. Physical education programs should increase the physical competence, health-related fitness, self-responsibility, and enjoyment of physical activity for all participants such that physical activity is established as a natural part of everyday life. If states, school districts, and teachers carefully examine the issues surrounding online physical education courses and conclude this instructional alternative is in the best interests of student learning, it is imperative to hire state certified physical education teachers, promote the achievement of state and national physical education standards, and implement evidence-based teaching and learning techniques including developmentally appropriate instruction.

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Appendix

Initial Guidelines for Online Physical Education Checklist

This checklist is based on NASPE's *Initial Guidelines for Online Physical Education* (2007) and is designed to assist teachers and administrators in determining the quality and effectiveness of online physical education courses.

Student Prerequisites	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students demonstrate competency in basic movement concepts and motor skills, including an assessment of physical fitness, and a foundational knowledge of physical education. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students understand how to navigate through the Internet, download instructional (digital) videos, and participate in webinars and pod casts. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students have access to, and familiarity with, computer technology, the Internet, and basic software such as Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students demonstrate an understanding of safety procedures and protocols when performing movements and exercises. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students demonstrate time management skills to work independently for a self-paced online course. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students and parents complete an honor code contract, which includes information on Internet safety, plagiarism guidelines, and Internet copyrights. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers require an initial parent/student orientation meeting. This must be in person rather than by phone so that future opportunities for in-person student-teacher meetings are scheduled before the student completes the course. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents agree to supervise and assist with online physical education learning. 		

Teacher Prerequisites	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A certified physical education teacher who is experienced in the traditional classroom and gymnasium setting teaches the course. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers serve as positive role models for students. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher teaches using the same content in the 		

online learning setting as that used for the school-based physical education classes.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher uses appropriate instructional strategies, provides clear expectations to students, interacts frequently, monitors student work, offers immediate and specific feedback, and provides support and resources to students. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher belongs to professional organizations, participates in ongoing professional development, keeps an updated portfolio, and demonstrates subject matter currency to ensure accurate course content and meaningful instructional practices. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher is able to help students with technological problems and issues that arise during the course. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher sets and keeps hours of availability. 		

Curriculum and Instruction Prerequisites	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The curriculum, and courses, should not only be standards-based, but should be relevant, meaningful, and challenging. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The curriculum should be research-based, follow best-practice guidelines, and be aligned with national, state, and local standards. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructional strategies should engage students mentally, physically, and socially. The instructional design should allow for ongoing communication with the teacher. The student should receive instruction in the utilization and protocols for chat rooms, appropriate use of e-mail, and requirements for the submission of student work. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning activities should encourage student partnerships for safety, enjoyment, and social support. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student physical activity plans should be developmentally and age appropriate, progressive, and assessment based. 		

Assessment	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate opportunities for hybrid courses. 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A variety of performance-based skill assessments such as logging activity time, providing evidences from heart rate monitors, student-generated PowerPoint presentations, pod casts and multi-media presentations, as well as knowledge assessments will be administered (and presented) to demonstrate student success. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Samples of authentic assessment may include the provision for monitoring heart rates through a “loaner” heart rate monitor program or pedometer assessments. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student completion rates of physical activity are calculated and discussed as part of course content. 		

Class Size	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The amount of time the online teacher is being paid to teach the class allows for enough time for meaningful interaction with all students. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The online teacher can adequately handle the number of assignments that will be presented by students. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When in-person instructional time is provided, the class size is appropriate for the teacher to teach and assess. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student-teacher ratio in an online environment is less than in a traditional class setting, as additional student contact is needed outside of class. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no more than 25 students enrolled per online course. 		

Time Allocation	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students and teachers alike have committed sufficient time for the online course. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course duration reflects NASPE guidelines for quality physical education, a minimum of 225 minutes per week, with at least 50% of class time in moderate to vigorous physical activity (NASPE, 2004a). 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students enrolled in online courses are provided with an opportunity to work independently and at 		

their own pace.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are assessed on a regular basis, and through a variety of assessment techniques, such as written, oral, or other authentic assessments, to ensure student comprehension and course integrity. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If an activity log is required, physical activity represents at least the minimum level of physical activity according to guidelines for youth physical activity. 		

Availability of Community Facilities	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher made sure that facilities are safe and available, and the student's have the knowledge to access them. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of facilities is available to students with guidelines for accessing local facilities integrated into the curricula. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If students are required to participate in activities in an environment outside of the home/yard, then access to safe facilities, such as parks, recreation centers, or fitness gyms are assessable, especially in the evening hours and on weekends. 		

Equipment and Technology Systems	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equipment and technology systems are accessible, working properly, and safe. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are able to access all course materials. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heart rate monitors or other physical monitoring systems are available to ensure that physical activities are followed. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video technology should be utilized to teach physical education skills and knowledge and to monitor students' progress. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adequate equipment is available for students needing equipment and safety guidelines are provided when students have to create their own equipment. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technological platforms with tech support exist to provide consistent online instruction. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student access to technology tools such as access 		

to live television broadcasts, streaming audio/video, DVD/CD-Rom, video conferencing, webinars or the Internet are safe and in working order.		
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Program Evaluation	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students complete an informal or formal evaluation at the end of each course to provide feedback about their performance and the class instructor. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An outside evaluator with expertise in physical education, as well as the school district's online technology coordinator conduct annual program evaluations. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course curriculum is evaluated on an annual basis and upgraded as needed. 		

Students with Special Needs	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online physical education courses serve, and are available for, students with special needs. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The IEP and/or 504 team work collaboratively with the physical education teacher to provide reasonable accommodations and modifications for exceptional children enrolled in online courses. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodations are made for students with disabilities to ensure both cognitive and physical abilities are met as required in IDEA. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure safety during physical activity, supervision of students with special needs during self-paced physical activity is considered. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructions and other written materials are clear, and students have access to online dictionaries and other resources to limit language barriers. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act requires access to electronic and information technology and these are provided through the online course. 		

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