WYOMING
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

2015 House Enrolled Act No. 101 Distance Education Task Force

Progress Report: August 17, 2015

UNDERSTAND CHALLENGES

IDENTIFY PRIORITIES

GENERATE SOLUTIONS

EVALUATE OPTIONS

INFORM RECALIBRATION: MAKE RECOMMEND-ATIONS

Purpose

This report has been prepared by the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) to meet the requirements of the 2015 House Bill No. 0011 and provide a window into the decision making process and progress of the Distance Education Task Force (DETF).

   Section 2. *Commencing June 15, 2015, the department shall provide monthly progress reports on the work of the task force to the legislative service office.*

Task Force Overview

The task force has been formed to make official recommendations to the legislature on the following:
- A review of the distance education programs currently providing courses
- Programmatic requirements for the delivery of quality distance education
- Compliance with statewide education standards
- Professional certification requirements for distance education instructors
- Transparency in the accounting and administration of distance education programs
- Compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The intention of the task force is to review the current challenges in distance education and to explore the possibilities of how to best afford increased access to quality learning opportunities to every Wyoming learner.

Summary of Task Force Activities

As of the date of this report, the following task force activities have been completed:
- Task force membership was established (March 2015)
- Task force meetings from May 2015 through September 2015 were scheduled (April 2015)
- Three (3) task force meetings were conducted (April, May, June 2015)
- The current challenges in Wyoming distance education were identified (April 2015)
- The priorities of the task force were established (April 2015)
- Options to address the priorities have been and will continue to be researched (May 2015, Ongoing)
- An initial vision and definition for virtual education has been drafted (June 2015)
- Distance education administration models have been proposed and discussed in detail (June 2015)
- Recommendations on teacher certification were agreed upon (July 2015)

- The Subcommittee for the Advancement of Virtual Education recommendation was developed (July 2015)
- The task force voted on which models and funding recommendations they would like to make to the legislature (August 2015)

Task Force Membership

Superintendent of Public Instruction Jillian Balow is chair of the task force and appointed the following fourteen voting members in March 2015:

- Brent Bacon, *WDE Chief Academic Officer*
- Senator Stephan Pappas, *Laramie County Senate District 07*
- Representative John Freeman, *Sweetwater County House District 60*
- Aaron Carr, *Niobrara County School District No. 1 Superintendent*
- Shon Hocker, *Big Horn County School District No. 1 Superintendent*
- R.J. Kost, *Park County School District No. 1 Curriculum Coordinator*
- Brian Farmer, *Wyoming School Boards Association Executive Director*
- London Jenks, *Hot Springs County School District No. 1 Technology Coordinator*
- Scott Mecca, *Albany County School District No. 1 Teacher*
- Julia Cook, *Park County School District No. 6 parent*
- Denise Miller, *Natrona County School Dist. No. 1 Technology Instructional Facilitator*
- David Picard, *Wyoming Connections Academy lobbyist*
- Nicole Tiley, *Wyoming Virtual Academy Head of School*

Ex-Officio Distance Education Task Force Members
- Mike O'Donnell, *Wyoming Attorney General Special Assistant*
- Nick Bellack, *Professional Teaching Standards Board*

WDE Consultants to the Distance Education Task Force
- Rob Bryant, *Director of School Support*
- Laurel Ballard, *Student/Teacher Resources Team Supervisor*
- Alicia Kerns, *Digital Learning Consultant*
- Lori Kimbrough, *Digital Learning Consultant*
- Jed Cicarelli, *School Foundation Team Supervisor*

Schedule of Task Force Meetings

April 16 & 17, 2015: Casper College, 1:00 - 5:00 pm the 16th;

<div align="right">8:00 am - 12:00 pm the 17th</div>

May 28, 2015: Video Conference via WebEx, 3:00 - 5:00 pm
June 24 & 25, 2015: Casper College, 12:00 - 5:00 pm the 24th;
<div align="right">8:00 am - 12:00 pm the 25th</div>

July 23, 2015: Video Conference via WebEx, 9:00 - 11:00 am
August 13, 2015: Video Conference via WebEx, 9:00 - 11:00 am

Future Meetings (Tentative)
September 17 & 18, 2015: Casper College, 1:00 - 5:00 pm the 17th
<div align="right">8:00 am - 12:00 pm the 18th</div>

Distance Education Task Force Report Schedule

June 15, 2015: 1st Progress Report due to the Legislative Service Office
July 15, 2015: 2nd Progress Report due to the Legislative Service Office
August 17, 2015: 3rd Progress Report due to the Legislative Service Office
September 15, 2015: 4th Progress Report due to the Legislative Service Office
October 15, 2015: Final Report due to the Legislative Service Office with recommendations
from the Task Force

Updated Definition of Virtual Education (as of 7/23/15)

Virtual education is the delivery of K-12 education primarily through technology outside of the physical classroom as prescribed by Wyoming statute.

Updated Vision for Virtual Education (as of 7/23/15)

Wyoming's virtual education system seeks to expand learning opportunities by providing access to global educational resources for all students.

Underlying Assumptions for New Models

To develop more effective models for virtual education, the DETF agreed upon a set of underlying assumptions to serve as a foundation to build upon. They allow the task force members to focus on the merits of these new models knowing critical components that must be included to address the DETF identified priorities and challenges.

1. Make students and meeting their needs the highest priority of the system.
2. Create a statewide vision of a high quality distance education system.
3. Step away from the current model to consider what could be.
4. Build the distance education system upon research/evidence based best practices.
5. Funding requirements from the Legislature will not increase ADM.
6. Partnerships between school districts & distance education providers should be encouraged.
7. Create a funding model incentivizing the program requirements.
8. Increase flexibility and access for all students.
9. Allow school districts to manage their distance education programs while ensuring equal opportunities are provided to every student.
10. Meet state requirements for standards, assessment, and accountability.
11. Infrastructure is key for success and varies throughout the state.
12. Wyoming will have a K-12 model for distance education.
13. Considerations will need to be made for training and professional development of K-12 distance educators in addition to training of distance education students.
14. Distance education students must be able to access opportunities.
15. Distance education courses for credit will continue to be approved by the WDE.

Identified Challenges to Overcome

Online Single Course Access: Statewide online part-time offerings are not always available to full-time brick and mortar students.

Brick and Mortar Single Course Access: Full-time online students don't always have access to classes in their district of residence such as welding, band or art.

Reporting Issues: Lack of transparency created by online and brick and mortar students reported together.

Assessment Issues: Additional efforts and costs to administer statewide assessments.

Virtual Education Models

The DETF is concerned with two types of virtual education; part-time enrollment and full-time enrollment. Part-time enrollment describes the majority of classes being taken in the brick and mortar environment with some courses (typically one to two) taken online. Full-time enrollment describes the majority or all courses being taken online.

Part-Time Enrollment Models

Proposed Part-Time Model A - Virtual Single Course

Proposed model A would facilitate part-time online enrollment. This model would be available through the WDE website and be accessible by all districts, parents, and students. This site would include contact and enrollment information for each statewide online provider for online education courses. The emphasis for this model would be on increasing accessibility and ease of enrollment into single course offerings from a variety of providers. This model differs from Wyoming's current model of virtual education in that part-time or single course offerings are not available or easily accessible.

CHALLENGES RESOLVED	
Current Challenges	**Resolved by the Model?**
Online Single Course Access	Yes
Brick and Mortar Single Course Access	NA-Students will be able to take brick in mortar classes in their resident district
Reporting Issues	NA-Student reported with resident district
Assessment Issues	NA-Student tests with resident district
VISION MET	
Expanded learning opportunities	Yes
Global educational opportunities	Possibly
Access for all students	Yes
UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS 1-15	
Met	1-6, 8-10, 12, 13, 15
Not Applicable	7, 11, 14
Not Met	None

DETF Recommendation: Adopt this model as Phase I

Proposed Part-Time Model B - District Consortium

DETF members discussed creating an online consortium model which would consist of districts collaborating and pooling resources to develop and deliver online courses. Educators across the participating districts would collaborate in the development and teaching of online courses with students from those districts being able take the online courses at no additional cost to their primary district. The advantage behind this model is students would be able to access middle and secondary courses not currently available in their district. Participating districts would identify courses such as Advanced Placement or Hathaway Success Curriculum courses they can offer. They would also determine which courses they are not able to provide so the district consortium can determine priority courses for students from across districts to access online.

CHALLENGES RESOLVED	
Current Challenges	**Resolved by the Model?**
Online Single Course Access	Yes
Brick and Mortar Single Course Access	N/A-Students will be able to take brick and mortar classes in their resident district
Reporting Issues	N/A-Students will be reported with their resident district
Assessment Issues	N/A-Students will be assessed in the resident district
VISION MET	
Expanded learning opportunities	Yes
Global educational opportunities	Possibly
Access for all students	Yes
UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS 1-15	
Met	1-6, 8-10, 12, 13, 15
Not Applicable	7, 11, 14
Not Met	None

DETF Recommendation: Adopt this model as Phase II

Full-Time Enrollment Models

Proposed Full-Time Enrollment Model C - "District 307"

Proposed Model C would require the formation of a statewide school district, termed "District 307" and would emphasize the importance of incorporating non-credit courses (supplementary electronic educational resources) and professional development opportunities into the statewide credit-bearing virtual course offerings.

This model would include those vendors currently providing K-12 full-time enrollment opportunities for Wyoming students, as well as providing a course catalog and registration assistance for additional part-time course enrollment opportunities. This model would continue the current approval for all providers and for all courses offered as well as requiring a cap to be set on the course loads for both teachers and students participating part-time.

The DETF discussed the almost $10 million increase in funding that would be required by the Legislature to implement this model. If this model were to move forward, a cost-based funding model for virtual education would need to be explored further.

CHALLENGES RESOLVED	
Current Challenges	**Resolved by the Model?**
Online Single Course Access	Yes
Brick and Mortar Single Course Access	Not Directly Addressed
Reporting Issues	Yes
Assessment Issues	Yes
VISION MET	
Expanded learning opportunities	Yes
Global educational opportunities	Possibly
Access for all students	Yes

UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS 1-15	
Met	1-3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15
Not Applicable	7, 11, 14
Not Met	5, 9

DETF Recommendation: Do not adopt this model

Proposed Full-Time Model D - Virtual Schools

Through discussion at the June DETF meeting, a fourth potential model was discussed in which each school district in Wyoming would have the opportunity to open a "Virtual School." This school would be treated the same as any other school. There was also discussion about potentially making these schools a different type of alternative school. This model would resolve the current reporting and accountability concerns raised by the provider districts and principals from the schools with virtual students assigned to their brick and mortar buildings.

The DETF discussed the increase in funding that would be required by the Legislature to implement this model. Previous requests for creating new virtual schools estimated the increase of funding to be approximately $2 million. If additional districts created their own virtual schools, there would be significant increases funding required by the Legislature.

CHALLENGES RESOLVED	
Current Challenges	**Resolved by the Model?**
Online Single Course Access	Not Addressed
Brick and Mortar Single Course Access	Not Directly Addressed
Reporting Issues	Yes
Assessment Issues	Not Addressed
VISION MET	
Expanded learning opportunities	Possibly
Global educational opportunities	Possibly

Access for all students	Yes
UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS 1-15	
Met	1-4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15
Not Applicable	7, 11, 12
Not Met	5

DETF Recommendation: Do not adopt this model

Proposed Full-Time Model E - Revised Current Model

The current model of distance education in Wyoming operates through the Wyoming Switchboard Network (WSN). Approved WSN programs are housed in districts and provide online courses to students statewide or within district only. Students enrolled full-time online are assigned to grade level appropriate brick and mortar schools within the program district even if they are geographically located outside the district. The WSN houses contact and enrollment information for all approved full-time distance education providers, a course catalog of currently approved online courses, and links to Wyoming state statutes and policies regarding distance education and online learning. The revised version of this model would address the challenges defined by the DETF.

CHALLENGES RESOLVED	
Current Challenges	**Resolved by the Model?**
Online Single Course Access	Yes
Brick and Mortar Single Course Access	Yes
Reporting Issues	Yes
Assessment Issues	Yes
VISION MET	
Expanded learning opportunities	Yes
Global educational opportunities	Possibly
Access for all students	Yes

UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS 1-15	
Met	1-6, 8-10. 12, 13, 14, 15
Not Applicable	7, 11
Not Met	None

To meet the needs of full-time virtual education students in Wyoming, the Distance Education Task Force proposes to make revisions to the current virtual education model. These revisions include:

- Transparency in reporting in online and brick and mortar student categories for all assessments and accountability measures.
- Supporting off-site administration of statewide assessments.
- Providing an avenue for full-time online students to participate in brick and mortar classes or programs in their district of domicile.

Transparency in Reporting

To address the issue of confusion in reporting as described in the June 2015 Distance Education Task Force LSO Report, the WDE held internal meetings to discuss the possibility of separate unofficial reporting for online students assigned to brick and mortar schools. Pursuant to W.S. 21-13-330(g)(ii), all full-time online students who are enrolled in the online provider district are assigned to a grade level appropriate school within that district.

As accountability and statewide assessments are reported by school level, the online and brick and mortar student results are combined. This practice makes it difficult for administrators, parents, and school board members to determine how the online students are performing. It is also difficult to assess how the brick and mortar students are performing and what instructional needs online or brick and mortar teachers should be addressing. The online provider district administrators also argue that online student demographics are similar to alternative school characteristics and have suggested that implementing a different accountability model would be more appropriate for online performance evaluation.

The WDE data and accountability staff have determined that under current statutes, official separate assessment and accountability reports for students assigned to the same school are not an option. However, the group did conclude that subgroups within a school could be created for online and brick and mortar students, allowing for separate reporting.

During the August 13, 2015, meeting the DETF members expressed concern that the subgroup reporting wouldn't adequately resolve the reporting issues and pressed for statutory change to the assessment and accountability reporting of online students. Task force members also discussed the possibility that a different accountability model may be needed for online students but currently there is no data to support the justification for a different model.

DETF Recommendation: Adopt this model
The task force adopted this model in the form of: "To recommend the enhancement of the current model to continue for full-time, online students with the charge to continue future expansion toward statewide opportunities for virtual education."

Virtual Teacher Licensure

Task force members explored the possibility of changing the Wyoming certified teacher requirement to allow classes to be taught by teachers certified by any State Education Agency (SEA). The Professional Teaching Standards Board (PTSB) and WDE staff provided information and insight into the ramifications of this proposed change.

This discussion included how teachers from other states can quickly become certified to teach in Wyoming. Other ramifications discussed included the possibility of these teachers being misassigned, which could in turn negatively affect a district's accreditation. Teachers not certified in Wyoming but teaching a Wyoming class, would also not meet the requirements of the federal Highly Qualified Teacher as defined in No Child Left Behind. Based on these discussions, the task force is planning to recommend the Wyoming certified teacher requirement remain a statutory requirement.

Professional Development for Virtual Educators

In order for virtual educators to become most effective in teaching in the online environment, there is a need for continuous professional development opportunities to be available. In order to meet this need, it has been determined by the DETF that all virtual educators will be required to complete a predetermined number of professional development hours. Each school district responsible for delivering online courses will be also responsible for providing this professional development for the educators who teach these courses.

Subcommittee for the Advancement of Virtual Education

Virtual Education is an ever evolving field, making the need for continuous monitoring and improvement a high priority. To allow for agility based on information gathered through the continuous improvement efforts, the DETF will propose the formation of the Subcommittee for the Advancement of Virtual Education (S.A.V.E). This committee will research and solve details and concerns that have been identified by the task force but require additional time and resources to fully resolve. S.A.V.E. will have the ultimate goal of remaining agile in the implementation and improvement of virtual education in the state to continuously advance educational opportunities for all Wyoming students.

The task force proposal is to have S.A.V.E function as a subcommittee of the School Finance and Data Advisory Committee with an added requirement to report to and make improvement recommendations to the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Distance Education Task Force Funding Subcommittee

During the July 23 meeting of the DETF, the need for a subcommittee dedicated to building funding models for each recommended virtual education model was discussed. This subcommittee consists of six individuals volunteering to fill the identified roles of: Parent, Superintendent, Teacher or Instructional Facilitator, Virtual Education provider, and Wyoming Department of Education representative. The members volunteering to take place on this subcommittee are: Julia Cook, Shon Hocker, Scott Mecca, Nicole Tiley, and Brent Bacon. Additional support staff from the WDE will also participate on this subcommittee as needed.

Meetings of this DETF subcommittee will take place every two weeks with the first scheduled meeting taking place via phone conference on August 12, 2015. The goal of the meeting was to develop funding recommendations for the virtual single course model. Many of these recommendations should be applicable in developing the other models.

Next Steps

The DETF selected the optimal model for both part-time and full-time virtual education in Wyoming during the August 13, 2015, meeting held via WebEx. Throughout August and September, the task force funding subcommittee will explore potential funding alternatives to support the implementation and maintenance of these models. Deciding upon a funding model and making final recommendations for virtual education in Wyoming will be the focus of the final DETF meeting in September.

Respectfully submitted:

Brent Bacon, Chief Academic Officer
Wyoming Department of Education
307-777-2058
brent.bacon@wyo.gov