



**2015 House Enrolled Act No. 101
Distance Education Task Force**

Progress Report: July 15, 2015



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.

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)

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. 2 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;
8:00 am - 12:00 pm the 17th

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;
8:00 am - 12:00 pm the 25th

Future Meetings (Tentative)

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

September 17 & 18, 2015: Casper College, 1:00 - 5:00 pm the 17th
8:00 am - 12:00 pm the 18th

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 15, 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

June Task Force Meeting Overview

The third meeting of the Distance Education Task Force (DETF) took place on June 24-25, 2015 at Casper College in Casper, Wyoming. Twelve voting task force members and ex-officio member Mike O'Donnell were in attendance. Task force members London Jenks and John Freeman were absent.

DETF members were asked to step outside of the current distance education model to think about “what could be”. Task force members agreed they have the opportunity to formulate and make recommendations on a forward thinking distance education system for students across Wyoming. As a start to this work, it is critical for Wyoming to have a common vision of what we want for distance education to be in the future. With that vision, the DETF brainstormed a variety of models or programs to fulfill this vision. To insure funding considerations do not inhibit new thinking, this work is initially being completed without considering the funding implications. Once the merits of the various distance education models are vetted and the optimal model is selected, the DETF will look at how to fund the system, given the current financial constraints for education.

Evolution of Distance Education Terminology

The definition of distance education in Wyoming statutes from 2008 emphasizes the separation of teacher and student by space or time. This definition allows for more than one distance delivery method to fall under distance education programming. At the time, distance education in

the state included video conference courses taught through the Wyoming Equality Network (WEN) Video, correspondence courses and online courses.

The usage of WEN Video has significantly dropped over the years with no classes being held on it during the 2014-2015 school year. Based on current reporting, other than limited correspondence courses (in 2014-2015 seven students participated in five correspondence courses), distance education under the W.S. 21-2-202 (xxxi) program refers essentially to online courses with 2,236 courses delivered in 2014-2015. Given that all but a few courses considered distance education are being taught online (on a computer over the internet), the DETF believes it is time to update the term we use to describe this type of education program from *distance* to *virtual*.

Draft Definition of Virtual Education

Virtual education is delivery of K-12 courses primarily through technology outside of the physical classroom as prescribed in W.S. 21-2-202 (a)(xxxi).

The DETF found and reviewed multiple existing definitions of distance education to develop a single, cohesive definition for “virtual education”. The differences between fully online courses for credit and educational technology resources for use in classroom instruction were discussed. The DETF decided to include only the online courses for credit when discussing virtual education. The additional educational technology resources are believed to be beyond the scope of the work to be completed by the DETF. Although educational technology resources will not be discussed further by the DETF, several suggestions were made on how to better assist districts with this work and the WDE is following up on those suggestions.

Draft Vision for Virtual Education

Wyoming’s virtual education system seeks to expand learning opportunities by providing access to global educational opportunities 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.

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

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 placed on increasing accessibility and ease of enrollment into single course offerings from a variety of providers. This model differs from our current model of virtual education in that part-time or single course offerings are not available.

Proposed Part-Time Model B

The 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 to take the online courses at no additional cost to their primary district. The advantage and thought 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 as well as those courses they are not able to provide so the district consortium can determine priority courses for students from across districts to access online.

Full-Time Enrollment Models

Proposed Full-Time Enrollment Model C

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.

Proposed Full-Time Model D

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 house 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 of the provider districts and principals from the schools with virtual students assigned to their brick and mortar buildings.

Proposed Full-Time Model E

The current model of distance education in Wyoming operates through the Wyoming Switchboard Network (WSN). Approved WSN programs are based 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.

Next Steps

Since a number of models have been proposed, the DETF will select the optimal model for virtual education in Wyoming at its July 23 meeting. Throughout August and September, a task force subcommittee will develop funding alternatives to support the implementation and maintenance of this model. Deciding upon a funding model and making final recommendations will be the focus of the final DETF meeting in September.

Respectfully submitted:

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