

WYOMING
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



2015 House Enrolled Act No. 101 Distance Education Task Force

Progress Report: June 15, 2015



Purpose

This report has been prepared by the Wyoming Department of Education to meet the requirements of [House Bill No. 0011](#) passed during the 2015 legislative session:

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.
- Task force meetings from May 2015 through September 2015 were scheduled.
- Two (2) task force meetings were conducted.
- The current challenges in Wyoming distance education were identified.
- The priorities of the task force were established.
- Options to address the priorities have been and will continue to be researched.

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*
- Ed Olson, *Digital Learning 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

Future Meetings (Tentative)

June 24 & 25, 2015: Casper College, 1:00 - 5:00 pm the 24th;
8:00 am - 12:00 pm the 25th
July 23, 2015: Video Conference, 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

Overview of April 2015 Task Force Meeting

The first Distance Education Task Force meeting took place on April 16 through April 17, 2015 at Casper College in Casper, Wyoming. The scheduled meeting began on with an address by Brent Bacon, delegated chair of the Distance Education Task Force as appointed by Jillian Balow, and Dicky Shanor, Wyoming Department of Education Chief of Staff. The afternoon of April 16th, and the morning of April 17th, the task force members were divided into focus groups in order to more fully examine the current model of distance education and determine the roadblocks facing Wyoming distance learners. The topics of these focus groups included: funding, individual student instruction and choice, accountability requirements, assessment, data collection, and online programs and course identification numbers.

Jed Cicarelli, Wyoming Department of Education School Finance Committee, shared information regarding recalibration and the funding model for distance education in Wyoming. It was asked of the task force members to remain cognizant of the current funding model when making recommendations to the Legislature in October of 2015.

On April 17 Superintendent Jillian Balow addressed the Distance Education Task Force members and emphasized the needs and expectations of the Distance Education Task Force. Superintendent Balow requested that the task force members think beyond the current model of distance education, develop plans to increase access to quality education, and determine if the proposed plans would fit into the current funding model.

Current Distance Education Challenges

The current challenges in Wyoming distance education were identified by the task force members include the following:

1. **MOUs between districts:** Currently no district is willing to engage in the distance education Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) process. This situation presents two distinct challenges.
 - a. All students who currently want to be enrolled full-time in online instruction have unenrolled from their district of domicile which means the online provider district must meet their assessment, counseling, special education needs, etc. from a distance.
 - b. Students enrolled full-time in a brick and mortar program do not have the option to take one or two (part-time enrollment) courses from one of the state approved online providers.
2. **Limited options to participate in home district in part-time courses/programs:** Students enrolled full-time online who want to participate in a course or program offered at their district of domicile may not be allowed to do so. In many cases, the district of domicile doesn't allow a student who has unenrolled from the district to take brick and mortar courses or participate in programs such as band or gifted and talented instruction.
3. **Additional efforts and costs to administer state assessments:** To administer assessments to the full-time online students, the online provider staff travel the state

to provide off-site testing to ensure assessment participation, delivery of results to students and families, and to provide optimal testing environments for students.

4. **No part-time online participation options within Wyoming:** Students enrolled full-time in a brick and mortar school do not have the option to take one to two (part-time enrollment) from an approved Wyoming online provider. Some districts will provide supplemental online courses to students from out-of-state providers or other vendors. Many of these courses are not taught by Wyoming teachers and the standards may not necessarily align with Wyoming standards.
5. **Reporting confusion:** Because the statutes require that the full-time online students who enroll in an online provider district be assigned to a grade level appropriate brick and mortar school within that district, reporting of the online and face-to-face students is combined.

Priorities Identified

The Distance Education Task Force members were asked to identify the main priorities and issues to be resolved within the current model of distance education in Wyoming. These priorities were determined by group consensus and resulted as follows:

1. **Define and review the accountability model for Distance Education**
2. **Explore separate reporting requirements for data**
3. **Develop a Wyoming definition of Online Learning**
4. **Ensure equal access to courses for all Wyoming students**
5. **Explore funding options that would allow ADM funding to follow the student**
6. **Limit barriers for state assessments**
7. **Review and ensure transparency as described in EA101**

Plan of Action

It was determined by the Distance Education Task Force that additional information and data collection would be needed and reported to the next meeting via WebEx video conferencing on May 28th, 2015.

The Wyoming Department of Education members conducted an informational meeting on May 4th, 2015 including individuals from all necessary and relevant divisions within the Wyoming Department of Education. These divisions included: Finance, Data and Reporting, Standards and Accountability, and Assessment. At this meeting, termed the Distance Education Task Force “Think Tank”, members from each division discussed the priorities determined. Wyoming Department of Education staff suggested various

solutions and evaluated the potential benefits and implications of each possible solution to be reported to the Distance Education Task Force. The following information has been identified:

List of priorities and work that has gone on since the April meeting.

- a. Accountability
 - i. Common theme across the state.
 - ii. Alterations may require a change in statute.
- b. Program ID's – May require a statute change.
- c. Data and separate reporting requirements. Currently the WDE provides student level data which districts/schools can then use to create separate reports.
- d. Assessment Reporting requirements and adjustments
- e. Student:Teacher Ratio of 25:1 would need to be addressed
- f. Funding for online learning, including the 1-2 courses per student:
 - i. Not to exceed the 1 ADM
 - ii. Address an alternative structure

The priority of distance education programs requiring a separate accountability and reporting model identified by the Distance Education Task Force was thoroughly discussed and determined that there is no statutory authority to support the separation.

Overview of May 2015 Task Force Meeting

Guest Speakers provided an overview of Utah Education Network and an overview of the Utah Electronic High School

Rick Gaisford, Educational Technology Specialist
Utah State Office of Education
Kathleen Webb, Principal
Utah Electronic High School

Discussion of financial information will continue at the June 24-25 meeting.

Continued updates of information and discussions will be added, following the June 24-25 meeting in Casper.

Respectfully submitted:

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