

WYOMING
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



2015 House Enrolled Act No. 101 Distance Education Task Force

Executive Summary: October 15, 2015

Submitted to:
Legislative Service Office

Submitted by:
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UNDERSTAND
CHALLENGES

IDENTIFY
PRIORITIES

GENERATE
SOLUTIONS

EVALUATE
OPTIONS

INFORM
RECALIBRATION:
MAKE
RECOMMEND-
ATIONS

Executive Summary

Wyoming is committed to expanding opportunities for students to learn in ways that best meet their needs. The transition to allowing students to take advantage of virtual education began in 2008. As more students seek virtual education options, districts encounter obstacles limiting student access. For this reason the Wyoming Legislature called for the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to chair a task force addressing these key challenges. The Distance Education Task Force, with fourteen voting members, convened to develop recommendations for the Legislature.

Task Force Legislative Duties, House Enrolled Act 101

(i) Programmatic requirements for the delivery of quality distance education programs statewide that provide equal access and opportunity for all students enrolled in a Wyoming school district;
Task Force Response: The task force has developed recommendations on both part-time and full-time virtual education models to allow greater access for students to participate in online learning.

(ii) Guidance to ensure compliance with statewide education standards and student assessment and accountability requirements under W.S. 21-2-202, 21-2-204, 21-2-304 and 21-9-101, including, but not limited to, data collection requirements;
Task Force Response: The task force has worked with the WDE Assessment Team and their vendors. The process the Assessment Team developed previously is allowing a greater number of students to test. The unique needs of virtual education students will continue to be considered as Wyoming's assessment system evolves. The task force has developed recommendations to provide greater transparency for districts and parents on the performance on state assessments for virtual education programs housed within districts.

(iii) In consultation with the professional teaching standards board, professional certification requirements for distance education instructors;
Task Force Response: The task force worked with PTSB to develop recommendations. At this time there are a limited number of educators trained to teach online. If additional certification requirements are put into place at this time, then it would greatly limit the state's ability to provide greater opportunities for students to access virtual education courses. This should be revisited as additional educators are trained and teaching virtual courses.

(iv) A review of distance education that can be used to provide greater transparency in accounting for administering distance education program;

Task Force Response: The funding recommendations included in the proposed virtual education models provide increased transparency and flexibility. The WDE posts the school finance funding formula for each district on its website, making it accessible to the public.

(v) Requirements for partnership agreements, if necessary, for school districts electing to collaborate in the delivery of a distance education program;

Task Force Response: The task force has developed virtual education models which would eliminate the use of partnership agreements and their associated burdens on districts.

(vi) Guidance to ensure compliance with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. 1400.

Task Force Response: The WDE monitors the virtual education programs in districts. Special education students are equally represented in virtual education and served in the same manner as they are in brick and mortar schools.

Virtual Education Model Foundations

To ensure the task force was working from the same foundation, a set of underlying assumptions, virtual education definition and virtual education vision were developed and used in determining if virtual education models proposed and analyzed by the task force were satisfactory.

Underlying Assumptions

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. Support partnerships between school districts and distance education providers.
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.

Definition of Virtual Education

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

Vision for Virtual Education

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

Virtual Education Model Recommendations

The task force looked at various virtual education models, and is recommending two models which meet all of the requirements outlined in the virtual education vision and underlying assumptions. The task force created a model related to part-time virtual education to be implemented in phases, and a model for full-time virtual education.

The task force has recognized the need to accurately define both part-time enrollment and full-time enrollment. A part-time virtual education student is a student taking 50% or less of their courses online, and a full-time virtual education student as a student taking more than 50% of their courses in an online format with a single virtual provider district.

Part-Time Virtual Education Model

Facilitating opportunities for students to access single virtual education course is a high priority for the task force. To facilitate this process, the WDE will update the online course catalog system to make it easier to add to and maintain the catalog. There will also be an expansion of the system, creating a pre-registration system for districts to use. This would allow a school to quickly find courses students need and facilitate the registration process. Course information on the site would include, at a minimum: a synopsis, a standards alignment document, the district providing the course, and the cost of the course. The task force is recommending the Legislature provide guidance on the development of course fees between districts. In an effort to expedite student access to these courses, a two-phase rollout of the part-time models is recommended.

Phase I: In the first phase, the WDE will work with the existing districts housing virtual education programs to make single online courses available to other districts.



Phase II: The WDE would provide opportunities for all districts across the state to develop and offer virtual education courses to other districts. The WDE would be responsible for providing professional development opportunities to support educators in the development and teaching of those courses. A WDE hosted learning management system (LMS) is a critical component of Phase II. WDE would be able to take advantage of economies of scale and acquire the LMS at a lower cost than if each district purchased the system on their own. It would also develop a consistent system, making it easier for students by only having to learn one system even if they are taking multiple courses from different districts.

Part-Time Virtual Model Recommendations

There are several key recommendations for the part-time virtual education model. Table 1 provides a summary of those recommendations.

Table 1: Key Recommendations for Part-Time Virtual Education Model by Phase

Legend: ✓-Included, X-Not Included

| Recommendation | Phase I | Phase II |
|---|---------|----------|
| Centralized Online Course Catalog | ✓ | ✓ |
| Online Pre-Registration System | X | ✓ |
| Distance Learning Plan Required | X | X |
| Milestones Required | X | X |
| Assessment and Accountability Requirements Stay with District Where Student Received 50% or More of Instruction | ✓ | ✓ |
| Required Annual Professional Development for Virtual Education Educators | X | ✓ |

| Recommendation | Phase I | Phase II |
|--|---------|----------|
| WDE Professional Development for Course Development and Pedagogy | X | ✓ |
| Virtual Education Certification from PTSB | X | X |
| Available Statewide | ✓ | ✓ |
| Approved Course Development Process | ✓ | ✓ |
| Taught by Wyoming Certified Teachers | ✓ | ✓ |
| Virtual Education Teachers Employed by School Districts | ✓ | ✓ |
| Aligned to Wyoming Standards | ✓ | ✓ |
| State Hosted Learning Management System (LMS) | X | ✓ |
| Single Course Fee | ✓ | ✓ |

Full-Time Virtual Education Model

A variety of challenges and priorities pertaining to full-time virtual education were identified and discussed throughout the task force meetings. These main challenges include: the complexity of required milestones, lack of seat-time equivalency for online students, lack of opportunity for full-time online students to participate in brick-and-mortar classes at their local schools, and the lack of transparency created by online students being reported in conjunction with brick-and-mortar students.

Ultimately, the task force believed adjusting the current full-time virtual education model best meets the needs of Wyoming students.



Full-Time Virtual Model Recommendations

Given the nature of full-time virtual education, a variety of recommendations unique to full-time virtual education are needed. Table 2 provides a comparison between the current full-time virtual model and the model recommended by the task force.

Table 2: Key Recommendations for Full-Time Virtual Education Model

Legend: ✓-Included, X-Not Included

| Recommendation | Current Model | Proposed Revisions |
|--|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Centralized Online Course Catalog | ✓ | ✓ |
| Online Pre-Registration System | X | ✓ |
| Students Enroll in District Providing Virtual Education | ✓ | ✓ |
| Assessment and Accountability Requirements with District Where Student is Enrolled | ✓ | ✓ |
| Separate Virtual Program Performance Reporting for Assessment and Accountability | X | ✓ |
| Course Development by Approved Online Providers | ✓ | ✓ |
| Taught by Wyoming Certified Teachers | ✓ | ✓ |
| Aligned to Wyoming Standards | ✓ | ✓ |
| Educators Employed By Wyoming Districts | ✓ | ✓ |

| Recommendation | Current Model | Proposed Revisions |
|---|---------------|--------------------|
| Virtual Education Certification from PTSB | X | X |
| Required Annual Professional Development for Virtual Education Educators | X | ✓ |
| Districts Collect Enrollment Fees for Brick and Mortar Courses for Full-Time Virtual Education Students Without Impacting District Revenues | X | ✓ |
| Milestone Simplification | X | ✓ |
| Create A Seat-Time Equivalency To Measure Student Progress and Funding | X | ✓ |
| Memorandums of Understanding Required | ✓ | X |
| Distance Learning Plan Required | ✓ | X |

Additional Programmatic Recommendations

The task force is making several general recommendations to be considered. Key recommendations include:

1. Create an advisory panel to continuously monitor the state of virtual education and act in an advisory capacity to districts;
2. Remove postsecondary institutions from the requirements associated with the K-12 virtual education system;
3. The terms “resident district” and “nonresident district,” create confusion in determining who is accountable for the online student. The current definition of these terms can be

found in W.S.21-13-330 (iii-iv). The task force recommends removing these terms and redefining them in terms of where students receive a majority of their instruction.

Legislative Action

Many of the task force recommendations will require changes to statute and rules. A complete list of the recommendations with their associated legislative action is listed in Appendix F of the full report. There is one appropriations request for the state hosted learning management system (LMS). The WDE estimates \$250,000 would be needed per biennium to ensure all students in the state would have access to the system containing all course and instructional content associated with virtual education courses.