



# Wyoming Department of Education

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Joint Education Committee

**FROM:** Jim McBride Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Public Instruction

**DATE:** November 7, 2007

**SUBJECT:** Recommendation on Distance Education Programs in  
Accordance with House Bill 0115, Section 301

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### **Recommendation on Distance Education Programs In Accordance with House Bill 0115, Section 301**

I commend the Distance Education Task Force (DETF) and its collective efforts to meet the goals outlined in House Bill (HB) 0115, Section 301. The seven member DETF team's diversity coalesced around the need to provide Wyoming students a quality "opportunity for achievement through rigor, relevant coursework delivered via emerging 21<sup>st</sup> century distance learning programming in conjunction with local schools." I applaud and support the efforts of the Task Force.

I support and ask the Joint Education Committee (JEC) to recommend the following:

1. Accept the DETF recommendations and require the Superintendent of Public Instruction to construct Rules and Regulations concerning the implementation of Distance Education (DE) Program policies and procedures.
2. Add to the District Assurances Report (WDE Form 604), submitted by each school district, a written compliance measure reportable to the WDE concerning its involvement in DE programs.
3. Delegate the funding mechanism to the state's School Foundation Program consultants for further study and recommendations based upon the cost-based model.

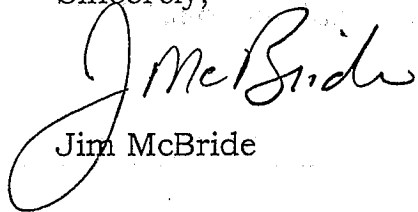
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4. Provide manpower and operational resources to the WDE for the oversight management of the DE programs.

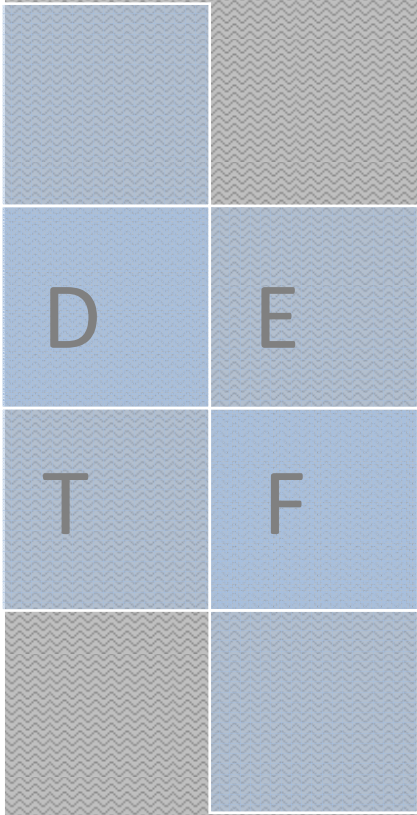
Distance learning opportunities, especially online learning, are growing across the country. According to Dr. Tim Snyder's article, *Online Education Closing Opportunity Gaps*, in the *PRISM* Spring 2007 edition, "There are now more than 500,000 K-12 enrollments in online courses across the nation and more than two million enrollments in colleges and universities." (Vol. 7, No. 1, page 8). In the *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning, A Review of State-Level Policy and Practice, October 2006*, report, "Michigan passed a law creating an online experience requirement for high school graduation." (page 7)

Our vision is to create a viable DE program benefiting all of Wyoming's students. I look forward to working closely with each member of the JEC and other legislators, State Board, local boards, district administrators and WDE staff as we collectively build a rigorous, relevant and high quality DE program.

Sincerely,



Jim McBride



# Report from the Wyoming Distance Education Task Force

Concerning recommendations on state oversight, assistance and guidance for the development, operation and funding of Distance Education Programs by school districts as extensions to or a component of public school education programs.

Presented to: SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION  
Jim McBride, Ed.D.

*AS REQUIRED BY HOUSE BILL 0115*

*September, 2007*

### ***Wyoming Distance Education Task Force Members***

Pamala Anderson	State Board of Education
Susan Kinneman	Superintendent, Fremont School District #2
Roger Larsen	Principal, Wyoming Virtual School
Gene M. Meier	Superintendent, Charter High School
Cristy McBee	Kindergarten Teacher and Board Member, Sweetwater School District #1
Peter Hawkins	French Teacher, Sheridan School District #2
Timothy Snyder	Executive Director Emeritus, Colorado Online Learning

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# Report from the Wyoming Distance Education Task Force

## A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite the best efforts of policymakers and supportive funding models, wide variances in the breadth and scope of course offerings still exist among Wyoming schools challenged with geographic isolation and the economic disadvantages common to small schools. However, new and evolving technologies offer a substantive means to reduce these gaps in student opportunity.

Wyoming House Bill 0115 requires the state superintendent to study and develop recommendations on distance education programs and to establish a task force for this purpose. Facilitated by Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) staff, the seven-member Distance Education Task Force (DETF) met during the months of May-August, 2007 to develop a vision and recommendations.

Their proposed vision emphasizes student-centered equity and opportunity, achievement, rigor, relevancy, collaboration with local schools, choice and flexibility, quality assurance, local control and emerging 21st century distance learning tools.

To accomplish the elements of this vision, the DETF recommends the continuance of the WEN Video Network, AND the development of a Wyoming Switchboard Network (WSN), facilitated and monitored by the WDE, wherein districts could develop and host distance education (online and other media) courses that would be used by students to supplement the curricula of their resident districts.

The development and hosting of the supplemental courses would be funded by an expansion of the current Distance Learning Incentive fund, the increase of which is needed to, 1) provide for more statewide use, and 2) compensate host districts for their costs in procuring or designing courses, training teachers for design and at-a-distance pedagogy, obtaining course accreditation, and delivering the courses via necessary technology platforms.

The DETF also recommends the state allow the opportunity for districts to create and host full-time virtual schools of choice for statewide students, without regard to district boundaries, as long as resident districts have an option to contract for services with host districts on behalf of participating students. Recognizing that distance education funding is primarily from the foundation program, W.S. 21-13-309, based on ADM accountability, a state-minimum ADM is proposed for virtual students, and a Memorandum of

Understanding structure wherein it is expected that 80% of the minimum ADM would go to the host district, and 20% retained by the resident district for collaborative support services.

The DETF recommends a student Distance Learning Plan, integrated as a part of the student's overall Individual Learning Plan, wherein the student, parents, resident, and host district document course goals and performance benchmarks for students, as well as associated systems designed to facilitate student achievement.

This report gives important national, and state contextual information, as well as the innovations that would make Wyoming's approach to distance education a national model of excellence for distance learning—the switchboard concept, collaboration among brick/mortar and distance education programs, distance learning plans, memoranda of understanding, and state/district funding structures.

Definitions and prospective organizational roles are outlined, including the responsibilities of the WDE in ensuring proper accreditation and adherence to state standards of all distance education program coursework, and the responsibilities of the resident and host districts in facilitating student achievement and assessment.

Critical discussion points are also included for the consideration of policymakers and other stakeholders. The discussion points include local control vs. state oversight, access and quality, implications of competition and choice, institutional challenges, home school students, court-ordered placement and detention students, vendor participation, teacher-pupil ratios, virtual school names, and teacher compensation. Equality—and quality—of opportunities for all its students were the overriding concerns of the DETF.

*We want to devise a common sense approach to distance education for Wyoming...one where students' opportunities to learn are at the core.*

Teri Wigert, Director  
Technology, Careers, and Data  
Wyoming Department of Education

## B. OVERVIEW

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### 1. Background

1.1 Wyoming's sparse population and extended distances have always challenged schools in offering a full range of educational choices to their students. It is well known that the lack of economies of scale of small schools operating in remote regions has historically prohibited the same range of course offerings as those offered in larger schools. This presents a significant gap in educational opportunity.

1.2 The work directed by the Wyoming Supreme Court in *Campbell County v. State*, 907 P.2d 1238 (Wyo. 1995) has prompted further contemplation of equality of educational opportunity, resulting in, among other things, implementation of the Wyoming Education Technology Plan, which led to the development of the Wyoming Equality Network (WEN).

1.3 Despite the best efforts of policymakers and supportive funding models, however, wide variances in the breadth and scope of course offerings still exist between schools in the state. Extreme variations of school populations, lack of economies of scale in very small schools, distances between schools, lack of facility space, and the challenges involved with scheduling synchronous, real-time classes contribute to these variances.

1.4 New and evolving technologies offer a substantive means to reduce those gaps in student opportunity. WEN Video has played an important role in this, as has the Wyoming e-Academy of Virtual Education. Their initial successes have prompted further thought about how advancing technology could be used to create more distance education options for Wyoming students; particularly those based on asynchronous delivery models, thereby offering more flexible scheduling features.

1.5 The need for comprehensive state policy that supports and guides these efforts is evidenced by the state audits/issues in Kansas, Colorado, Idaho and elsewhere. The 2006 opening of the Wyoming Virtual School in Gillette, a full-time online school for K-6 students residing in Campbell County, has also raised questions concerning the scope of distance education and the state policy structures that should be considered.

1.6 There are many elements to this discussion—access and equity, quality and accountability, costs and funding, the needs of traditional students and schools, assessment, and organizational roles, to name a few. It is a challenging task to balance Wyoming's long-held traditions of independence and local control with new educational options that lend themselves to statewide delivery. Key to this effort will be policies that foster quality, equity, access, adequacy and effectiveness in ensuring the best possible innovations for Wyoming students.

1.7 These conversations serve as a backdrop to the legislation outlined below, and the report that follows.

### 2. Legislation

2.1 Wyoming House Bill 0115, passed in 2007, requires the state superintendent to study and develop recommendations on distance education programs and to establish a task force for this purpose. Specifically,

*The state superintendent of public instruction shall in consultation with a task force established for this purpose, develop recommendations on state oversight, assistance and guidance for the development, operation and funding of distance education programs by school districts as extensions to or a component of public school education programs. For purposes of this section, virtual school programs for grades kindergarten through twelve (12) shall be included as a distance education program.*

2.2 HB 0115 outlined the following areas for the DETF to suggest recommended changes in policy and practice:

- a) The assignment of responsibility for distance education program content and student performance, and accountability measures which are attached to the assigned responsibility.

- b) A process which:
  - i) Assures distance education programs provide the required statewide educational program prescribed by W.S. 21-9-101 and 21-9-102(b) in accordance with statewide program standards developed under W.S. 21-2-304(a)(iii);
  - ii) Delegates appropriate supervision of student progress; and
  - iii) Addresses student performance requirements under W.S. 21-2-304(a)(v) and the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.
- c) The identification of eligible providers of distance education programs and specifically, virtual education programs;
- d) A process for the integration of distance education programs into the regular public school education program which equates the relationship to traditional education program delivery and the weight toward achieving student learning goals and statewide educational requirements;
- e) A funding mechanism which incorporates distance education programs within the Wyoming education resource block grant model.

2.3 The legislation directs the state superintendent to report his findings and recommendations to the Joint Education Interim Committee (JEC) on or before October 1, 2007; and directs the JEC to present recommendations, including necessary enabling legislation, to the legislature at the 2008 budget session.

### 3. Distance Education Task Force (DETF)

3.1 As per HB 0115, the state superintendent appointed the following seven task force members:

<b>Pamala Anderson</b>	Member of the State Board of Education
<b>Susan Kinneman</b>	Representative of Wyoming school districts
<b>Roger Larsen</b>	Representative of home schools
<b>Gene Meier</b>	Representative of charter schools
<b>Cristy McBee</b>	Parent of a school age child
<b>Peter Hawkins</b>	Wyoming teacher with experience in distance education programs
<b>Timothy Snyder</b>	Representative of distance education service providers

3.2 See Appendix A for brief biographical summaries on each member.

3.3 The DETF was facilitated by WDE Distance Education Supervisor Chuck Mitchell and Administrative Assistant Paula Smith, with advisement by Technology, Careers and Data Unit Director Teri Wigert and Education Consultant Scott Bullock.

3.4 *It is noted that the DETF was very pleased with the expertise and personal attention of the WDE staff in assisting this work.*



3.5 The following addressed the DETF at different stages of its work:

Dr. Jim McBride, Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Dr. Mohamed Salih, Business, Agriculture and Technology Dean at Laramie County Community College  
Joe Simpson, Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Joseph Rust, Court Ordered Placement of Students Program Consultant  
Fred Hansen, Finance Unit Director  
Grady Prince, Section Supervisor, School Foundation Program  
Lacy Krakow, WDE Hathaway Program Consultant and ACT/WorkKeys Facilitator  
Gordon Knopp, Director, Laramie County School District 1 Department of Technology  
Deane Skinner, Technology Coordinator, Laramie County School District 2

3.6 DETF members traveled to Cheyenne on four separate occasions (two days each in May, June, July and August) and spent 70+ hours in meetings plus additional time at-a-distance in study and electronic correspondence to accomplish their work.

## 4. Distance Education Overview

4.1 Distance education is defined as teaching whereby the instructor and student are connected by alternative delivery media. This can include:

- a) Traditional correspondence courses utilizing paper-, audio- and/or video-based formats,
- b) Instructional television with or without interactive conferencing features, and
- c) Online education utilizing Internet resources and functionalities in full-time, part-time, or hybrid models.
  - i) Full-time models provide all of a student's instructional content leading to advancement to the next grade or a high school diploma.
  - ii) Part-time models are designed to supplement the coursework available at a student's traditional school.
  - iii) Hybrid models involve the integration of one or more distance education formats into traditional classroom settings.

4.2 In each format, a teacher presents instructional content from a distance, and evaluates student performance via assessments monitored by local school staffs or controlled via electronic means.

4.3 The advantages and disadvantages of each model can relate to cost, availability, delivery mechanisms, applicability to student need and learning style, onsite scheduling, required professional development, facilities, and instructional timelines/pacing.

## 5. National, Regional, and State Contexts

5.1 Distance education is rapidly changing the face of public education in the nation—particularly with the advent of evolving technologies.

5.2 As noted in the 2006 Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning report,

*Online learning continues to grow rapidly across the country as an increasing number of educators and policymakers recognize the benefits of learning unconstrained by time and place. As of September 2006, 38 states have either state-led online learning programs, significant policies regulating online education, or both.<sup>1</sup>*

5.3 The report spotlights the following states that created new state-led programs and/or passed significant new laws in late 2005 or 2006<sup>2</sup>:

- a) Michigan passed a law creating an online learning experience requirement for high school graduation.
- b) Georgia passed a law allowing cyber-charter schools.
- c) North Carolina created the North Carolina Virtual Public School.
- d) Missouri passed a law to create a new state-led program that will include both full-time and part-time students in grades K-12.
- e) Washington issued guidelines for its “alternative learning experience” policies, which govern most online learning programs in the state.

5.4 Michigan lawmakers emphasized the transitions to post-secondary training and the work place as drivers for its online learning experience requirement. Its website notes,

*Thirty-eight million fulltime workers in the nation have Internet access at their jobs and two-thirds of them (67%) go online at least once per day. Seventy-two percent of full-time workers with Internet access at work say it has improved their ability to do their jobs. . . Completing a meaningful online learning experience in grades 9-12 will allow students to become familiar with the key means of increasing their own learning skills and knowledge. It also will prepare them for the demands they will encounter in higher education, the work-place, and personal lifelong learning. . . To give our students an experience of learning in a virtual world, the online learning experience is included in the Michigan Merit Curriculum requirements.<sup>3</sup>*

5.5 Washington exemplifies the flexibility being provided by states to distance education modeling. It defines alternative learning experiences (ALE) as,

*. . . learning experiences for public school students that are primarily characterized by learning activities that occur away from the regular public school classroom setting. The specific requirements and expectations of these away-from-school learning activities are detailed in a written student learning plan (WSLP) developed and supervised by a public school teacher.<sup>4</sup>*

5.6 Washington has also recognized the ways in which online programs challenge policy mechanisms that were created for distance learning provided by non-online means, and recently updated its ALE requirements to be applicable to online programs.

5.7 Each of the states contiguous to Wyoming has utilized traditional distance education formats over the years, and the following summarizes their activity in online learning.

5.8 **North Dakota.** The Division of Independent Study (an agency of state government) offers both online and print courses that are self-paced. It began in 1996 and had 5,000 course registrations during the 06/07 school year.<sup>5</sup>

5.9 **South Dakota.** House Bill 1236, signed in March 2006, establishes the state virtual high school and creates systems and requirements for other distance learning providers.<sup>6</sup>

5.10 **Nebraska.** Distance education legislation was passed in 2006 which will increase bandwidth into schools; create a state-level Distance Education Council to broker and facilitate courses, administer learning management systems, and provide assistance to instructional design and best practices; and shift districts into an Educational Service Unit model which facilitates state funding and allows contracts with providers. In August 2007, Nebraska completed Phase I of a three-phase project to update aging JPEG videoconferencing equipment and connect all schools to a high bandwidth IP-network. Current online programs include Westside Virtual High School and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Independent Study High School, which includes some supplemental online courses in its correspondence course program.<sup>7</sup>

5.11 **Colorado.** House Bill 07-1066 grants \$480,000 to the Mountain Board of Cooperative Services to contract with a state provider of supplemental online courses.<sup>8</sup> Colorado Online Learning, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, was awarded the contract. COL courses were used by 1300 students and 94 school districts in the 06/07 school year. Senate Bill 07-215 provides a certification and accountability structure for full-time online schools.<sup>9</sup> There were over 7,000 full-time online students in 2006-07. A legislative audit found significant variances in quality among the full-time online schools.<sup>10</sup>

5.12 **Utah.** During the 06/07 school year, the Utah Electronic School, started in 1994, granted 16,119 quarter credits to 6,356 students. It offers 300 courses that are funded via annual state appropriation. Three districts have formed the Utah Online Academies—full-time online schools.<sup>11</sup>

5.13 **Idaho.** The Idaho Digital learning Academy, started in 2002, had 3,682 course registrations from 2,760 unique students in the 06/07 school year. It offers 85 courses that are funded via state appropriation and \$50 course fees. Three statewide cyberschools offer full-time online programs.<sup>12</sup> A legislative audit reported that vague statutory definitions have led to variations in key areas of virtual school operations.<sup>13</sup>

5.14 **Montana.** Districts may receive or provide distance learning, and may receive supplemental distance learning instruction without restriction. The Montana Schools E-Learning Consortium is a group of districts working together to provide online learning opportunities.<sup>14</sup>

## 6. Wyoming's History of Success in Distance Education

6.1 Distance education has a history of success in Wyoming, and the following are given as examples of applications currently being used by Wyoming schools:

- a) The Wyoming Equality Network (WEN) Video system exists as one solution to help provide equity for all of the students of Wyoming. Using this system, students supplement their local curricular offerings by taking courses from teachers elsewhere in Wyoming. The courses are synchronous, but asynchronous instructional assistance can also occur via the internet. The WEN Video has been in place since 1999. Although information is incomplete because some schools schedule directly with other schools without going through the state scheduling system, there were at least eight high school classes taught over the WEN Video during fall-semester 2006 (French, Russian and Spanish sections) that were accessed by 91 students. These data do not include the 11 fall-semester 2006 dual-credit courses or the 14 college courses taught over the WEN Video during that same period. The average total hourly videoconferencing usage during the school year routinely exceeds 3000 hours per month. Included are the credit courses, continuing education/staff development events, meeting/conferences and special events connecting to out-of-state entities such as MOTE Marine Laboratory in Sarasota Florida and the Hubble Space Telescope Project in Baltimore Maryland
- b) The Wyoming e-Academy of Virtual Education (WeAVE) is hosted by the Fort Washakie Charter High School, and has two main components. The full-time model combines online and traditional, face-to-face instruction for students working towards a diploma, and enrollment has averaged 50 students per year. The part-time model offers a full high school curriculum to statewide students, and about 100 students are registered by their schools at any given time. In the three years of its operation, approximately 1300 students from 14 school districts have taken advantage of WeAVE programming. WeAVE is accredited by NCA and CITA, and employs four onsite teachers and ten offsite online teachers, all of them Wyoming certified and highly qualified in terms of NCLB definition.
- c) The Wyoming Virtual School (WyVS) opened its doors in the fall of 2006 to K-6 students residing in Campbell County. A Wyoming-certified teacher works with students and parents to facilitate the full-time curriculum within their homes in a distance education format. Students receive a full set of curricular materials, including a computer and printer, to aid in instruction via email, phone calls, chat rooms, streaming audio, and some face-to-face meetings. Twenty students were enrolled for the 2006-07 school year.

- d) Traditional, paper-based correspondence courses have been used for many years by Wyoming schools for students needing to make up high school credit for graduation. Examples include University of Nebraska and University of North Dakota high school correspondence courses.
- e) Some high schools, particularly in alternative education formats, are using curriculum software and web-based applications to offer credit recovery and tutorial coursework. Examples include NovaNet, A+, and Plato.
- f) Some high schools are also using online courses imported from out-of-state providers to supplement local course offerings. Examples include Apex, Aventa, and BYU courses.
- g) Dual-credit courses are offered by community colleges in online and instructional television formats, and utilized by students seeking to earn college credit while still in high school.

## 7. Preliminary DETF Discussion Parameters

- a) The overarching focus of the WDE and DETF was to ensure Wyoming students and schools receive the highest-quality programming and processes in increasing distance education program opportunities.
- b) An operational parameter given at the beginning of the work was that the DETF could explore any means for delivering distance education program services to Wyoming students with the single exception that creating a state school for virtual education was not a viable option.
- c) The DETF did not address dual-credit courses taught in conjunction with post-secondary institutions in that the work of the DETF was specific to the K-12 environment.
- d) A working draft of possible policies was given by WDE staff as a starting point for DETF work.

## 8. DETF Discussion and Work Outline

8.1 WDE facilitator Chuck Mitchell expertly guided the DETF through the below components of discussion and work:

- a) Developing a recommended vision for distance education programs in Wyoming.
- b) Developing a recommended state paradigm for distance education programs, complete with state and district roles and responsibilities.
- c) Determining a recommended funding mechanism for distance education program components.
- d) Developing recommendations on state oversight, assistance and guidance for the development, operation and funding of distance education programs by school districts as extensions to or a component of public school education programs.

8.2 WDE arranged for a number of recognized experts in various areas to present information and respond to questions. Among those was an excellent keynote presentation by Dr. Mohamed Salih, Dean of Business, Agriculture and Technology at Laramie County Community College, wherein he emphasized the need for quality in all distance education program opportunities. Joe Simpson, Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction, offered four key words to the DETF in its deliberations—equity, access, adequacy and effectiveness.

*Distance education is a forward step into lifelong learning.*

Chuck Mitchell, Supervisor  
Distance Education  
Wyoming Department of Education

## C. RECOMMENDATIONS

The DETF proposes the following recommendations in support of the application of distance education in Wyoming. Appendix B defines many of the specific terms used throughout this section.

### 1. Vision

1.1 After considerable discussion, the DETF's recommended vision for a distance education program is:

1.2 *All students shall gain greater equity of access and opportunity for achievement through rigorous, relevant coursework delivered via emerging 21st century distance learning programming in conjunction with local schools. Students shall experience increased choice and flexibility within state and local policy structures that assure high-quality education while honoring local control.*

This vision emphasizes the following key words and phrases:

*Students*

*Greater equity of access and opportunity*

*Achievement*

*Rigor and relevancy*

*Emerging 21st century distance learning programming*

*Collaboration with local schools*

*Student choice and flexibility*

*State and local policy structures*

*Quality assurance*

*Local Control*

### 2. Distance Education Program Components

2.1 The DETF recommends the following components of distance education programming in Wyoming:

#### **Category 1: Traditional distance education programming**

2.2 Paper-based and other traditional correspondence-type courses should be allowed to be used, and funded, by schools and students as they have been in the past.

2.3 The video conferencing component of the Wyoming Equality Network (WEN) Video should be continued and nurtured, along with its Distance Learning Incentive grant funding.

2.4 Districts and schools, particularly those using alternative education formats, should be allowed to use and pay for curriculum software and web-based applications to offer credit recovery and tutorial coursework as they have in the past.

2.5 Districts and schools should be allowed to approve and use distance education program courses imported from out-of-state providers to supplement local course offerings as they have in the past. However, there would be no additional level of state funding support for these district-approved courses.

2.6 Dual-credit courses offered by community colleges in online and instructional television formats, and utilized by students seeking to earn college credit while still in high school, should be allowed to be used and funded as they have been in the past; i.e., subject to the policies and procedures of the student's school district and post-secondary institution.

### **Category 2: Distance Education Programs that supplement or replace local curricula.**

2.7 These are commonly referenced as supplemental and full-time distance education programming.

2.8 Students generally access *supplemental* courses from their local "resident" district during the regular school day for the purposes of, 1) taking classes not offered at their local school (languages, AP courses, or other enrichment courses), 2) making up credit, 3) resolving scheduling conflicts, or 4) for other reasons due to the unique circumstances of the school or student. The supplemental courses would be developed and/or procured and taught by Wyoming teachers from a "host" district.

2.9 A *full-time* distance education component would involve students being allowed to choose a full-time distance education program instead of having to attend their resident districts. Students in this category would access their full-time coursework from home or other location and be taught at-a-distance by teachers hired by the full-time distance education program hosted by a Wyoming district. The resident district could provide some services to the student, and the ADM would be divided by the resident and host districts.

2.10 Students desiring full-time distance education learning formats would be required to first contact their resident districts to determine availability and/or desire of district to provide the requested distance education programming. The resident district would have the choice of, 1) providing their own distance education programming, 2) contracting with a host district to provide the distance education program for the resident district student, or 3) removing the student from resident district rolls, and allowing the student to enroll directly with a host district providing a full-time distance education program.

2.11 The following roles and responsibilities are recommended for the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE), resident districts, and host districts in implementing distance education programming involving online and/or other media that supplements or replaces local curricula. It is recognized that the roles and responsibilities could also encompass some of the components of traditional distance education programming.

2.12 **Wyoming Department of Education Roles and Responsibilities.** The WDE should provide guidance and oversight of distance education programs in Wyoming by establishing, facilitating, and monitoring a state network of providers of distance education (online and other media) courses that meet state-established guidelines for course content and delivery via Wyoming-licensed teachers. **The network would be called the Wyoming Switchboard Network (WSN).**

#### **Wyoming Switchboard Network (WSN)**

*A state network of distance education program providers that meet state-established guidelines for course content and delivery via Wyoming licensed teachers*

*Evoking images of Ma Bell operators, the WSN could operate as a network of schools in delivering and accessing distance education program courses designed to supplement a student's learning experiences, thereby increasing a school's ability to offer a full range of course options to its students. WDE staff and a portal website would act as the "operator." The host-district teachers and resident-district students would be the communicating parties. Necessary infrastructure—policy framework, template forms, training, technical assistance, web site, and facilitation—would be provided by WDE staff.*

*All distance education programs would be required to work through the WSN.*

2.13 In addition, the WDE would:

- a) Develop standards/guidelines pertaining to distance education programs, including Wyoming teacher certification, student and course accountability, distance education pedagogy, professional development requirements, and course delivery methods.
- b) Develop a policy framework and template for an individual student Distance Learning Plan (DLP). This is a critical element of the distance education program. It ties the student, teacher, resident district and host district into a binding contract on behalf of the student, the student's resources, to include a mentor, and the student's accountability to both the instructor and the resident district. The students' DLP shall be designed for a period not to exceed one year, and shall be integrated into the student's overall Individual Learning Plan (ILP). The DLP shall contain, at a minimum, the following information:
  - i) Student demographic information to include the student's Wyoming Integrated Statewide Education Record Identifier (WISER ID) identification.
  - ii) A syllabus for each distance education course to include the course description, start and end dates, and performance expectations with periodic benchmarks established by the host district's course(s) instructor to measure student progress.
  - iii) Reason for the student's enrollment into the distance education program and the student's expected outcome.
  - iv) Clearly outlined process concerning where and how to send information requested by the instructor or student, to include necessary due dates.
  - v) The name and position of the resident district's designee and/or the student's mentor/tutor throughout the duration of the distance education course(s); and, by what medium to communicate progress reports.
  - vi) The agreed distance education course completion status report (numeric grade, pass/fail, etc), the amount of credit to be achieved by the student upon successful course completion, and that will be entered into the student's permanent transcript by the resident district.
- c) Develop a policy framework, including a mediation process, and a template for an inter-district Memoranda of Understanding (MOU). The MOU used for distance education programs is intended to be an agreement between the host and resident districts to ensure that students receive the highest quality distance education programming possible. It should set forth the terms to which the parties should adhere. The MOU should:
  - i) Be initiated by the host district and be on file at both the host and resident districts.
  - ii) Be the funding agreement between the resident and host district, and be signed by the host and resident district's Business Manager in accordance with district policies.
  - iii) Consist of, but not be limited to, identifying the resident and host district administration's point of contact, the name(s) of the student(s) involved in the distance education program(s), a beginning and completion date for each distance education program, payment due dates, and payment method.
  - iv) Be informed by the student's DLP. A single MOU could address multiple DLP's.
  - v) Apportion the responsibility for ensuring that each student has access to the appropriate electronic equipment, connectivity, funding, and resources needed to participate in the distance education program(s).

- d) Create and maintain a state portal website for the WSN. The website would include a consolidated guide of available distance learning programming opportunities and resources available to students, parents and districts.
- e) Create and maintain staffing adequate to providing training and technical assistance needed by host and resident districts to participate in the WSN.
- f) Create template mid- and end-of-course surveys and collect data as needed to monitor and improve distance education programming.
- g) Create and implement a comprehensive reports process that would meet state and federal reporting requirements and funding measures.
- h) Monitor the design, content and delivery of distance education coursework, and the capacity and implementation planning of the host district. This could include on-site visits to both host and resident districts, and a methodical distance learning product scrutiny.
- i) Monitor the accreditation of distance education programs.
- j) Institute a complaint-resolution process whereby concerned individuals and schools could receive needed assistance in resolving any issues resulting from the delivery of distance education courses.
- k) Remain current and inform districts concerning trends and use of distance learning media and programming, to include but not limited to videoconferencing courses, correspondence courses, audio courses, Internet Protocol (IP) courses and/or any combination, hybrid, initiative instrumented by the host district course instructor.
- l) Maintain the intrastate Wyoming Equality Network (WEN) and its videoconferencing provider the WEN Video.
- m) Annually survey district superintendents concerning their distance learning needs and instructional availability to a single point-of-contact in an effort to provide the basket-of-goods to all Wyoming K-12 students.

**2.14 Host District Roles and Responsibilities.** School districts would host the providers; i.e., contract with distance education program teachers, supervise course development, provide an interactive technology platform, monitor instruction, provide ongoing information to all stakeholders, collaborate with districts registering students in the courses, and provide reports to the state as required. In the performance of these responsibilities, host districts would:

- a) Ensure that their distance education courses meet or exceed uniform Wyoming standards for educational programs prescribed under W.S. 21-9-101 and 21-9-102, and that they meet the standards set forth by the Wyoming Success Curriculum.
- b) Document the content standards being met by the course, in accordance with W.S. 21-9-101(a), and include benchmarks and guidelines throughout the coursework explicitly defining mandatory milestones and required contact time by the student in order to successfully complete the course.
- c) Ensure the distance education courses meet or exceed WDE standards/guidelines pertaining to distance education programs, including Wyoming teacher certification, student and course accountability, distance education pedagogy, and course delivery methods.



- d) Provide adequate professional development for distance educators, the pre-service components of which should be completed prior to the course(s) beginning date.
- e) Assist in the completion of the supplemental student's Distance Learning Plan (DLP) in collaboration with the resident district official, the student, and parent or legal guardian.
- f) Facilitate the development of the full-time distance education student's DLP in collaboration with the student, parent, and resident district. The requirement to collaborate with the resident district is not necessary if the resident district chooses to not negotiate an MOU.
- g) Limit Distance Education class sizes to 25 students per course section or elementary grade, recognizing that low class sizes can positively impact student achievement.
- h) Report course completion status, numeric grade and/or class ranking to the designated resident district official at the completion of the distance education program in accordance with the student DLP.
- i) In collaboration with the resident district, institute mid- and end-of-course surveys evaluating the DE program/course from the teacher, student and parent perspective. Report survey results to the WDE on an annual basis.
- j) In collaboration with the resident district, ensure that the needs of all students are met, including special education, gifted and talented, and at-risk students.
- k) Be responsible for student performance, state assessment results, and accountability for all students enrolled in their full-time distance education programming, regardless of whether or not there was a contract for services with the resident district.
- l) Ensure the accreditation of their distance education programs. Acceptable accreditation shall be approved by the WDE.

2.15 **Resident District Roles and Responsibilities.** Districts in which the student physically resides would advise students of educational opportunities via distance education program(s), and would appoint staff to:

- a) Register students in available distance education program(s).
- b) Facilitate the completion of a Distance Learning Plan in conjunction with the Individual Learning Plan for each participating student, in accordance with state-established criteria and in collaboration with the student, parent, and host district prior to entering the distance education program(s).
- c) Monitor student progress in collaboration with the host district to ensure the student is progressing in accordance with the terms of the student's DLP. In the case of supplemental programs, student performance and accountability should be the responsibility of the resident district. Each student participating in distance education program(s) should be evaluated, tested, and monitored, at a minimum, at the same intervals as other students in their grade level and in accordance with the resident district's assessment policies.
- d) Facilitate any needed instructional support. The resident district shall provide face-to-face mentoring services for distance education program students in accordance with the student's DLP. The mentor shall notify and assist the student who is not performing satisfactorily in the course, or fails to achieve the goals established in the DLP based upon the distance education course instructor's evaluation.

- e) Ensure the records of each student participating in distance education program(s) are maintained on a permanent basis by the resident district. The records shall include but not be limited to:
  - i) Attendance data, as reported by the host district to the resident district, in accordance with the student's DLP.
  - ii) The student's DLP.
  - iii) Test, evaluation, and statewide assessment results.
  - iv) Immunization records, as required by W.S. 21-4-309(a).
- f) Ensure each student participating in distance education program(s) resides within the state and meets the criteria for selection to participate as outlined in the student's DLP.
- g) Ensure that each student has access to the appropriate electronic equipment, connectivity, funding, and resources needed to participate in the distance education program(s). The host and resident districts should determine via the MOU process which entity shall provide the necessary equipment and connectivity for distance education program students not already having access.
- h) Verify that a prospective distance education program meets or exceeds uniform Wyoming standards for educational programs prescribed under W.S. 21-9-101 and W.S. 21-9-102, and that the program meets district standards.

### 3. Funding for Supplemental Distance Education Programming

3.1 For supplemental distance education programming, the expansion of distance education options via a state network of host districts would be dependent on the level of funding provided in the state's Distance Learning Incentive (DLI)—currently \$500 per student. The DETF feels that this level of funding would not be sufficient to encourage host districts to create and teach courses for use by other districts, and that \$850 would be a recommended amount to compensate for costs associated with course development and teacher training. It is further recommended that the \$850 be increased annually commensurate with the annual per cent increase in state education funding, or some other reasonable mechanism.

3.2 Hosting a distance education course for use by statewide students can be expensive and complex, and it is for these reasons that the DETF recommends an increased level of DLI funding. For example, the host district will either need to purchase an already-made distance education course, or develop its own. Either option is expensive in that there has to be an up-front investment by the host district in the purchase, or compensation to a teacher for developing the course utilizing technology platforms and functionalities. In most cases, it would be necessary to send teachers for the training necessary for designing courses suitable for distance education pedagogy. Then the teacher has to be trained in teaching at-a-distance, since national experience has shown that good on-site teachers are not necessarily good distance teachers, and vice-versa. Then the course should be taught to a select number of students on a test basis to ensure its quality for statewide use. The lack of economies-of-scale in Wyoming necessitates adequate funding to significantly broaden distance education opportunities for state students.

*Distance education options, including online courses, give us the capacity to close existing opportunity gaps for every student in the state.*

Dr. Tim Snyder, Member  
Distance Education Task Force

3.3 It is noted that, over time, the increased use of supplemental distance education program courses will also create a need for more money in the DLI fund.

3.4 Distance learning incentive funding would not be available for courses not hosted by Wyoming districts. Wyoming districts could contract with providers of supplemental distance education program courses not operating within the WSN, but costs for those outside courses would have to be borne by the district or student in accordance with district policies.

3.5 Distance learning incentive funding applies only to the supplemental distance education program environment. It should not be used to support full-time distance education program(s).

3.6 Full ADM should remain with the resident district in behalf of students participating in supplemental distance education programming.

3.7 Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) could be negotiated between host and resident districts to finalize agreements related to any special circumstances of the districts or students in accessing supplemental distance education coursework.

## 4. Funding for Full-Time Distance Education Programming

4.1 Funding for full-time distance education program students would be absorbed within the existing ADM structure.

4.2 ADM for full-time distance education students should be the minimum ADM awarded in behalf of Wyoming students. This would provide the same level of funding for all full-time distance education students, regardless of their district of residence, a model which is fairly consistent across the nation.

4.3 A student should be considered full-time when the distance education program course load equals or exceeds the resident district's traditional scheduled classes. In no case shall a distance education student be eligible for more than 1.0 ADM.

4.4 Although the student would have the choice of participating in a full-time distance education program, the resident district would retain the right to determine how the program would be financed. This means that the resident district chooses whether or not to negotiate an MOU with the host district.

4.5 Partnership model between the host district and resident district. The resident and host districts would negotiate their respective responsibilities and division of ADM based on the template MOU's created and made available by the WDE. It is anticipated that the typical division will be 80% of the distance education ADM sent by the resident district to the host district. The resident district would keep the remaining 20% for use in providing mentoring and state-testing services, extra- and co-curricular activities, fiscal accounting, special services, and other possible responsibilities; however, the two districts can negotiate the division based on the unique needs and circumstances of the student.

4.6 For example, the minimum ADM for the 06/07 school year was about \$10,800. A resident district contracting with a host district to provide full-time distance education programming could negotiate an 80% payment to that district, approximately \$8640, and retain 20%, or \$2160, for support services.

4.7 Host district model where the student has withdrawn from the resident district. A host district would receive 100% of the minimum ADM for those students whose resident districts have chosen to remove the student from their rolls and allow the student to enroll directly with a host district providing a full-time distance education program.

4.8 Self-contained model where the host district is delivering distance education services to its own resident student. It is recommended that students accessing distance education program courses hosted by their own (resident) districts be eligible for the full value of the resident district's ADM.

District A student attends District B full-time virtual school under MOU.	Districts A and B share state-minimum ADM.
District A student attends District B full-time virtual school without MOU support from District A. DLP documents the student's withdrawal from District A and full-time enrollment in District B.	District B receives 100% state-minimum ADM.
District A student attends District A full-time virtual school—no MOU necessary.	District A receives 100% ADM because student resides in district.

4.9 It is noted that some home and private school students may choose to enter the public-school environment via these options, thereby increasing the amount of state funding needed for the overall K-12 Foundation grant. That increase could be offset by the decrease in state funding occasioned by students changing from full to state-minimum ADM.

4.10 The DLI should not be available for full-time distance education students. DLI funds should be reserved for supplemental distance education program courses only. Students enrolled in distance education programs less than 100% of the time should be considered supplemental distance education program students.

4.11 Funding for full-time distance education program students should be based upon reports submitted by each district on schools operating within that district; and, awarded from the Wyoming education resource block grant model, in accordance with W.S. 21-13-306.

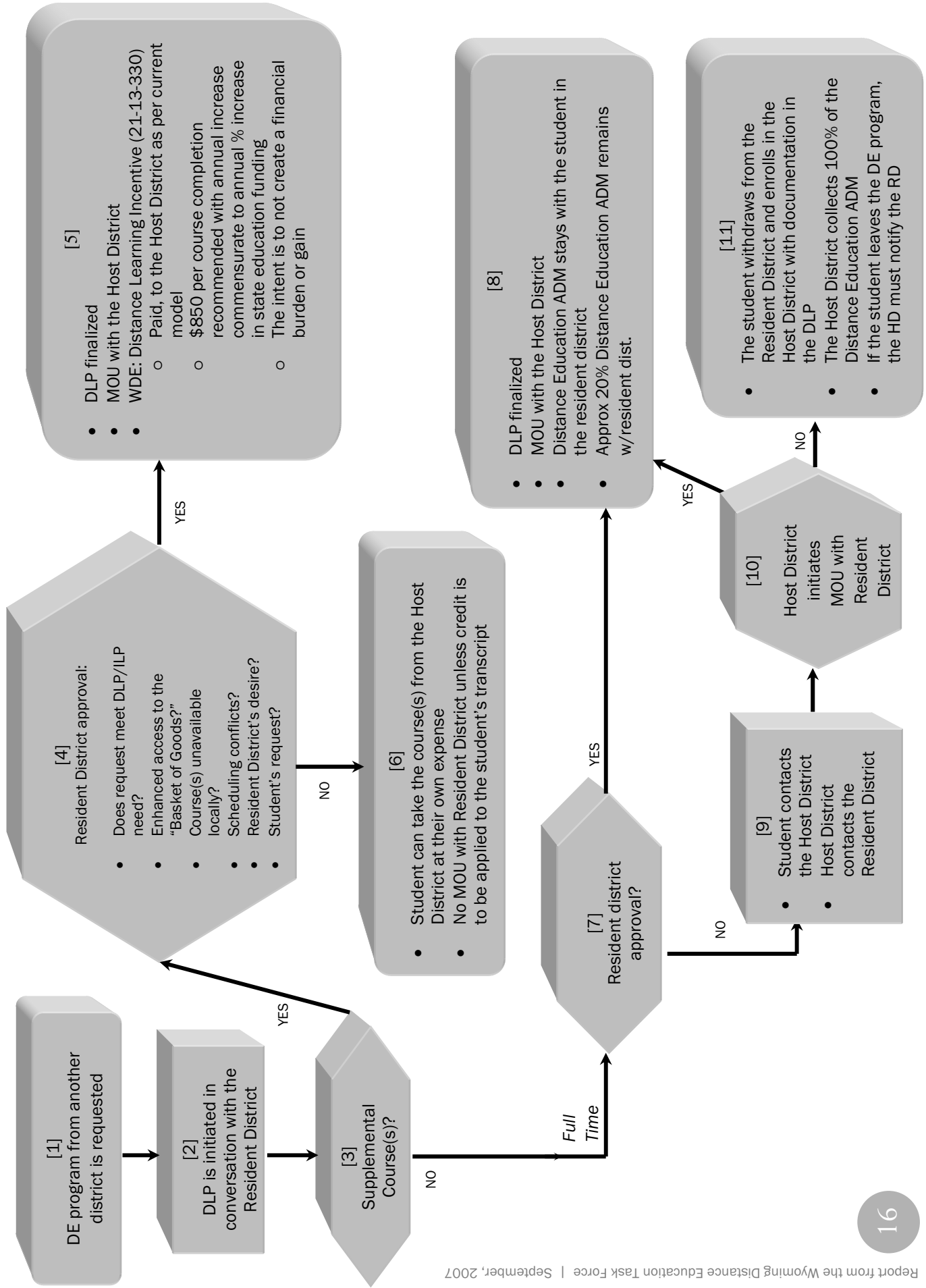
4.12 *The Distance Education Decision Flow Diagram on page 16 demonstrates the decision-making process involved with students desiring supplemental or full-time distance education programming.*



*The success of online learning programs. . . demonstrates that there is demand for educational options unconstrained by time and place.*

John Watson, Colorado Association of School Boards *PRISM* Spring 2007, p.7.

# 5. DISTANCE EDUCATION DECISION FLOW DIAGRAM



## 6. Attendance

6.1 Attendance in synchronous distance education program courses is not an issue since students are physically located in classrooms while accessing instruction. Attendance in an asynchronous supplemental distance education program course is generally not an issue because students typically access the courses from a traditional school setting. However, asynchronous formats for full-time distance education program students can be different in that the “any time, any pace, any place” capabilities of distance education programming can mean that students are completing coursework away from their traditional “seats.” The following recommendations pertain to attendance in distance education programming.

- a) A student enrolled in distance education program(s) should be deemed to satisfy compulsory attendance requirements in accordance with W.S. 21-4-102(a) by meeting the benchmarks of participation outlined in the student’s DLP.
- b) Full-time K-12 distance education program students should participate in a sufficient number of distance education courses/credits to meet state school attendance requirements pursuant to W.S. 21-4-101 through 21-4-107, and in compliance with the DLP and course requirements.
- c) A full-time distance education program student should be counted for ADM purposes so long as the student is provided with opportunity to receive a minimum of one hundred eighty-five (185) days or the number of days necessary to be equivalent as distance education program contact hours that are authorized under an alternative schedule approved by the state board as per W.S. 21-13-307(a)(ii).
- d) Documentation of student participation in distance education programs and other activities should include communications between and among teachers and students, including copies of e-mail messages and/or faxes, physical correspondence materials, documented participation in online or videoconferencing discussions and/or telephone calls, electronic logs of student activity in the course, or other evidence of participation as outlined in the student’s DLP.

## 7. Assessment and Adequate Yearly Process (AYP)

7.1 It is recommended that each student participating in distance education program(s) be subject to the Wyoming statewide assessments as required in W.S. 21-2-304(a)(v); and that the assessment be administered and monitored by a State-trained assessment administrator as per the student’s DLP and associated MOU. It is recommended that supplemental course students be counted toward the resident district’s AYP; and full-time students be counted toward the host district’s AYP.

7.2 Students enrolled in distance education programs would not be exempt from state, local or district assessments.

## 8. Teacher Certification

8.1 All teachers instructing distance education program courses should be currently certified to teach in Wyoming, endorsed within their content area and highly qualified. Upon verification by the Professional Teaching Standards Board (PTSB), the certification must be on file with the host district.

8.2 Teachers instructing distance education program courses in Wyoming shall be employed by a Wyoming school district, community college or the University of Wyoming. The employing institution is responsible for the authenticity of teacher credentials.

## 9. K-12 Full-Time Virtual Schools

9.1 A K-12 virtual school should only be established with the singular purpose of providing an alternative teaching medium by a school district. However, a K-12 virtual school should not be created whenever the district board, state board or the Department determines the virtual school's purpose is in direct conflict with the district board's or Department's mission.

9.2 A K-12 virtual school should be a public school within a school district, approved by the district board and shall adhere to the duties of the state superintendent's policies outlined in W.S. 21-2-202, the data collection outlined in W.S. 21-2-203 and to the state board policies outlined in W.S. 21-2-304, W.S. 21-2-305, W.S. 21-2-307, and shall be in compliance with applicable laws and requirements outlined by this document, The Education Laws of Wyoming (2005 Edition), the district board and other state and federal laws.

9.3 A K-12 virtual school may charge a fee. An MOU between the districts should be used to identify responsible parties.

9.4 Subject to the negotiated agreement between the host district and the K-12 virtual school, the K-12 virtual school's administration should be responsible for its operations, to include but not limited to budget, contracting services and materials, and personnel.

9.5 A K-12 virtual school's course should include benchmarks and guidelines for the student in order to meet the minimum contact time required within the student's DLP to successfully complete coursework.

9.6 A K-12 virtual school should not be considered an alternative school.

## 10. Miscellaneous Recommendations

10.1 Any modifications to the configuration of grades within the DE program in which student(s) are enrolled during any school year should be documented by the district and approved by the state superintendent per W.S. 21-13-309(iv)(C).

10.2 Districts are cautioned that distance education programs should not be used to create a "profit" for the district. Revenues derived from distance education program funding should be put back into the programming to enhance its quality. This caution should not restrict districts from contracting with outside providers.

10.3 Students taking additional distance education program courses beyond the recommended district's course load could be enabled to do so in accordance with district policies; however, the district would not necessarily be responsible for course fees. In no case should the district claim the student for more than one ADM.

10.4 *The DETF strongly urges consideration by host districts for awarding compensation to those teachers working extra-duty hours to prepare and teach distance education program courses in the supplemental environment. All too often, their unique skills and dedication are not recognized in a tangible way.*

## 11. Staffing

11.1 This report also describes a level of WDE staff support that suggests the need for additional staff.

11.2 It is expected that the Superintendent of Public Instruction will project enrollment, staffing and funding amounts associated with the above and attach them to this report.

*The WDE should provide guidance and oversight of distance education programs in Wyoming by establishing, facilitating, and monitoring a state network of providers of supplemental distance education courses that meet state-established guidelines for course content and delivery via Wyoming-licensed teachers.*

## D. HB 0115, SECTION 301 REQUIREMENT SUMMARY

The recommendations of this report address each of the tasks outlined in Section 301 of HB 0115, specifically:

<b>301(c)(i)</b> Assign responsibility for DE program content and student performance and accountability measures.	<b>Response:</b> Primary responsibility for DE program content rests with the host district. Primary responsibility for student performance and accountability stays with the resident district, except in the case of full-time distance education program students whose resident districts choose to not participate in an MOU with a host district.
<b>301(c)(ii)(A)</b> Assures DE programs provide the required statewide educational program prescribed by 21-9-101 & 21-9-102(b) and IAW 21-2-304(a)(iii).	<b>Response:</b> Primary responsibility for meeting requirements of statewide distance educational programming rests with the host districts, with oversight provided by WDE.
<b>301(c)(ii)(B)</b> Delegates appropriate supervision of student progress.	<b>Response:</b> Primary responsibility for supervision of student progress is with the resident district, except in the case of full-time distance education program students enrolled in a host district.
<b>301(c)(ii)(C)</b> Addresses student performance requirements IAW 21-2-304(a)(v) & the NCLB Act.	<b>Response:</b> Responsibility for student performance requirements rests with the resident district, except in the case of full-time distance education program students enrolled in a host district.
<b>301(c)(iii)</b> The identification of eligible providers of DE programs and specifically virtual education programs.	<b>Response:</b> Eligible providers of DE programs, including virtual education programs, are Wyoming districts.
<b>301(c)(iv)</b> A process for the integration of DE programs into the regular public school education program which equates the relationship to traditional education program delivery and the weight toward achieving student learning goals and statewide educational requirements.	<b>Response:</b> The proposed student's Distance Learning Plan (DLP) is the primary vehicle for ensuring the integration of DE programs in the regular public school education program.
<b>301(c)(v)</b> A funding model mechanism which incorporates DE programs within the WY education resource block grant model.	<b>Response:</b> The proposed funding mechanisms incorporate DE programs within the Wyoming education resource block grant model.
<b>301(d)</b> Include an assessment of the feasibility of offering quality K-12 DE programs that meet state education program standards in all subject areas.	<b>Response:</b> Via the paradigms described in this report, the DETF assesses that there are no limits to the feasibility of offering quality K-12 DE programs that meet state education program standards in all subject areas.



## E. INNOVATIONS

This report proposes a number of innovations that would uniquely serve Wyoming students and schools:

1. ***Wyoming Switchboard Network (WSN)***. The WSN could operate as a network of schools in delivering and accessing distance education program courses designed to supplement a student's learning experiences, thereby increasing a school's ability to offer a full range of course options to its students. WDE staff and a portal website would act as the "operator." The host-district teachers and resident-district students would be the communicating parties. Necessary infrastructure—policy framework, template forms, training, technical assistance, web site, and facilitation—would be provided by WDE staff. The switchboard would also connect students with opportunities for other distance education options. All distance education programs would be required to work through the WSN.

2. ***Collaboration and Coordination***. Requiring students to work through their resident districts provides for increased collaboration and coordination, particularly in the realm of full-time distance education learning. This facilitates choice while giving the resident district opportunity to work personally with students in developing more options for them. The objective is not choice for the sake of choice, but choice that leads to the best educational options for students. However, the DETF recommends that students and their parents have the final say in determining their choices. If adopted by the state, this paradigm for collaboration and coordination would be a national model.

3. ***Distance Learning Plan (DLP)***. A DLP, integrated into the student's overall Individual Learning Plan (ILP) and created in collaboration with the student, parent, resident district and host district will set the stage for successful completion of distance education program courses by establishing points of communication, expectations, benchmarks of success, and means of facilitation and ongoing course assessment. The DLP is a critical element for the distance education program's success.

4. ***Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)***. A well-executed MOU between resident and host districts will ensure the facilitation intended to enhance student success in distance education program courses.

5. ***Funding via the Distance Learning Incentive (DLI)***. Extending the present use of the DLI to additional tech-based distance education options provides a transition that will be familiar to Wyoming schools and their staffs.



*"Our biggest barrier is our memory of what schools look like. Those of us running the schools have a very strong memory of 'this is how a school looks, this is how it works.' And the system itself is designed to be very resistant to change. But the innovation and the change is going to come very naturally to our students, and if we are going to keep our students in school. . .we're going to have to make these jumps and these adaptations."*

Susan Patrick, President and CEO of North American Council for Online Learning, March 9, 2007  
presentation on School 2.0.

## F. CRITICAL ISSUES

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As is the nature of task force discussion about new and evolving policy areas, critical issues were raised that elicited in-depth conversation. The following are presented as samples of those issues:

1. **Local Control vs. State Oversight.** The desire of the DETF was to maximize local control while ensuring appropriate quality mechanisms for distance education programs that are delivered statewide via a switchboard concept; i.e., a good policy framework is critical when multiple stakeholders are involved.

2. **Access, Process and Quality.** This report strives for the right balance between access, process and quality. Stringent processes can lead to high quality experiences, but student access may be limited. Conversely, laissez-faire processes can lead to more access, but may negatively impact quality. Questions associated with this are:

- a) Is there enough incentive to prompt districts to host DE courses?
- b) Will districts use DE courses on behalf of their students?
- c) Will the switchboard concept adequately promote access by schools and students?

2.1 The recommendation for increased DLI funding is intended to help incent districts to develop and host distance education courses. It will take concerted efforts by districts to accomplish the complex tasks involved with developing courses using online and other media. If district costs aren't adequately compensated, then course development will be slow, and opportunities for state students limited.

3. **Competition and Choice Implications.** The recommended expansion in DE models has the potential to create competition among host districts in providing specific courses, but more particularly in the full-time arena as the door will be opened for full-time distance education program (particularly online programs) schools to market their models to students across the state. This creates a condition wherein district administrators will receive inquiries from their students about switching to virtual schools. Those students that opt for this choice could exacerbate the declining enrollment patterns already occurring in some Wyoming districts. This will, in turn, affect the funding available for students remaining in traditional programming. On the other hand, districts with high numbers of students opting for virtual schools should probably examine their local operations to determine why so many are opting out.

4. **Institutional Challenge.** It is recognized that the operations of school districts and their staffs are complex, and that the staffing and process changes required to implement new DE programming can be daunting. However, new opportunities occasioned by new technologies require forward-thinking and change if students are to be adequately prepared for post-secondary training and the work force. Again, the DETF strongly urges districts to compensate those teachers willing to learn and exercise new skills in facilitating distance education programming opportunities for their students.

5. **Home-School Students.** The model presented herein may encourage home-school students to enter public virtual schools. Discussion about this can range from the implications for the state budget to the opportunity to serve all Wyoming students.

**6. Court-Ordered Placement (COP) and Detention**

**Students.** The DETF urges the Superintendent of Public Instruction to facilitate a funding model for COP and Detention students whose education would be enhanced by distance education program courses.

**7. Vendor Participation.** The model presented herein gives out-of-state vendors opportunity to contract individually with Wyoming districts to offer supplemental and/or full-time distance education program(s) to Wyoming schools and students. This is already happening in the case of Campbell County’s Wyoming Virtual School, Fremont County School District 21’s WeAVE program and districts that are importing DE coursework from out-of-state.

**8. Teacher-Pupil Ratios.** It is recognized that the quantity and quality of teacher interaction with students-at-a-distance can make a significant difference in student success. The DETF was unanimous in its promotion of a maximum 1:25 teacher pupil ratio for distance education students per course section or elementary grade.

**9. School Names.** An unanswered question involves school naming rights. Should virtual schools be allowed to adopt organizational names that reflect the use of the state’s name?

**10. Teacher Compensation.** It was unanimously felt by the DETF that DE teachers in the supplemental environment should be compensated for their unique skills in developing and teaching DE courses utilizing evolving forms of technology, and that a portion of the Distance Learning Incentive be used to increase supplemental program teacher and mentor compensation.

**G. CONCLUSION**

The members of the DETF express appreciation for this opportunity to serve the citizens of the State of Wyoming, and stand ready to assist as needed in further conversation and study. Wyoming is known as the Equality State. Equality—of opportunities for all its students were the overriding concerns of this task force.

The vision for distance education emphasizes these key words:

*Students*

*Greater equity of access and opportunity*

*Achievement*

*Rigor and relevancy*

*Emerging 21st century distance learning programming*

*Collaboration with local schools*

*Student choice and flexibility*

*State and local policy structures*

*Quality assurance*

*Local Control*



## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning, A Review of State-Level Policy and Practice, John Watson and Jennifer Ryan, Evergreen Consulting Associates, 2006, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/faq19\\_178611\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/faq19_178611_7.pdf).

<sup>4</sup><http://www.k12.wa.us/alternativeEd/ProgramImplementationGuidelines/FAQGeneralQuestions.doc>.

<sup>5</sup>Personal communication with the Keeping Pace author/researcher based on the 2007 Keeping Pace program survey.

<sup>6</sup>Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning, A Review of State-Level Policy and Practice, John Watson and Jennifer Ryan, Evergreen Consulting Associates, 2006, p. 97.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, p. 93.

<sup>8</sup>[http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2007a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/F9696758891E5C2B87257251007B2A8F?open&file=1066\\_enr.pdf](http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2007a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/F9696758891E5C2B87257251007B2A8F?open&file=1066_enr.pdf).

<sup>9</sup>[http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2007a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/E4DFB9DF18308CC487257251007C783E?open&file=215\\_enr.pdf](http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2007a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/E4DFB9DF18308CC487257251007C783E?open&file=215_enr.pdf)

<sup>10</sup>State of Colorado, Report of the State Auditor, Performance Audit of Online Education Department of Education, November 2006.

<sup>11</sup>Personal communication with the Keeping Pace author/researcher based on the 2007 Keeping Pace program survey.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Idaho Legislature Office of Performance Evaluations, Evaluation Report, Virtual School Operations, March 2007.

<sup>14</sup>Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning, A Review of State-Level Policy and Practice, John Watson and Jennifer Ryan, Evergreen Consulting Associates, 2006, p. 117.

## Appendix A

### BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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#### ***Pamala Anderson, State Board of Education***

Pamala Anderson is a retired elementary teacher who brings her experience teaching in the realms of special education, junior high, and grades K-5. Pamala was active in writing curricular standards at the local level and with professional organizations promoting math, writing, and reading. She served on the Raising Readers in Wyoming Foundation and presently serves on the Paleon Foundation, an education and research group in Glenrock. Pamala currently serves on the Wyoming State Board of Education.

#### ***Susan Kinneman, Superintendent of Fremont School District #2***

Susan Kinneman is a second-year superintendent in Dubois, WY. She taught high school English, journalism, photography, and speech for 20 years in Iowa, Dubois, and Green River, WY. In 1999 she became the first principal of a new alternative school, Expedition Academy, in Green River, and stayed there for seven years before returning to Dubois. Susan served on the Wyoming State Board of Education from 1996 to 1999.

#### ***Roger Larsen, Principal, Wyoming Virtual School***

Roger Larsen is a long time educator entering his 29th year with Campbell County School District. He has been a secondary Language Arts teacher, a department chair, an NCA Internal Chair for Campbell County High School and NCA External Chair for Buffalo High School in Johnson County, a basketball coach, and most recently, the Title I Director for CCSD and principal of the Wyoming Virtual School, a K-6 school located in Campbell County offering distance education to elementary students.

#### ***Gene M. Meier, Superintendent of Charter High School***

Gene Meier is the Director of the Wyoming E Academy of Virtual Education (WeAVE) and Associate Superintendent at Fremont County School District No 21. WeAVE serves the reservation and the state of Wyoming as an alternative to high school education. He is also the Principal Investigator for the Wind River Rural Systemic Initiative (WRRSI), a program funded by the National Science Foundation to increase science, technology, engineering and math literacy amongst Native American Students.

#### ***Cristy McBee, Kindergarten Teacher and Board Member, Sweetwater School District #1***

Cristy McBee is a kindergarten teacher working for Sweetwater #1 and serving on the School Board in Sweetwater #2. She is one of the 2007 recipients of the Qwest/WDE mini-technology teacher grants and her work will bring hand held devices into three kindergarten classrooms. She will serve as a technology facilitator and library classroom teacher. Her education is leading towards a Ph. D. in Educational Technology and her National teacher certification in early childhood education.

#### ***Peter Hawkins, French Teacher, Sheridan School District #2***

Peter Hawkins is a French Teacher from Sheridan, Wyoming who has been teaching on the Wyoming Equality Network Video system since 2002. He has 18 years of high school teaching experience in the United States and France, and serves as an adjunct professor at Sheridan College. He has a passion for distance education as a tool to bring equity of opportunity to the students of Wyoming. He has previously served on the Wyoming Equality Network Advisory Board.

#### ***Timothy D. Snyder, Aurora, Colorado***

Dr. Snyder is a retired superintendent from Colorado who led the development of Colorado's first online high school (1995), and later collaborated with school districts in creating the Colorado Online Learning supplemental online program. He has facilitated legislation regarding online learning, received state and national awards, and keynoted international conferences. He is a member of Colorado's P-20 Council, School Finance Project, and Council on 21st Century Learning.

## Appendix B

### PROPOSED DEFINITIONS

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- (a) “Alternative Delivery Medium” – a communication source used to provide synchronous and/or asynchronous instruction between instructors and students who are physically separated by time and/or space;
- (b) “Asynchronous” – instruction delivered by the instructor and received by the student not concurrent in time;
- (c) “Department” - the State Department of Education as created by W.S. 21-2-104;
- (d) “Distance Education” - teaching whereby the instructor and student are connected by alternative delivery media;
- (e) “Distance Education Course” – a body of subject-matter content equivalent to a full or partial Carnegie unit of credit taught by means of alternative delivery media.
- (f) “Distance Education Programs” – programs which provide K-12 content as outlined in W.S. 21-9-101 and W.S. 21-9-102 for students by means of alternative delivery media and instruction;
- (g) “District Board” – the educational governing body established at each Wyoming school district in accordance with W.S. 21-3-101;
- (h) “Distance Learning Plan (DLP)” – a per-student signed documented agreement between the host and resident districts, the student and the parent(s) or guardian(s) outlining the distance education program(s), requested by the Wyoming student, with written expectations and achievable benchmarks required for completion by the student in accordance with approved Wyoming content standards;
- (i) “Earning a semester grade” - the Wyoming K-12 student receiving a rating for the course(s) in which the student was enrolled and completed in accordance with the Distance Learning Plan ( DLP);
- (j) “Fulltime Distance Education ADM” – a school district’s allocated funding based on a Wyoming K-12 student’s enrollment in a fulltime distance education program. The maximum allocable funds are based on the Wyoming school district with the lowest ADM.
- (k) “Host District” – the Wyoming school district in which the instructor is contracted and certified to teach; and, which sponsors, approves, facilitates, and supervises the course(s) material;
- (l) “Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)” – a per-student signed documented agreement between the host and resident district outlining fees paid for distance education program(s);
- (m) “Resident District” – the Wyoming school district in which the student resides, receives the instruction and where the student’s original DLP is filed;
- (n) “School District” – a Wyoming entity as outlined in Chapter 3, School Districts in General, sections W.S. 21-3-101 through W.S. 21-3-131;

- (o) “Sponsored by a Wyoming School District” – the district board of the hosting school district(s) that shall be responsible for the distance education program provider’s content and the distance education program provider’s alignment to Wyoming’s content standards as described in W.S. 21-9-101 (a);
- (p) “State Board” - the State Board of Education as created by W.S. 21-2-301 (a);
- (q) “Student” – a resident of Wyoming as described in W.S. 21-4-102;
- (r) “Subject Mastery” – a student’s successful completion of a distance education program and/or course in accordance with the course benchmarks, syllabus and instructor’s requirements as outlined in the DLP;
- (s) “Synchronous” – instruction delivered by the instructor and received by the student concurrent in time;
- (t) “Virtual School” – an educational organization providing any collection of distance education program(s), regardless of grade configuration, enrolling Wyoming students and employing Wyoming certified teachers to provide instruction via alternative delivery media.
- (u) “Wyoming Switchboard Network (WSN)” – a state network of distance education program providers that meet state-established guidelines for course content and delivery via Wyoming licensed teachers.