

Wyoming Department of Education
Alternative Learning Environments – Distance Education
Update

to the
Joint Education Interim Committee

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Authority

- Senate Enrolled Act 45, SF 0070, Section 5 Distance Education, Chapter 41 Rules and Regulations
- W.S. 21-2-202(a)(xxxi) Duties of the Director per Senate File 104
- W.S. 21-13-330 Distance education; program content; distance learning plan required; students within ADM of resident district; agreements with districts authorized

History

- 2007 House Bill 0115 Section 301: The Wyoming Department of Education, in consultation with a task force established for this purpose, developed 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.
- Senate File 0070, Enrolled Act 45 Section 5: Created an additional duty of the Director, 21-2-202(a)(xxxi); revised 21-13-330 to address distance education, program content, distance learning plans, students within ADM of the resident district, and authorized agreements with districts; and established the Distance Education Grant (DEG).
- Chapter 41 Distance Education Rules apply to all distance education courses offered by Wyoming school districts or distance education courses from which academic credit will be transferred to or accepted by a Wyoming school district.
- Section 10(e) of the WDE Chapter 8 Rules and Regulations for the School Foundation Program outlines how distance education courses received by a district will be included within their membership.
- Distance Education Grant (4505) - \$500,000 Biennial Authorization
 - 2012-2013: \$221,190.36 Awarded

- 2013-2014: \$278,809.64 Awarded

Guidance and Technical Assistance

- *Resident District Handbook: A Guide to K-12 Distance Education (2012 - 2013)*¹
- Monthly Distance Education Advisory Panel (DEAP) webinars to disseminate information and to gather input from all distance education stakeholders regarding current K-12 policy, share best practices, recognize potential issues to be addressed, and to identify future distance education trends and their impact.
- Seven (7) District Roundtable Discussions across the state to gather: feedback on the Wyoming Department of Education's recommended changes to § 21-13-330 that would provide districts and students greater flexibility and options when enrolling into distance education programs; stakeholder input regarding current distance education policies and procedures; identify the strengths and challenges of Wyoming's K-12 distance education system; and suggestions to improve the system.

Current Distance Education Participation Rates

- *2011-2012 Summary Report of Distance Education in Wyoming*²:
 - 2,043 Wyoming students participated in 13,706 distance education full-time and supplemental courses: 233 (11%) enrolled as **self-contained** students; 838 (41%) enrolled as **partnerships**; and 914 (45%) enrolled as **virtual transfers**. [See pg. 01]
 - Wyoming students registered for 13,706 courses: two **single-district** programs provided 229 (2%) distance education courses to 98 students; five **statewide** programs provided 12,781(93%) distance education courses to 1,563 students; and six **postsecondary** institutions provided 580 (5%) distance education courses to 358 students. [See pg. 03]

Policy Considerations

Provision of Reverse Partnerships

- Overview: The intent of the reverse-partnership model is to allow for virtual transfer students to supplement their distance education coursework from the provider's non-resident district with supplemental "brick and mortar" courses from the student's resident district. If considered, these statutory changes would allow the two districts to determine which would claim primary enrollment and membership for the student while removing artificial geographic limitations. Through removing the reference to "fractional" ADM, combining distance education Milestones-based "attendance" and traditional seat-time attendance systems will become more clear and efficient when calculating a student's Average Daily Membership (ADM).

¹ <http://www.wyomingswitchboard.net/Docs/WSNRDHB.pdf>

² <http://www.wyomingswitchboard.net/Docs/2011-2012WyoDE.pdf>

- Background: Under § 21-13-330, a student may withdraw from their resident district and transfer, fulltime, into the distance education program offered by another Wyoming school district. Currently, the non-resident districts that educate fulltime distance education (DE) virtual transfer students are prohibited from receiving funding when partnering with the students resident districts to provide supplemental “brick and mortar” courses. Furthermore, per § 21-13-310(a)(ix), any tuition paid back to the resident district would be counted as a local resource and considered in the determination of the funding amount to be distributed to that district.
- Stakeholder Feedback: Recommended statutory changes to allow for a reverse-partnership model were received favorably by school districts and the School Foundation Data Advisory Council. Concerns were raised in regard to liability, insurance, and potential overcrowding but several feasible solutions were also addressed.
- Recommendation: The WDE recommends that the LSO staff conduct a review to draft statutory amendments that: enables two districts to determine a distance education student’s primary enrollment without regard to the student’s geographic location; allows for the primary enrolling student to collect the student’s full membership and, through agreement, transfer necessary funding to the concurrent enrolling district; and remove the fractional limitation imposed upon attendance and membership generated through the delivery of distance education coursework.

Classroom Ratios

- Distance education program providers have expressed concern over the inclusion of distance education course sections within the required 16:1 average student-teacher ratio for grades kindergarten through third.
- Overview: Program providers state, correctly, that distance education is a completely different mode of instructional delivery than those experienced in most brick-and-mortar settings. Advances in instructional technology (in *all* educational settings) can provide the instructor the capacity to teach and facilitate an increased number of students. Both the legislative intent and current educational research are unclear on the application of a 16:1 average ratio in K-3 distance education classes.
- Background: § 21-13-307(a)(iv) requires that districts maintain “an average student-teacher ratio of not greater than sixteen (16) to one (1) for the aggregate of all classes in kindergarten through grade three (3).” Section 9(c) of the current Chapter 41 Distance Education rules limit course sections to a 25:1 maximum student to teacher ratio for all grades.
- Clarification Request: Whether or not distance education course sections are to be included within the required sixteen (16) to one (1) average student-teacher ratio for the aggregate of all classes in kindergarten through grade three (3).

Distance Learning Plans (DLPs)

- Resident districts, program providers, and the WDE have all expressed dissatisfaction with the current requirements for the student level Distance Learning Plans. There is agreement that the DLP should document that a student has received a pre-enrollment consultation and verifies that distance learning is an appropriate educational decision. However, § 21-13-330 includes DLP requirements such as “achievable performance benchmarks” and monitoring “the participating student’s progress as measured by his distance learning plan” that have created the unintended consequence that the focus of this document has become compliance-oriented.
- Recommendation: The WDE recommends that the statutory requirements of the Distance Learning Plans be reviewed and simplified to re-orientate the DLPs towards a student-centric process.

Additional Items

- Multiple districts that receive distance learning courses for their students made requests for increased funding levels to properly monitor their student’s progress and academic achievement.
- Many districts cited issues concerning access to postsecondary course information, specifically consistent Milestone documentation, and establishing Distance Learning Plans (DLPs) when partnering with Wyoming community colleges.
- Both districts and program providers noted displeasure for multiple policy discrepancies between the traditional public school system and distance learning programs operated from within these public schools. Of primary concern to the resident districts is the DE program’s latitude to establish enrollment requirements, windows, and policies that the traditional public schools cannot, by law, adopt. Larger distance education programs with the capacity to serve fulltime students continue to express their desire to have their own school ID assignments.
- Districts requested an increased level of technical assistance in regard to distance learning policy and best practices. Suggestions include the addition of online courses/trainings and increased on-site collaborations.