WDE
Opportunity Through Education

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To:	Joint Education Committee
From:	Kari Eakins, Chief Policy Officer
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Date:	July 19-20, 2021
Subject:	Virtual and Remote Education Program Operations

Background

Instructional delivery in which the teacher and student are not in the same physical location has officially been recognized in Wyoming statutes for over a decade. In addition to several statutory changes in the past four years, the COVID-19 pandemic quickly expanded existing virtual education programs and led to the creation of new programs that primarily use technology to deliver instruction. This memo provides information on:

- Instructional Delivery Methods and Definitions
- Virtual Education Programs
- Virtual Education Performance Data
- Best Practices

Instructional Delivery Methods and Definitions

Virtual education means school district programs and classes approved by the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) pursuant to W.S. 21-2-202(a)(xxxi), W.S. 21-13-330(f-k), and the Chapter 41 Virtual Education Rules for delivery when the teacher and student are in separate locations. Virtual education instruction is primarily delivered through technology and can be asynchronous, synchronous, or a combination of both. Additional virtual education definitions and methods include:

- Full-time virtual education is when "more than 50% of the required educational program is provided through virtual education..." per W.S. 21-13-330(f)(v).

- Part-time virtual education is when "50% or less of the required educational program is provided through virtual education..." per W.S. 21-13-330(f)(vi).

- Full-time virtual education students are generally located off campus while part-time students are generally on campus.

- Statewide programs are available to any student in the state.
- District-level programs are only available to students who live in the district offering the program.
- Either type of program can offer full-time or part-time courses, or a combination of both, to any grade level K-12 the district applies to serve.
- Districts have the option to utilize Canvas, the statewide learning management system available at a much lower negotiated price, for virtual education.

Virtual Education Teachers

Virtual education teachers may be employed by the school district providing the program or by online course vendors. When districts contract with a vendor for full-time programming, the contract terms include whether or not district or vendor teachers, or a combination of both, will be used to instruct the courses. The same also applies when districts purchase courses from a vendor for a part-time program.

Whether virtual education teachers are employed by the school district or a vendor, all virtual education teachers are required to have Wyoming certification. They all must also complete a seven-hour workshop each year that is approved by the Professional Teaching Standards Board and primarily focused on using virtual education methods to instruct students.

Virtual education teachers employed by the school district typically live in Wyoming but not necessarily within the district providing the virtual education program. Teachers employed by a virtual education vendor typically live outside of Wyoming. Virtual education teachers may be physically located in a district administration building or in a school classroom but the majority are typically teaching from their homes.

Remote Education

Remote education means classes delivered by a teacher located in a physical classroom with students present while also providing simultaneous remote instruction as described in W.S. 21-13-300(m-n). Remote education instruction is delivered through interactive, synchronous technology which allows the student receiving the remote education to ask questions, make comments, and interact in real-time with the teacher, classroom students, and other remote students. Teachers instructing remote education are always employed by the school district offering the course. The statutes establish remote education as separate from virtual education programming and not subject to the same requirements or rules and regulations.

Virtual Education Programs

Wyoming statutes only allow for school districts to provide virtual education programs. W.S. 21-13-330(g)(ii) requires all students in those programs to be enrolled in brick and mortar schools within a district. The brick and mortar schools are located in the district providing the program, including

those that are statewide. When the program is district-level, or there is an agreement between the resident and program districts, virtual education students are enrolled in their neighborhood schools. Virtual education student performance and accountability is included in the brick and mortar school performance measures.

School districts have a considerable amount of flexibility around the type of virtual education program provided. Districts can offer the program statewide, regionally, only to students within the district, using courses and teachers purchased from a vendor or using courses developed by district staff and teachers employed by the district, part-time or full-time, to different grade bands or K-12, or any combination of those options. Attachment A shows the different virtual education program configurations approved for the 2020-21 school year, which includes four statewide and 14 district-level programs.

As with all virtual education programming, including statewide programs, districts can accept or deny students into the program depending on whether students meet their program eligibility criteria. Accepting students in virtual education programs is not mandatory and is up to district discretion based on established enrollment requirements including high school students having sufficient credit.

Virtual Education Funding
Pursuant to Chapter 41 Rules, school districts track participation in virtual education courses as an attendance equivalence. School districts select one or more of eight metrics to track each student's participation in each class in grades K-12. Attendance is then recorded based on students meeting the participation requirements.

The average daily membership (ADM) for virtual education students is reported to the WDE by the brick and mortar schools in which the students are enrolled. The district with the student's primary enrollment, either the district providing the program or the resident district if an agreement is in place, receives the student's full average daily membership for part-time and full-time students. The ADM funding for virtual education students is the same as it is for brick and mortar students. The school funding model does not consider virtual education students differently than brick and mortar students with the exception of school facilities funding, in which full-time virtual education counts of students off campus are removed from the number of students in a school.

Virtual Education Increase Due to COVID
The WDE did see an increase in full-time virtual education enrollments in the 2020-21 school year. The expectation for the 2021-22 school year is that the number of school districts with virtual education programs will be maintained or increased, but the overall enrollment numbers will decrease. Table 1 below compares full-time virtual education enrollments based on preliminary enrollment data collected each October.

Table 1: Full-Time Virtual Education Programs by School Year

Program Type/School Year	Number of Districts	Number of Students
Full-time Statewide 2019-20	3 Districts	1,047
Full-time District-level 2019-20	5 Districts	142
Total Combined	8 Districts	1,189
Full-time Statewide 2020-21	4 Districts	2,602
Full-time District-level 2020-21	10 Districts	2,833
Total Combined	14 Districts	5,435

Source: WDE684 WISE Teacher/Course/Student Fall Data Collection.

Virtual Education Performance Data

Although school districts started offering distance education programs in the 2008-09 school year, there unfortunately has not been a consistent data collection and reporting system in place to easily separate virtual education enrollments until just recently. For the 2020-21 school year, new data collection rules for virtual education courses were implemented to assist districts in accurately reporting virtual education courses and enrollments to the WDE. Graduation rates for the Class of 2021 will be the first to include a separate graduation rate for virtual education students. Attachment B shows the graduation rates for the two high schools containing the longest-running virtual education programs as well as the statewide average from 2010 to present.

Currently, the only performance data for virtual education programs at the district level is of the two statewide programs in Big Horn #1 and Niobrara #1 based on the virtual education assessment subreporting implemented in the 2016-17 school year. The enrollment numbers in district-level programs were either too small to subreport the virtual education results or districts did not correctly identify the enrollments as virtual education. Since the statewide assessments were not administered in the 2019-20 school year, the 2018-19 results are the most recent and can be viewed in Attachment B. The School Performance Ratings for the schools in Big Horn #1 and Niobrara #1 with statewide virtual education programs are also available in Attachment B. Generally, virtual education students scoring lower than non-virtual education students is a consistent trend in all the data currently available.

Virtual Education Best Practices

Although resident and virtual education provider districts can enter agreements to serve students who remain enrolled in their district of residence, very few agreements are currently in place. Students who participate in virtual education programs located in their district of residence, or through an agreement between districts, have the advantage of more easily being able to

participate in activities, sports, and classes at their neighborhood schools and receive services in person when needed. When students unenroll from their district of residence to participate full-time in a virtual education program in another district, they typically are not allowed access to their resident district's programs, other than the activities sanctioned by the Wyoming High School Activities Association per statute.

It is much easier for districts to provide services, including special education services, to the students located within the district providing the virtual education program. It is also easier to administer assessments and provide onsite tutoring and instruction should the students or parents need that support. The statewide virtual education programs provide all services at a distance or through contracts with local providers but some students and their families are dismayed when they are not able to access local courses or activities. Other students left their resident district intentionally and do not want to participate in anything the district may offer.

During the 2015 Distance Education Task Force work, a survey was administered to students and their families to help understand why students enroll in full-time virtual education. The WDE received a total of 237 responses in 35 districts from families with students enrolled in full-time online programs, with 95% of the respondents being parents. The highest-rated reasons why full-time virtual education is preferred include:

- To focus on academics without distractions. (62.0%)
- To progress at an individual pace. (59.5%)
- To get away from negative peer groups. (59.1%)
- To escape bullying. (38.0%)

The survey also inquired about how many full-time virtual education students would like to access part-time brick and mortar classes, as this was one of the challenges identified by the task force. These classes could include welding or band or programs such as those provided for gifted and talented students. Of the 237 respondents, 108 (45.6%) indicated they would like to be able to take some classes at their local school, but the opportunity is not always available.

Attachment A
2020-21 Wyoming Virtual Education Program Districts

District & Program	Model	Enrollment Schools	Courses & Teachers
Big Horn #1 Wyoming Connections Academy (WYCA)	**K-12 Full-time** Statewide	**K-5:** Rocky Mountain Elementary **6-8:** Rocky Mountain Middle School **9-12:** Rocky Mountain High School	**Connections Academy Curriculum** District & Vendor Teachers
Big Horn #4 Tech Trep	**K-8 Full-time** District-level	**K-5:** Laura Irwin Elementary **6-12:** Riverside Middle/High School	**Tech Trep Academy Curriculum** Vendor Teachers
Campbell #1 Campbell County Virtual School	**K-6 Full-time** District-level	Students' Neighborhood Schools	**Stride, Inc. Curriculum** District Teachers
Fremont #25 Spur Virtual Academy	**K-12 Full-time & Part-time** District-level	Students' Neighborhood Schools	Acellus Curriculum District Teachers
Goshen #1 GCSD 1 Virtual Education	**6-12 Full-time** District-level	Students' Neighborhood Schools	**Edmentum Curriculum** District Teacher
Laramie #1 Cheyenne Virtual School	**K-12 Full-time** District-level	Students' Neighborhood Schools	**Edgenuity Curriculum** District Teachers
Lincoln #2 Star Valley Virtual	**9-12 Full-time** District-level	Students' Neighborhood Schools	**BYU Independent Study & District Developed** District & Vendor Teachers
Natrona #1 Natrona Virtual Learning	**K-12 Full-time & Part-time** District-level	Students' Neighborhood Schools	**Edgenuity, Stride, Inc., Odysseyware, & District Developed Curriculum** District Teachers
Niobrara #1 Wyoming Virtual Academy (WYVA)	**K-12 Full-time & Part-time** Statewide	**K-5:** Lusk Elementary **6-8:** Lusk Middle School **9-12:** Niobrara County High School	**Stride, Inc. Curriculum** District Teachers
Park #1 Park #1 Online	**6-12 Full-time & Part-time** District-level	Students' Neighborhood Schools	**Florida Virtual School & District Developed Curriculum** District & Vendor Teachers

District & Program	Model	Enrollment Schools	Courses & Teachers
Park #6 Cody Online Virtual Education (COVE)	**6-12 Full-time & Part-time** District-level	Students' Neighborhood Schools	**Florida Virtual School & District Developed Curriculum** District Teachers
Park #16 Park 16 Tech Trep Academy	**K-8 Full-time** Statewide	**K-8:** Meeteetse School	**Tech Trep Academy Curriculum** Vendor Teachers
Platte #1 Peak High School Virtual Education	**9-12 Part-time** District-level	**9-12:** Peak High School	**Edgenuity Curriculum** District Teachers
Sheridan #1 Cowboy State Virtual Academy	**K-12 Full-time & Part-time** Statewide	**K-5:** Big Horn and Tongue River Elementary **6-8:** Big Horn and Tongue River Middle School **9-12:** Big Horn and Tongue River High School	**Acellus Curriculum** District Teachers
Sublette #1 Sublette County School District #1	**11-12 Part-time** District-level	Students' Neighborhood Schools	**District Developed Curriculum** District Teachers
Sweetwater #1 Sweetwater County School District #1 Online Learning	**9-12 Part-time** District-level	Students' Neighborhood Schools	**District Developed Curriculum** District Teachers
Sweetwater #2 SWCSD2 Virtual Education Program	**6-12 Full-time & Part-time** District-level	Students' Neighborhood Schools	**Edmentum Curriculum** District & Vendor Teachers
Washakie #1 Washakie No. 1 Online (WOL)	**K-12 Full-time & Part-time** District-level	**K-1:** East Side Elementary **2-3:** South Side Elementary **4-5:** West Side Elementary **6-8:** Worland Middle School **9-12:** Worland High School	**Stride, Inc. & District Developed Curriculum** District Teacher

Attachment B

Performance Data

Table 1: Virtual and Non-virtual Education State Level 2018-19 Assessment Results

Grade	Subject	% Non-virtual Proficient & Advanced	% Virtual Proficient & Advanced
3	Math	53.68%	28.30%
3	English Language Arts	54.95%	36.54%
4	Math	53.25%	14.29%
4	English Language Arts	49.26%	30.91%
4	Science	52.20%	27.27%
5	Math	55.64%	22.58%
5	English Language Arts	55.65%	43.55%
6	Math	55.29%	26.23%
6	English Language Arts	60.84%	59.02%
7	Math	52.16%	38.46%
7	English Language Arts	58.73%	50.55%
8	Math	54.88%	31.75%
8	English Language Arts	60.76%	58.73%
8	Science	47.68%	38.10%
9	Math	40.57%	28.70%
9	English Language Arts	52.68%	53.15%
10	Math	45.55%	28.47%
10	English Language Arts	52.71%	55.15%
10	Science	48.43%	41.61%

Figure 1: Graduation Rates for High Schools with Virtual Education Programs

Note: Niobrara County High School began its virtual education program in the 2009-10 school year. Rocky Mountain High School began its virtual education program in the 2011-12 school year.
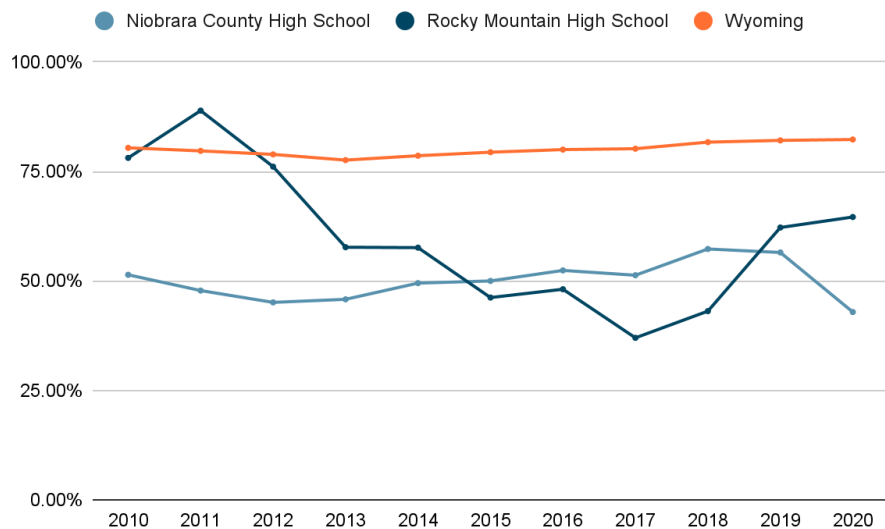

8

Table 2: School Performance Ratings for Schools with Virtual Education Programs

School	2013-14 SPR	2014-15 SPR	2015-16 SPR	2016-17 SPR	2017-18 SPR	2018-19 SPR
Rocky Mountain Elementary School	Partially Meeting Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Partially Meeting Expectations
Lusk Elementary School	Partially Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations
Rocky Mountain Middle School	Meeting Expectations	Partially Meeting Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Partially Meeting Expectations	Partially Meeting Expectations
Lusk Middle School	Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Partially Meeting Expectations	Partially Meeting Expectations	Partially Meeting Expectations	Partially Meeting Expectations
Rocky Mountain High School	Not Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Partially Meeting Expectations	Partially Meeting Expectations	Partially Meeting Expectations
Niobrara County High School	Not Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Partially Meeting Expectations