

Distance Learning Review Committee
June 11, 2021
DOE State Library Commons, Pierre

Members Present: Dr. Dustin Degen, Ms. Mary Cundy, Ms. Sherri Nelson, Ms. Camrin Vaux, Dr. Julie Mathiesen, Mr. Tom Farrell, Ms. Amber Mikkelsen, Dr. David Swank, Ms. Cheryl Medearis, Ms. Samantha Fischbach, Ms. Lakisha Jordan, Mr. Alan Neville, Ms. Mandy Grantham, Ms. Charlotte Mohling, Ms. Connie Godfrey, Ms. Camille Kaul, Ms. Jennifer Tschetter, Ms. Mary Stadick Smith, Ms. Linda Olsen, Ms. Tina Board

The second meeting of the Distance Learning Committee was held at the South Dakota Department of Education in Pierre on June 11, 2021 beginning at 10:00 AM. Small group sessions focused on common resources and questions. Large group sessions resulted choral dialogue and discussion resulted in themes for later proposals.

1. Themes discerned from the initial May 27th Zoom meeting:

A. What is the current state of South Dakota K-12 Distance Learning?

- SDVS has needs for updating, marketing and clear communication to schools.
- Clear roles and products of providers should be delineated. Providers should be defined.
- Assistance should be provided to all stakeholders in regard to expectations and delivery if distance learnings is to be successful.
- Attempts to replicate traditional delivery is counterproductive. Distance learning should be recognized as a singular model with unique characteristics that must be acknowledged. However, outcomes should be consistent. A true definition with accompanying policy or rules and protocols is a necessity. Continued review and examination, and a process for that review must also be a part of a credible statewide program.
- Guidance, resources, policy should match the unique nature of distance learning, with latitude that allows maximum local control.

B. Where should South Dakota's distance learning opportunities be at this time?

- Equity for all stakeholders is a must. All students should be 1:1 and have reliable access.
- More providers, choices and collaboration of K-12 schools who have found success to share not only their programs, but perhaps

share students without penalty to either entity. Perhaps regional centers for distance learning?

- Consider a central Learning Management System, perhaps state-funded.
- State should provide ideas for either certification or training for any facilitator engaging in distance learning with ongoing development opportunities.
- A vision with incremental change should be constructed with timelines and action plan presented to schools and stakeholders, then implemented.

C. When and where is distance education appropriate?

- Appropriate for all at every level, understanding the nuances of socioeconomics, SPED, ESL, developmental levels. However, there should be thresholds of prerequisites established to assist in proper placement and accountability of all stakeholders.
- Necessity for distance learning: when curriculum unavailable in person, when diversity of learner requires another setting? Snow days or other unavoidable interruptions?

2. South Dakota Policy review – small groups assessed current South Dakota Policy – tasked with comment for change and capturing important language and definitions – this document review can be found at: https://sdk12-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/kevin_lein_k12_sd_us/Ec3H0ql2yj1Lkg9EBKZDR40BL4diecsUsywIWYmpet57KQ?e=DMcQIj

- Repeated call for comprehensive change in ARSD. Overhaul system in all ways. Policy should reflect current and necessary practices for successful, resourced and non-threatening distance learning opportunities for all K-12 stakeholders.

3. South Dakota funding mechanisms connected to distance learning – small groups reviewed other state funding protocols and reviewed South Dakota system.

- Providers each have a formula according to services provided (BHOLC, NSU, DIAL).
- Ideas in concert with other states – free for all students? Centralized? If completion- or performance-based – who is at fault and is penalized? Can we find a similar state model that would be reasonable and congruent to current South Dakota funding mechanism? Should there be a separation of funding for distance learning?
- Dangers of creating a unique set of rules for distance learning – how to match funding accountability to traditional settings?

4. Accountability – the members began to evaluate attendance challenges as part of student accountability issues. They first reviewed national research, contributed to small group discussion and then shared to the entirety.

- Attendance is less significant in distance learning environment and should be unique to delivery, content and other variables. Orientation and training of all stakeholders, as well as possible prerequisites can assist this concern. However, performance – if credibly and reliably assessed – is the most significant measure. Even though attendance can be a predictor, competency-based can become a beneficial result of our change that was necessitated by required distance learning last spring. (See REM grant).

Some additional important conversations:

- The SDVS website will be reconstructed – funding for this improvement was earmarked in the last legislative session.
- Group consensus – with caveats of developmentally matching methods and models, distance learning can work for all.
- Hybrids were the most palatable to all. This will require state flexibility and open-ness to local iterations with accompanying rationale, assessment plans, and fidelity – as well as consistent training prior to adventures in distance learning creation.
- Hesitations by members can be assuaged by the formula. This could also create statewide sharing – but there must be a platform and guidance, perhaps even a resourced section of the DOE that is dedicated to the endeavors of schools willing to make this foray.
- Many states do not penalize schools for student choice of distance learning. In residence, no matter the platform of learning chosen, still allows for funding ADM to remain. Is that possible in South Dakota – creating less apprehension of loss of funding. Or, only allowance of hybrids that necessitate local influence no matter the platform or environment chosen.
- A 24/7 approach is a contemporary vision and logical progression, but how? Can there be some guidance or models from other states or entities if this is necessary to meet stakeholder needs?

Next meeting – July 12, Department of Education, 8:30 AM.