

January 8, 2014

Good Afternoon Rural Task Force Members:

First of all, let me thank you for your leadership on the Speaker's Task Force for Rural Schools. This Rural Schools Task Force demonstrates your interest and commitment to listen to the issues and the promising solutions for our rural schools and communities throughout Wisconsin.

I am Dawn Nordine, Executive Director of Wisconsin Virtual School, operated out of Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) #9 since 2000. As a former graduate, teacher, technology coordinator, and superintendent of the Phelps School District, I have firsthand experience of the issues that face rural schools and the promising solutions that are transforming education nationally and in Wisconsin.

I would like to briefly describe K-12 online learning on a national and state level before giving you a few Wisconsin examples of online learning meeting the diverse needs of rural schools in particular. K-12 online learning expands access to rigorous multimedia courses, develops 21st century skills, helps at-risk students recover credits and graduate, expands opportunities for all students, and provides teachers new professional development options to teach online and blended learning courses. (Slide 2) Online learning provides solutions by offering advanced placement or college level courses, provides certified teachers when not available, and solves scheduling conflicts. (Slide 3) Online learning is a smart investment NOW more than ever. **(iNACOL (International Association for K12 Online Learning) http://www.inacol.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/iNACOL_NowMorethanEver-lr.pdf)** (Slide 4)

Across the country we have 25 state virtual schools serving 740,000 course enrollments in 2012-13. 30 states have at least one full time online school. Wisconsin has 28 virtual charter schools, plus numerous local programs. (Slide 5) Nationally, Wisconsin is in the middle in number of full time enrollments served compared to K-12 population in the state. (Slide 6) Wisconsin drops slightly further in course enrollments compared to K-12 population for supplemental options despite a state-led virtual program (Wisconsin Virtual School) having been available for 10+ years. (Slide 7) Wisconsin is one of the states providing early on blended options for students. Projections made for the growth of supplemental and blended options mirrors what WVS has experienced in enrollment growth. (Slides 8, 9, 10)

The unique challenges of rural schools: declining enrollments, economically disadvantaged students, broadband access not accessible in homes, low teacher retention rates and pay, failed referendums, scheduling conflicts, shortage of teachers in foreign languages and other high need courses, and fewer electives can all be addressed cost effectively with online learning solutions. (Slides 11, 12, 13, 14, 15)

School districts in Wisconsin are finding solutions as they partner with organizations like Wisconsin Virtual School or the Wisconsin eSchool Network to provide online and blended learning opportunities using their own local teachers when possible. Ripon School District provides online courses to students who have schedule conflicts and at-risk students needing to complete their physical education graduation credits. Menomonie and Stevens Point are preparing their own teachers to increase blended learning options for their local students.

Algoma has partnered with WVS to use their own teacher to provide low enrollment Physics and AP Physics options. WVS adds other students from other schools around the state into their online course and subsidizes the teacher's compensation which in turn provides resources for additional online options for other Algoma students. Phelps School District used innovative strategies with online learning to provide credit recovery, a new teacher digital content and assessments, fill a shortage in a Health position, and provided a solution to a multi-certified, multi-position administrative- teacher with an online course to support the students' career planning requirement. (Slides 16-22)

Wisconsin Virtual School (WVS) out of CESA 9 became the Wisconsin Web Academy (Wis. Stats., sec. 115.28 (53) in 2008. **Unlike** the majority of similar state-led online programs in the nation supported by state funding or appropriations, according to *Keeping Pace with K12 Online and Blended Learning: An Annual Review of Policy and Practice* (http://kpk12.com/cms/wp-content/uploads/EEG_KP2013-lr.pdf), WVS has become a sustainable, effective, and equitably accessible state-led supplemental online and blended learning program for grades 6-12 in Wisconsin, although we could involve many more Wisconsin schools and students with state funding support directed towards a new collaborative initiative. Let me tell you more.

In the past year and a half WVS collaboratively formalized a partnership with the DPI and Wisconsin eSchool Network through what's now called the **Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative** (WDLC). (Slides 23-25) Why WDLC? No need to recreate initiatives, local control and **choice** for schools, statewide collaboration, experience with the growing pains of implementing digital programs that districts need not experience, it's quality centric, and it provides economies of scales that truly benefit rural schools. (Slide 26)

With our 10+ years of experience in digital learning, the WDLC provides equitable access to high-quality online education by offering Wisconsin certified teachers and standards based online course choices to Wisconsin school districts – public, charter, and private. The WDLC provided online and blended services to **230 districts** in 2012-13. **60% of which are rural districts**. Still less than 2% of Wisconsin's total K-12 population has **accessed** online courses through the state-led supplemental program. A state funded investment for the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative would provide services and resources accessible to ALL districts. This also creates equity in opportunity for ALL students. These 230 districts **and others** could be empowered to use the following benefits and services **much more** extensively.

Benefits of the WDLC include (Slides 27, 28):

- Equity in digital content offerings between urban, suburban, and rural schools
- Student-choice at the course level at the local school
- Flexibility in access (scheduling) – courses are available 365/24/7 with rolling enrollments year round
- 20 College Board Audited Advanced Placement courses
- World Languages that include Chinese, Japanese, German, French, Latin, and Spanish
- Opportunity to accelerate graduation **or** recover credits
- Access to dual credit online courses (coming Fall 2014 in Wisconsin)
- Online professional development for educators and administrators reducing travel costs and sharing expertise in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of digital learning options

It makes sense there is a return of investment, economies of scale, and we're not starting from ground zero, because Wisconsin would be capitalizing on infrastructure already in place with the WDLC. The Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative has many of the tools and resources districts need to implement quality blended and personalized learning programs. WDLC can provide these resources for students including, but not limited to:

- WI licensed instructors (use local, share seats between multiple rural districts, use WVS supplemental)
- An online course catalog of over 200 online courses available today
- \$2 million worth of owned statewide perpetual digital content
- Negotiated licensed contracts with multiple content providers
- Single sign-on personalized learning platform including the integration of a customized student information system (registration and data collection) and a learning management system
- Early stages of a digital learning object repository
- Early stages of leveraged Open Education Resources (OER)
- Several other support tools needed to operate personalized digital learning environments.

(Slides 29, 30, 31, 32)

With this new partnership the WDLC is providing an integral part of the Wisconsin Digital Learning Plan (https://sites.google.com/a/dpi.wi.gov/wi_digital_learning_plan/) providing equitable access and personalized learning for applied and engaged learners. In particular, the Digital Learning Plan calls for action and states: "Create a seamless operational environment that ensures access to virtual courses.....this would address such details as a common statewide course catalog for virtual courses, integration with course selection, registration, and master scheduling, grading and transcripts."

(https://sites.google.com/a/dpi.wi.gov/wi_digital_learning_plan/action-items)

On December 17th, 2013, Governor Walker talks about the future of Wisconsin and when addressing - ***Where is education going in Wisconsin?***

- He uses these words, "I think we'll see transformations that are leading the country....."
- "I think you're going to see in the next 5-10 years even bigger transformations. I want Wisconsin to be at the forefront of making those."
- "For years we talked about distance learning, using video hook-ups. As policy makers we have always been reluctant to do that."

(Slides 33, 34)

Wisconsin has a significant **asset** already in place – the WDLC. There is no need to re-create efforts in a time where resources such as funding are difficult to obtain. Wisconsin is an innovative state which has had digital learning options available since 2000. In addition to the WDLC, Wisconsin has 28 full time virtual charter schools and a variety of local district and consortium efforts. What separates the access to and expansion of online course participation in Wisconsin's state-led online programs from other states is the funding to administer the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative, a legislatively mandated program, which would lower school district costs, particularly for rural schools struggling to participate in the digital learning pathways. Take a look at 2012-

13 national enrollment comparisons: 5,036 (Wisconsin Virtual School), 10,219 (Wisconsin eSchool Network), 20,812 (Michigan Virtual High School), 25,877 (Georgia Virtual School), 94,710 (North Carolina Virtual Public School), and 19,036 (Idaho Digital Learning Academy).

WDLC can leverage a national network called the Virtual School Leadership Alliance (VSLA), an alliance of 10 state-led online programs. Wisconsin could further its assets with procuring and bartering with the Alliance for shared digital content, online teacher professional development, and pursuing multi-state contracts for resources capitalizing on economies of volume and scaling. (Slide 35)

Funding for the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative, potentially distributed through a **TEACH II** (Technology for Educational Achievement in Wisconsin) mechanism, would add to Wisconsin's efforts to leverage digital resources developed in other states and pursue other collaborations to bring additional resources at low or no cost to Wisconsin schools, teachers, and students. I encourage you and your legislative colleagues to learn more about these initiatives and understand how we can leverage what is currently available in Wisconsin and through the multi-state Alliance. Online learning is a "lifeline" for rural schools.

I also welcome further conversation and can provide additional information regarding both national and Wisconsin online and blended learning initiatives. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dawn Nordine, Executive Director, Wisconsin Virtual School – CESA 9