

Minutes of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee
March 6, 2007
East Conference Room, JR Williams Office Building
Boise, Idaho

Co-chair Senator Shawn Keough called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. Attending the meeting were Senators Edgar Malepeai and Elliot Werk, and Representatives Maxine Bell, Donna Boe, and Cliff Bayer. Co-chair Representative Margaret Henbest and Senator John McGee arrived shortly after the meeting started. Also present were Rakesh Mohan, Director, and Margaret Campbell, Administrative Coordinator, and all other OPE staff.

After Co-chair Henbest arrived, she welcomed those in attendance, including individuals from the following agencies:

Representatives: Liz Chavez, Brandon Durst, Wendy Jaquet, Bob Nonini, and Jerry Shively
Office of the Governor: Karen McGee, Bob Wells
Office of the Attorney General: Kay Christensen
Division of Financial Management: Randy Tilley
Department of Education: Tom Luna
Board of Education: Dwight Johnson
Public Charter School Commission: Tamara Baysinger
Former Superintendent of Public Instruction: Marilyn Howard
I-DEA: Daryl Bertelsen
Virtual Academy: Cody Claver, Kerri Pickett-Hoffman
INSPIRE: Dallas Taylor
Richard McKenna Charter High School: Larry Slade, Chantel Durrence
Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities: Marilyn Sword

REPORT RELEASE: VIRTUAL SCHOOL OPERATIONS

Representative Boe moved to receive the report on virtual school operations. Senator Werk seconded the motion, and it unanimously passed by voice vote.

Amy Lorenzo, Senior Performance Evaluator, and Sean Borzea, Performance Evaluator, provided a summary of the report. In response to Co-chair Henbest's question, Ms. Lorenzo said I-DEA functioned as a virtual school because it was chartered before statute was passed to create the commission.

Representative Boe asked if and how schools ensured that parent-selected curriculum was approved by the state. She wondered how a qualified teacher fit in the program when student-teacher communication only occurred once a month or less. Ms. Lorenzo said the school provided parents with an approved list of curriculum to choose from. Once parents have made their selections, a certified teacher reviews and approves the chosen curriculum. She indicated the state needed to provide guidance for teacher involvement in a program where parents assumed a high level of teaching responsibility.

Representative Henbest said she was confounded that some students had no contact from their teacher and wondered why schools paid representatives to interact between the family and the teacher. She asked about the scope of work for a family representative, and why parents and teachers did not talk directly to each other. Ms. Lorenzo responded by saying the position of family representative aligns with the school's philosophy that parents should be the primary educator of their children. Family representatives generally have experience teaching their own children at home and can offer support and guidance to other parents. When questions became too technical or academic, the family representative deferred to the certified teacher.

Representative Boe asked if the state funded virtual schools in the same way as traditional schools—by number of support units. If support units determine the number of teaching staff, how do virtual schools spend their funding if not on teachers? How does the virtual program impact No Child Left Behind? Ms. Lorenzo responded to the questions by indicating that support units for virtual schools were calculated similar to traditional public schools, although virtual schools do not spend their money in the same way. She said it may not be appropriate to compare virtual schools to traditional schools because virtual schools were so different. She also noted that an OPE review of teaching certificates found that all teachers at virtual schools held valid Idaho licenses.

Senator McGee asked how student-teacher communication was defined for the report. Ms. Lorenzo said contact was defined as any type of communication, including e-mails, phone calls, or other electronic means.

Senator Malepeai asked if the report's recommendations conflicted with the school's accreditation standards. He also asked about the commission's onsite reviews and who received reports of those reviews. Ms. Lorenzo said accreditation was either through the state or through the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools. Because accreditation requirements were general, she did not think implementation of the recommendations would conflict. She indicated that the commission conducted visits each year for all schools it authorized and presented the findings of each visit to the commissioners at a public meeting.

Senator Werk asked about how to differentiate between homework and class work in a virtual school. Ms. Lorenzo said that because a virtual school was so much different than a traditional school, there may not be a clear way to reconcile this issue.

In response to questions about research in other states, Ms. Lorenzo said virtual schools were so new that best practices had not been established, only promising solutions. In general, states were struggling with virtual school issues. Arizona and Nevada required additional annual reports from virtual schools that informed their legislatures on *how* and *how well* these schools operated.

Representative Boe noted, as part of enrollment, that some schools provided families with a computer and/or an internet connection, but students did not always use a computer for online instruction. She asked if these families were out of compliance with legislation. Ms. Lorenzo said that whether the program was virtual distance or online, students should have some element

Joint Legislative Oversight Committee
March 6, 2007

of online curriculum. She indicated that the state needed guidance to identify a minimum time spent by students online—especially in proportion to grade level.

Representative Bell said she was confident the Senate and House Education committees and the State Board of Education could address and dispatch the report's recommendations. She said the recommendations were good, clean fixes.

UPDATE FROM HEALTH AND WELFARE: CHILD WELFARE CASELOAD MANAGEMENT

Mr. Ned Parrish, Principal Performance Evaluator, provided a summary of the department's update. Co-chair Henbest clarified that the department would need 60 additional full-time employees to meet the estimated process time for various service standards. The committee heard brief comments from Michelle Britton, Administrator of the Division of Family and Community Services.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.