Online Task Force Meeting #2 Friday, September 12, 2014

Link to the meeting recording:
http://connect.enetcolorado.org/p1x4durlrhy/

Meeting Notes:

The meeting of the Online Task Force (OTF) was called to order by Ethan Hemming, Task Force chair. Task force members introduced themselves.

OTF members in attendance:

Brian Bissell
Scott Campbell
Sunny   Deyé
Joe Dinnetz
Leanne Emm
Diana Gamboa
Ethan Hemming
Chaille Hymes
Renee Martinez
Dale McCall
Kim McClelland
John Myers
Gretchen Morgan
Dan Morris
Amy Valentine
Linda Van Matre
Judy Bauernschmidt participated through the online link.

Guests in attendance (also introduced themselves):

Jeanne Vanderhung with NHA, Hope Online, CCC, and DFER
Jim Cole with K12inc
Heather Omara with Hope Online
Jennifer Okes with CDE
Amy Attwood with CD Boces, Falcon, and Mesa 51

The meetings from the meeting #1 were opened for comment and received none; the meeting notes were considered approved.

Rule Making

Gretchen began the review of the rule making. Emergency rules are in place and will expire soon. CDE needs input regarding rulemaking by November 10th, the Monday prior to the state board's rule making meeting.

The rules will be updated to match the definitions for online schools and programs with what is in the current statute. The state board needs feedback for the rules for October student count.

Leanne reviewed her prepared document on CO rules and guidelines for October student counts (provided via attachment and in the meeting packet, and available online [http://www.cde.state.co.us/onlinelearning]: "Leanne_Emm_Online Pupil Counts).

The guidelines are provided as a way to assist education providers on how to count students so that schools receive funding based on the number and amount of time students participate in the program (part-time or full-time).

The document outlines the process for counting students within online schools and programs. Funding for school districts varies based on local demographics, such as cost of living and student needs, to determine funding for each district. Online funding for students in multi-district online schools.

There are five primary facets that determine funding eligibility for online schools:
1. Enrolled in a district
2. Attendance: log-ins must show the student was online on October 1st or, if the student is absent on the pupil enrollment count day, there must be a login prior to October 1st and within the following 30 days
3. Scheduled Equivalent Hours: 360 hours for full-time and, 90 hours for part-time based upon the hours of pupil-teacher instruction required to earn an equivalent number of credits in a traditional classroom setting
4. Proof of residency in CO
5. Active Participation, currently determined via assessment of demonstrated student log-ins into course content, though the new language allows authorizers to work with online schools to determine what constitutes active participation
   a. Active Participation is language in statute in school finance laws

School finance, October student counts, and active participation need to be aligned in the adopted rules. When the emergency rules were adopted, schools and school districts were given the choice of using existing systems or to adopt the new, emergency rules, creating two mechanisms for documenting participation in the online school.

OTF member discussion on rule making included:
- How to document active participation
  - The new language in the law allows opportunities to recognize active participation without just looking only at the logins
- The emergency rules (8/02) states that authorizers will provide assurances to the department on a form that indicates that schools will document active participation in a way that will ensure funding eligibility
  - CDE will provide a copy of this to the OTF

- Online schools should designate the number of hours required to earn an equivalent number of credits in a traditional brick & mortar schools for each course. For example, to receive credit for Algebra I take a certain amount of time, and this should be the same for online completion.
    - The funding formula does not address competency based learning
- Enrollment, attendance, schedules, active participation, and residency have not changed in the school finance laws

John Myers pointed out that the immediate rule making is a choice to stay with what is or to recommend something that is slightly better.

Gretchen pointed out that the OTF has the opportunity to recommend authorizer standards and pilot programs which could, in turn, return the discussion issues to additional rule making next year. It was cautioned that recommendations to potentially change the way October student counts are currently done may have large financial notes attached, though this shouldn't be prohibitive to doing so.

Policy Scan

Sunny Deyé presented the NCSL policy scan request from the OTF (provided via attachment and in the meeting packet, and available online [http://www.cde.state.co.us/onlinelearning]: "NCSL_Final Meeting 1 info request").

Sunny highlighted Appendix A, which provided examples of states that count enrollment for full-time, k-12 online schools differently than the typical state funding formula: CA, MN, OK, and WY. For clarification on these states' student count policies, average daily attendance versus membership was discussed: membership looks at if the student is enrolled, not whether they attended, participated, etc.

An iNACOL table of data (Appendix B) was reviewed by OTF members. Leanne cautioned that the average per pupil spending in traditional schools across the state (average revenue per pupil) figure used for CO was too high ($8,926, versus the estimated $6,000).

OTF members requested information on states that have similarities to CO, specifically states with local control and similar property tax treatment for education. Sunny responded that there are no similar districts, other than those presented in Appendix A, and none which are doing multi-district online.

Presentations from NACSA and iNACOL were suggested. John Myers reminded the OTF members that they need to make the request to do so before these could be scheduled. No requests were made at that time.

Brian cautioned against moving the authorizer standards towards a second accreditation system. Leanne supported this, and called for a standard for clarity while avoiding "watering down the process" of accreditation with too many disparate standards. Kim identified quality and extensive oversight at the authorizer level over accreditation as a key to an online school's success. Gretchen stated that requiring something additional from a district that that serve outside of their boundaries makes logical sense.

NACSA Minnesota Case Study

John Myers led the review of the NACSA MN case study (provided via attachment and in the meeting packet, and available online [http://www.cde.state.co.us/onlinelearning]: "NACSA_MN_Policy_Brief_Evaluating_and_Sanctioning_Authorizers_FNL").

John reminded the group that the CO Department of Education, unlike the MN Department of Education, has never been an authorizer. Instead, CO created the Charter School Institute to authorizer CO charters, which is viewed as an LEA.

Dale highlighted the bullet points in the report as being a good base from which to work from. Kim supported this idea and testified to her practice of authorizing multi-district charters and brick & mortar charters similarly, by using the NACSA standards for both, and that this process worked well for her. Chaille stated her need to address the variation her district experiences across authorizers. Using a working group to define the overarching direction of the standards, to identify what does and does not fit, and the ability to identify best practices for use by all districts was presented as a good way to do this.

The OTF members agreed to review the following five areas from the MN charter authorizer standards for possible application to certification of multi-district online authorizers: capacity and infrastructure, application criteria and process, contracting process, ongoing oversight and evaluation processes, and renewal criteria and process.

Additional Conversation

A pilot program proposal was requested to identify ways to increase the current online course completion rate (50%).

Concern that local districts do not have a say, as they do with charter schools, on if a drop-in center or online school site opens within their boundaries: a charter school must prove they are serving a missing need in that district.

Gretchen clarified that voluntary drop-in sites associated with an online school do not require approval, while a site that requires support from the district needs to petition the district, and a denial can be appealed to the state.

A request was made to identify ways to ensure blended learning was enabled in a comprehensive and easy way along.

Next Steps

The Minnesota Statute 124D.10, referenced in the NACSA report, will be provided to the OTF members for homework.

- Each member will identify the sub-topics for each of the bullet points

OTF members are to submit to Melanie prior to the meeting #3 the specific problems authorizer standards can solve by answering the question: "Problems I would like authorizer standards to address. . . ". These will be used to prioritize the discussion in meeting #3.

Closing

John Myerss reminded OTF members that data requests can be submitted to APA through Melanie.