

Online Task Force, Meeting #5

Monday, October 27, 2014

Link to the meeting recording:

<http://connect.enetcolorado.org/p3dxriikmfg/>

Meeting Notes

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

OTF members and staff in attendance:

Judy Bauernschmidt
Brian Bissell
Scott Campbell
Joe Dinnetz (by virtual link)
Leanne Emm
Diana Gamboa
Ethan Hemming
Chaille Hymes
Renee Martinez
Dale McCall
Kim McClelland
Gretchen Morgan
Dan Morris
Amy Valentine
Linda VanMatre
John Myers
Melanie Sloan
Sunny Deyé

Guests in attendance:

Randy DeHoff
Elizabeth Davis
Kris Enright
Matt Samuelson
Amy Atwood
Melanie Layton
Heather O'Mara
Todd Engdahl
Kayla McDannon
Kara Wheeler
Karen Aikhan

Comment [MS1]: Need help with these names

Dave Rigowski (?)

Housekeeping

Agenda

John Myers reviewed the agenda for the meeting and asked if there were any comments or questions; none were offered.

Packets of Information

John reviewed the packet of information provided to OTF members; additional copies were made available to guests.

John specifically pointed out the Minnesota Charter School Authorizer Performance Measures document (that state's rubric for assessing an authorizer's capacity, infrastructure, processes, and decision making). This was provided to OTF members for their review—it was not to be part of this meeting's work (the full document was also provided via email and posted to the OTF webpage).

OFT Meeting 4 Notes:

A type-o was pointed out: page two in the meeting notes document states the second OTF meeting in December is December 6. It should read December 16. The correction was made.

Presentations

Ethan Hemming introduced the two presenters scheduled for this meeting: Matt Samuelson with the Donnell-Kay Foundation (DLK), and lead for the prior online commission; and Elizabeth Davis with Calvert Virtual Academy. Both presenters were asked to provide their presentations for posting to the OTF webpage (the audio recording of the meeting will also be posted).

Matt Samuelson

Donnell-Kay Foundation is interested in disruptive forces to improve education. DLK was involved with the Trujillo Commission on Online Education (2007), and was asked by Colorado House Representatives Williams and Young, and Colorado State Senators Kerr and Williams (?) to lead the prior online commission.

Comment [MS2]: Need verification of these names

Prior Commission

The prior commission (Commission) had seven weeks to dig into issues surrounding online education with very little guidance. The Commission kept a tight focus using three guiding principles for their work: 1) Is the issue short or long term? 2) Does the issue affect all K-12 students, or only K-12 online students? 3) How does the issue affect the quality of online K-12 education?

Many of the recommendations made in the Commission's final report were adopted into statute, including technical fixes (transfer of student records, for example) and clarifying definitions (what defines online, for example). However, the Commission understood many of these issues were "low hanging fruit."

Pilot Programs

Pilot programs were discussed by the Commission as a way of bringing focus to deeper issues that have the potential to improve education for online students, but are slow to be implemented. The Commission members felt that online schools have an opportunity, through pilot programs, to lead the way, nationally; to prove the efficacy of online education; and to leverage the attention on the capital from the consideration of the Student Success Act (HB14-1292).

The pilot program recommendations of the Commission are summarized in Appendix B of their report (attached to this document). These recommendations sought to identify opportunities while not being prescriptive.

Matt spoke briefly about each of the pilot programs in Appendix B, including tiered interventions, and competency and course level funding. Matt recognized the contentious nature of competency based funding but stressed that it provides online schools an opportunity to take a lead on this issue while demonstrating their capacity. Course level funding, Matt said, was a necessary building block to allowing the pilot programs from Appendix B to be successful.

Funding

In 22-30.7-113 section 4 of HB 14-1382, it states:

“NOTWITHSTANDING ANY PROVISION OF THIS SECTION TO THE CONTRARY, THE DEPARTMENT MUST IMPLEMENT THE PROVISION OF THIS SECTION ONLY IF THE DEPARTMENT RECEIVES APPROPRIATIONS OR PUBLIC OR PRIVATE GIFTS, GRANTS, OR DONATIONS IN AN AMOUNT IT DEEMS SUFFICIENT TO OFFSET THE COSTS INCURRED IN IMPLEMENTING PILOT PROGRAMS PURSUANT TO THIS SECTION.”

Pilot programs were not funded and so implementation of them has not occurred. However, Matt stated that there is interest on the part of consultants to undertake pilot projects.

Matt quoted Rick Tanski: “a school-is-a-school-is-a-school,” but pointed out that policies in Colorado have built up to make it more difficult for online schools. He closed by encouraging the OTF’s work in providing guidance on pilot programs so that the needed disruptions can move online education forward.

Questions & Answers

Q: Were the student readiness requirements in Appendix B influenced by Illinois?

A: No, they were based around California independent schools’ use of tiered interventions for student supports.

The intent of the pilot program recommendations was to provide parameters, duration, outcomes, and replication guidance. The lack of time kept the Commission from diving deeper into this area.

Elizabeth Davis

Elizabeth repeated the Richard Tanski quote, emphasizing that the focus of the OTF should not be on the tool (online) but the service to kids (education). She pointed to the name of the OTF and called out the lack of the terms “education” or “learning.”

Elizabeth used the experience of her school and its evolution in practice to highlight the importance of learning and teaching theory, based on modern research. She cautioned that the work of the OTF should not, unintentionally, compromise these theories in practice by schools, or institute bureaucrat-ese.

Elizabeth then spoke to several identified pilot programs

Pilot Programs

Accountability

Elizabeth stated accountability is important: it ties a school’s mission to their work, it provides teachers with access to formative and summative assessments, and it provides multiple measures of achievement. However, she felt the current system relies too heavily on one single measure of student achievement—while ignoring their emotional and social well-being. Elizabeth noted that many parents of online school students do not care about student testing beyond its potential to close the school their child attends—a school that has provided them with an alternative for their child’s education.

Elizabeth recommended the book *Smartest Kids in the World*, by Amanda Ripley (<http://www.amazon.com/The-Smartest-Kids-World-They/dp/1451654421>).

Student Count Process

Elizabeth suggested that student-teacher interaction for a count process may need to be expanded to include other students, coaches, and mentors as teachers.

Tiered Interventions

Calvert utilizes tiered interventions and Elizabeth welcomed OTF members to see how they are used in practice at her school. She noted that implementing early response (days, not weeks) interventions didn’t take a lot of money to implement.

Student Requirements & Responsibilities

Elizabeth requested a database of peer best practices. She saw this pilot as something that should be part of every online school’s policies, and thought the OTF could take this pilot program further. At Calvert, everyone (parents, students, and the school) have to sign a contract that explicitly explains their responsibilities.

If a student is not able to succeed online, Calvert finds them another educational home before releasing them from their records; but a financial mechanism needs to be developed to remove the incentive to hold onto students for financial reasons, regardless of their ability to succeed in that school.

Additionally, a system needs to be developed for students who seek to change schools after the October count date.

Supportive Authorizers

An authorizer needs to know the right questions to ask, including asking “what am I not asking that I should be?” Elizabeth held up D49 Digital BOCES’ development (in collaboration with schools) of dashboards—these, combined with quarterly (not annually) conducted check-ins are “critical and important.” Elizabeth acknowledged quarterly check-ins may be seen as burdensome to the schools but affirms that doing so identifies problems before they become “alarming.” Finally, the authorizer should support the mission of the school, even if it is different from every other school in that authorizer’s purview; and support all of their schools in every federally mandated obligation because they share the liability with their schools.

Future of Online Education

Resist putting brick and mortar, online, and blended learning in boxes, because technology will come and disrupt the current thinking on these.

Questions & Answers

Q: Stated that items that don’t support the mission of the school shouldn’t be essential or important to the authorizer—can you clarify this?

A: The authorizer and school need to look at the mission together to identify the non-negotiable items: what drives the school’s work? This will identify what the school can and cannot move away from so that no-one is surprised when the school calls the authorizer when something is not working or can’t be done.

Q: Did your relationship with your authorizer change over time?

A: The authorizer and I have a firm policy of tolerating each other (laughs). We let the authorizer know we needed to change direction as soon as possible—and the authorizer was supportive of that. Most of the disagreement between Calvert and the authorizer is over implementation and/or interpretation of policy mandates, like October counts.

Pilot Programs

John transitioned the meeting from presentations to the pilot program ranking homework.

Mission

OTF members had an extensive conversation about the role of the OTF in regards to pilot programs, per the statute and their charge.

The charge of the OTF, regarding pilot programs, is to (per 22-30.7-112 (4)(a)(V):

“TO ESTABLISH THE PARAMETERS FOR, DURATION OF, AND METHODS FOR EVALUATING PILOT PROGRAMS”

Pilot programs (as noted above) were not funded, and so the October 15, 2014 deadline stated in the statute does not apply to the OTF work.

However, it is understood that pilot programs will not be undertaken without funding—because, regardless of whether the pilot program is privately or publicly funded, there will be costs to CDE for administrative support, assessment, etc.

Gretchen clarified that a statute would typically define the parameters that CDE would use to create a Request for Proposal (RFP) for pilot programs, in line with the applicable statute. Concern was expressed that the guidance created by the RFP could be too prescriptive. Gretchen provided an example in prior policy that stated the specific outcomes the policy was to be in service of, while leaving the requirements and/or parameters open.

Gretchen promised to find and provide more information about the RFP and policy process for the next meeting.

Concern was expressed about the ability of the OTF to undertake this process, given the limited amount of time remaining. Ethan stated that the OTF can combine the Commission's pilot program wording, the OTF pilot program ranking homework, and additional language (as needed) to meet this charge within the time remaining.

Additional concern was expressed about the time needed to focus on the authorizer standards, and that time and energy put to the pilot program charge will detract from this. Other OTF members wanted to seize the opportunity provided and felt that both could be accomplished in the time remaining.

It was agreed to move forward with the pilot program by reviewing the rankings, agreeing to which to identify in the final report as potential (and not limited to) recommendations, and to complete homework to merge existing language into a working pilot program recommendation document to provide to the legislature.

Rankings

Pilot programs were individually ranked using the median of the scores submitted by OTF members: the lower the score, the higher in priority the pilot program.

The top five ranked pilot programs were agreed to by the OTF members for continued recommendation:

1. Measures of Student Achievement
2. Student Academic Needs
3. Student Count Process
4. Tiered Interventions
5. Requirements & Responsibilities for Student Success

The final document will highlight the above five and also state “but not limited to,” to ensure non-listed pilot programs can be considered. However, the intent is that pilot program RFPs will be reviewed more favorably the more they address any/all of these ranked pilot programs.

Homework

OTF members are to provide to John and Melanie additional language for inclusion in the combined pilot program recommendation. This language should be focused on clarifying the intent of any future pilot and what the intent and outcomes of the pilot, in regard to each area, should be.

Due: November 10th

APA will combine the Commission's language with the above five ranked pilot programs for inclusion in the combined pilot program recommendation

Due: November 14th

Other Recommendations

The Other Recommendations ranking, done by OTF members as homework, will be used to prioritize time when the OTF gets to this in its work plan.

Homework

OTF members will provide additional language for the ranked Other Recommendations.

Due: November 10th

APA will create a draft outline of the OTF report

Due: November 14th

Authorizer Standards

The OTF members discussed and decided on edits to complete the first pass through the main body of the authorizer standards.

Edits to the Further Recommendations section of the authorizer standards document were tabled until the next meeting (November 17th).

Homework

APA will provide the OTF members the revised authorizer standards document, inclusive of all changes.

Due: October 31st (Happy Halloween!).

OTF members will bring their own and solicited comments to the document to the November 17th meeting.

Public Comment

Kris Enright, with GOAL Academy provided public comment. Kris was asked to provide his speech for posting to the OTF webpage (the audio recording of the meeting will also be available on the webpage).

Kris wanted to respond to two comments he has heard repeated within the OTF meetings:

- 1) The use of the term "our children"

Colorado allows students and families to select schools that best meet their needs, regardless of the district in which they live. Limiting this is a limit to choice.

- 2) Colorado students or teachers are inferior because they choose to do online
Kris provided examples of requirements specifically applied to online schools (a student couldn't enroll in an online school if it received an "F" in the prior semester, a student had to enroll in a brick and mortar school for at least one semester before enrolling in an online school, and October count processes that are different from all other modalities) as examples of this assumption of inferiority.

Kris also objected to statements that online schools were stealing kids, holding them for the October count, and then sending them back to brick and mortar schools. He provided current student counts from GOAL to challenge this assumption.

Kris closed by stating that online and brick and mortar schools share more than they differ and encouraged everyone to understand that online schools will continue to be part of the future of education.

2x2 Survey

Surveys were sent to the top and bottom four SPF rated online schools to more fully understand their successes, needs, and vulnerabilities to OTF changes.

The surveys had the following questions:

- What has been essential to your success?
- What are your barriers to success?
- What support or accountability from your authorizer has positively changed practice in your school?
- List one to three things that if changed right now would dramatically increase your potential for success?
- Is there anything your authorizer does differently with your school, in terms of oversight or support, as compared to brick and mortar schools?
- If you have changed authorizers, how did that impact your ability to ensure student performance?

Responses were received from two top and two bottom SPF rated online schools.

OTF members were provided a digest of their answers, sorted by whether they were top or bottom performing.

An OTF member noted that autonomy, flexibility, and parity across modalities stands out as important to the success of the responding schools, and encouraged the OTF to continue to be mindful of these as the work continues.

Wrap-Up

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for November 17th, from 9:30am to 1:30pm, at the Colorado Talking Book Library: 180 Sheridan Blvd., Denver, CO 80226.

Public Comment

John announced time for public comment would be made during each of the remaining meetings. An OTF member requested more time (45 minutes, 5 minutes per speaker) for public comment be set aside at future meetings.

A concern for providing additional time for public comment, given the amount of work remaining within a limited time, was offered in response. An OTF member suggested receiving written feedback, through individual OTF members. These would be sent to APA by individual OTF members. Additionally, comments could be solicited through the OTF Webpage and/or the Blended and Online Learning listserv.

John suggested utilizing both written and public comments, though no clear consensus was offered by the OTF members.

The OTF discussed having all day meetings for December: 9:00am to 3:00pm, December 3 and/or December 16. APA will collect availability of OTF members for potentially extending the December meetings and will re-schedule with OTF members, accordingly.

The meeting was then adjourned.