

LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH COMMISSION
COMMITTEE ON DIGITAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Thursday, October 4, 2012 at 10:00am – 1:00 pm
Wachovia Innovation Hall, Friday Institute for Educational Innovation

MINUTES

The LRC Digital Learning Environments in Public Schools Committee met at 10:00am – 1:00 pm on October 4, 2012, at the Wachovia Innovation Hall located in the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University. Eight members of the committee were present. Senator Dan Soucek presided.

Chairman Soucek called the meeting to order at 10:10AM and announced that due to members still arriving, the agenda would be adjusted for the purposes of time.

He began by making some brief remarks on the purpose and vision of the Committee and then introduced Governor Wise, who proceeded to make his presentation (see attachment).

Following Governor Wise's presentation, Chairman Soucek opened the floor for questions from the committee of Governor Wise. Representative D. Craig Horn was recognized first and inquired about the role of legislatures in helping to implement digital learning systems. Governor Wise opined that the legislature is responsible for casting a vision and setting basic guidelines to districts.

Subsequently, Representative Marcus Brandon was recognized for a question about best practices for closing achievement gaps between students of varying backgrounds. Governor Wise suggested that many such examples could be found across the country and offered to aid Rep. Brandon in finding an example that fit his district.

Finally, Representative Jason Saine was recognized and asked Governor Wise about the challenges of dealing with the speed of advancing technology. Governor Wise responded by suggesting that rather than being focused on latest and greatest, many districts are simply looking for the most cost-effective ways to fill the specific needs they have identified.

After thanking Governor Wise, Chairman Soucek then closed the videoconference and returned to the earlier business of introducing members of the committee and the Sergeants-at-Arms.

He then asked for a motion to adopt the committee's budget, which was made by Representative Brandon and approved by voice vote.

Kara McCraw of the General Assembly's Research Division then read the committee's charge to the members.

Chairman Soucek then recognized Myra Best, Special Advisor to the Governor for E-Learning and Innovation for her presentation (see attachment).

At the conclusion of her presentation, Representative Marvin Lucas was recognized and asked about the timetable for final implementation of statewide broadband for school districts. Ms.

Best replied that she could not give a firm timetable, but estimated that work could be completed in approximately two years.

Chairman Soucek stated that the final presentation would be a group effort involving Dr. Glenn Kleiman, Executive Director of the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, Dr. Jeni Corn, Director of Evaluation Programs at the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, Dr. Angela Quick, Deputy Chief Academic Officer for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and Dr. Tracy Weeks, Chief Academic Officer and Interim Executive Director of the North Carolina Virtual Public Schools (see attachment).

Dr. Kleiman spoke first and outlined the potential effects of technology for education in North Carolina.

Representative Horn was recognized and inquired about the scale of current efforts in North Carolina toward making technology a part of education. Dr. Kleiman

Chairman Soucek then recognized Senator Bob Rucho, who asked about Dr. Kleiman's opinion of the fiscal implications to the State. Dr. Kleiman explained that while there would likely be financial ramifications, he was more concerned about non-monetary resources such as leadership and expertise.

Dr. Corn spoke second and detailed some of the findings of her department's research and evaluation of existing digital learning in North Carolina schools.

Chairman Soucek then recognized Representative Horn, who questioned the ability for digital systems to aid in critical thinking as is related to students' internet research. Dr. Corn related that many educators already involved in digital learning have struggled with this very question. She explained that much work has been done and is ongoing to find and preserve accepted sources of knowledge for students to access in their internet research.

Dr. Quick then presented an overview of the existing programs statewide and shared some of the common traits and benefits of current methods in use.

Senator Rucho was recognized for a question about the potential effectiveness of digital learning as it relates to improvement of reading proficiency. Dr. Quick explained that reading proficiency was one of the benchmarks measured by these types of digital systems and that research indicates that students' reading proficiency is improving.

Chairman Soucek recognized Representative Saine, who questioned the speed of data coming back to teachers to aid in student evaluation. Dr. Quick related that information is delivered in near real time and would be available to teachers during the same class period so that they could make necessary teaching adjustments immediately.

Representative Horn was then recognized and expressed concern about the delay in appointing members of the new North Carolina Longitudinal Data System Board. Dr. Quick explained that she did not have an answer to that question and offered to get one from others at the Department of Public Instruction.

Chairman Soucek then recognized Representative Brandon who asked about the methodology for collecting data. Dr. Quick explained that there would be variable methods for measuring student data, including testing and writing samples. He also questioned whether proficiency

targets had changed and questioned whether students would be able to shape their own tests. Dr. Quick assured Representative Brandon that the required proficiencies were changing and added that teachers would have a variety of testing methods for gauging their students' progress.

Senator Ralph Hise was then recognized and questioned the ability to make the data collected by teachers relevant and comparable across all 115 LEAs in North Carolina. Dr. Quick explained that each district would be collecting similar data based on their individual digital learning programs.

Dr. Weeks then spoke about the North Carolina Virtual Public School and outlined their programs and services.

Senator Hise was recognized and asked about the differentiation between advanced placement courses earned through the North Carolina Virtual Public School and community college or university coursework for high school students. Dr. Weeks replied that many of the previous options were being phased out and that the Virtual Public School is attempting to be an option for students.

Representative Harry Warren was then recognized and sought clarification on the enrollment data presented on the map prepared by Dr. Weeks. Dr. Weeks explained that the figures on the map were relevant for each county's color scheme, not the combined totals of all similarly shaded counties.

Dr. Kleiman spoke again, concluded the team presentation with some basic principles that have been found to be prerequisites for successful digital learning and shared some recommendations with the committee.

Chairman Soucek introduced Representative Horn, serving as co-chair, who read a prepared statement (see attachment).

Chairman Soucek then thanked the members, the presenters and the audience before adjourning the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 12:54.

Senator Dan Soucek, Presiding

John Clark, Committee Clerk