

Governor's Task Force on Virtual Education Focus Group Summary



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Focus Group Participation and Purpose



- ⌘ 50 students and 48 parents attended a total of 14 one hour focus groups.
- ⌘ Conducted in same locations as community forums.
- ⌘ Designed to elicit more in-depth discussion
 - ☑ Student/parent interest
 - ☑ Barriers/concerns
 - ☑ Content
 - ☑ Program design
 - ☑ Funding

Perceived Benefits of Virtual Education

⌘ Rural communities

- ☒ "Bridges the gap" between urban and rural educational opportunities
- ☒ Virtual education would provide access to skilled teachers communities can not attract.
- ☒ Helps reduce student/teacher isolation

⌘ Urban communities

- ☒ Largely pleased with educational opportunities currently provided.
- ☒ Primarily seen as a way to support and enrich existing educational opportunities.

What the Public Wants



⌘ Quality, Quality, Quality

- ☑ Next generation courses, tools, and content
 - ☒ High bandwidth access in schools
 - ☒ Customizable and responsive
 - ☒ Media rich and interactive
 - ☒ Many of these courses and content, etc. don't exist at the moment
- ☑ Online courses must overcome current shortcomings
 - ☒ Improve access to online instructors
 - ☒ Improve sense of being part of a learning community
 - ☒ Improve content and course design

What the Public Wants (cont.)

⌘ Content and Tools

- ☑ Universal appeal for first providing a wide array of support material for teachers and students.
- ☑ In the early stages, course development was seen as a secondary goal.

⌘ Digital Commons

- ☑ Universal appeal for creating a Washington State Digital Learning Commons
 - ☒ One-stop shopping
 - ☒ Students and teachers access all courses and tools through one site

Parent Concerns

⌘ Funding

- ☑ Consensus that virtual education should not be funded at the expense of traditional education budgets, and that
- ☑ Such a burden on the community will just widen the divide between affluent and impoverished districts and individuals.

"The district is already strapped for money, how are they going to provide computers for everyone?" - Nova parent

"I can tell you right now nobody around here is going to pay for it and it can't come from district funds because that would only increase the haves and have nots" - Omak parent

Student Experiences w/ Current Online Courses



⌘ Access to instructors a problem

- ☑ Time lag getting critical questions answered
- ☑ Some students report waiting a couple days

⌘ Quality of instructor unknown

- ☑ Need reviews of instructor from past students

⌘ Ability to cheat on tests

- ☑ Log on and off the system to find answers to test questions

Student Experiences w/ Current Online Courses (cont.)



⌘ Boring content

⌘ Credit transfer problems

"Our experiences with online course have been frustrating; we have a faceless teacher and we have to wait too long for any feedback" - Omak student

"Most of the stuff is good, but not good enough to take a class online" - Bellevue student

High School Student Concerns

⌘ Fear of the unknown

- ☑ Students would prefer taking a traditional course over online if it is available.
- ☑ Perceived risk of failure and negative impact on future college or employment opportunities


⌘ Lack of access to instructors

⌘ Need structure and deadlines to combat lack of self-motivation

"I would need to learn better focus before I take a class like that." - Nova student

"Have someone trained that will be at school to have questions answered immediately." - Pasco student

High School Student Concerns (cont.)



⌘ Reluctant to participate in online courses until:

- ☑ Perceived advantage over traditional courses
- ☑ Offer access to essential courses or learning opportunities otherwise unavailable

"Too risky to take core courses or AP courses virtually. If I failed it would wreck my GPA. A failure like that might affect my college entry chances" - Pasco student

Benefits of Starting with Middle Schools



- ⌘ Greatest enthusiasm for online courses came from middle school parents and students
- ⌘ Good time to introduce new learning structures and instruction methods
 - ☑ Natural bridge between elementary and high school.
 - ☑ Absence of performance pressure associated with high school students.
 - ☑ Middle school students are eager to try new methods.
- ⌘ Offers greatest potential for successful introduction of virtual courses to students

Delivery Methods and Access

⌘ Primary access from school

- ☑ Both parents and students believe access to a traditional teacher is essential.
- ☑ School-based access ensures quality and accessibility of these services.

⌘ Access from public libraries should also be supported

- ☑ Rural areas particularly concerned about lack of PC availability outside the schools.

⌘ Access concerns closely related to location

- ☑ Primary concern in rural areas
- ☑ Urban areas generally not concerned with connectivity or PC availability at home/school.