

# SF2131

## Online Learning Task Force Recommendations

### Introduction

As part of Senate File 2131, Iowa's Area Education Agencies were tasked with facilitating a task force to examine the needs of Iowa school districts and the availability of current online learning offerings for K-12 students. This includes closely examining the current services delivered by statewide online learning partners (Iowa Community Colleges, the Department of Education, and Iowa's Area Education Agencies), and making recommendations for improved offerings, improved efficiencies and efforts for quality control.

### The Statewide Partners

As referenced throughout this report, the task force looked specifically at three entities referenced as *statewide partners*. Though their functions and ranges of services vary, each serve to assist local districts in the delivery of K-12 online learning. Each entity does so with a statewide approach and approach to their efforts. Furthermore, each entity actively partners with many others, including local districts and the other statewide partners. Indeed, both "statewide" and the "partner" are important descriptors.

The three statewide partners include:

- Iowa Community Colleges
- The Iowa Department of Education, and specifically their online learning program, Iowa Learning Online
- Iowa's Area Education Agencies, including their collaborative program, AEA Learning Online

### Process Overview

Iowa's Area Education Agencies worked with each stakeholder group to identify three members to serve on the task force, as well as Dr. Ryan Wise, director of the Department of Education. The group met four times. The committee first heard presentations from different providers in Iowa to better understand the scope of online offerings from the statewide system (see appendix). From there, the group developed and conducted a survey of Iowa school districts to assess their current needs regarding courses, school supports and student supports. This led to the task force developing recommendations based on the resulting data.

### Membership

#### Local Educational Agencies

- Delane Galvin, Superintendent of SE Warren Community School District
- Art Sathoff, Superintendent of Indianola Community School District
- Jill Janes, Director of Innovative Learning for Boone Community School District

#### Area Education Agencies

- Tom Lane, Executive Director of Iowa's AEA's
- Evan Abbey, Program Director of AEA Learning Online
- David Vanhorn, Associate Administrator of Green Hills AEA

## Iowa Department of Education

- Ryan Wise, Director
- Jeremy Varner, Administrator of Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation
- Gwen Nagel, Director of Iowa Learning Online
- Janet Boyd, School Improvement Consultant

## Community Colleges

- Theresa Umscheid, Executive Director of Iowa Community Colleges Online Consortium
- Todd Prusha, Executive Director of Distance Learning for Kirkwood Community College
- Valerie Newhouse, President of Iowa Lakes Community College

## Online Learning Defined

For the purposes of this work, the task force discussed what was defined as **online learning**, as well as **online courses**. Specific to the work, it was determined the focus was on exclusively K-12 coursework (i.e. not college credit courses). It was also mentioned that while the tendency was to examine semester-based courses at the high school level that were fully online, many other online learning formats were discussed.

Some examples include:

- Flexible-start, flexible-paced courses
- Credit recovery or self-paced options
- Blended learning, which includes both an online and a face-to-face component
- Middle school and elementary school online programming

## Data and Information Considered

### Online Survey

This four-question survey, distributed to all Iowa superintendents, asked school leaders to rank their current needs regarding course offerings, school supports and student supports. There were 129 respondents representing 89 unique school districts. Data were aggregated and shared with task force members via graphs and spreadsheet download. The survey is located at <http://survey.aealearningonline.org>.

### Comprehensive School Improvement Plan Data from 2017-18

From the most recent data collection, schools report on if they offer any online courses. Those responding “yes” continue to identify a) for what purposes they offer online learning, and b) which providers they used. For the year, 280 public school districts and 21 non-public schools reported “yes.” Information on their purposes and providers can be [found here](#).

## Recommendations

***The statewide online learning partners should identify and extend structures for Iowa schools to help prepare their students for online learning opportunities.***

Regional Education Laboratory (REL) Midwest’s 2015 report identified that Iowa students, much like other states, succeed at higher rates when prepared to learn in an online environment (p. 3). Statewide partners can provide efficiencies by creating structures that can be accessed and implemented by schools. For example, an orientation helps students understand how a specific online course space operates, including how to check for due dates, how to complete assignments, and how to collaborate with online peers. Learning surveys can help students cue into learning styles and possible danger points in the online environment, such as procrastination or failing to read closely. An introductory mini-course in how to be an online learner can fit within a typical 8th grade technology curriculum or be used with students entering high school.

***The statewide online learning partners should coordinate efforts and services that result in greater diversity in learning opportunities for students and educators.***

Forty-five respondents identified this as the top student need, making it the most frequently cited need in this area. Given the wider definition of online learning used by the task force, this recommendation goes beyond simply more subjects for online courses. This can include collaborative opportunities for students to work with students in another district on a common task, or for teachers to better individualize instruction by having access to a wider range of online e-curriculum or textbooks. This can also include opportunities for students to self-teach: accessing self-paced learning opportunities, including stand-alone modules and mini-courses around topics of personal interest. While these specialized learning opportunities are often too resource-intensive for any district to implement on their own, statewide curation or development of these opportunities can better provide this array.

***The statewide online learning partners should look at developing online learning resources that specifically support the Future Ready Iowa initiative and the Virtual Clearinghouse for Work-Based Learning.***

Thirty-four respondents identified supports for work-based learning as their top need for current course offerings, more so than traditional or self-paced course offerings. Currently, the Iowa Department of Education, Iowa's Area Education Agencies, and Iowa Workforce Development are collaborating to develop the Virtual Clearinghouse for Work-Based Learning, an online site where business and community partners can define authentic projects for their industries that students engage with in the K-12 classroom. Special focus is given to projects that can be done regionally or virtually, as to aid rural and remote districts to connect with statewide partners for learning. Additionally, Iowa's Intermediary Network delivers many work-based learning opportunities, such as apprenticeships, internships and career pathways. All statewide partners offer e-curriculum specific to the workplace that can support these opportunities as well. Further developing these opportunities and connecting them with each other can create more comprehensive work-based learning.

***The statewide online learning partners should collaborate on online learning standards and best practices to share with K-12 schools.***

In terms of school support needs, better alignment to the core (54 respondents identifying it in the top two needs) and improving rigor and engagement (49 respondents identifying it in the top two needs) both rated high for improving online learning opportunities. Many districts identified concerns regarding purchased e-curriculum products and the lack of alignment, rigor and engagement that they provide, despite their utility for providing learning opportunities. As displayed by all the statewide partner presentations, the statewide partners have focused heavily on online learning and course standards, as well as best practices for online facilitation and instructional design. Efforts to collaborate on this process in order to create more uniform best practices can help provide consistency across the state.

***The statewide online learning partners should help provide districts with resources that help districts make an educated local decision.***

Identifying and articulating best practices is part of the solution; the statewide partners should identify resources that make those best practices useful to a local district. The key, as articulated by user feedback and task force discussion, is to not exclude districts from the process, but rather help them make more educated local decisions. Resources might include a rubric for evaluating engagement of a learning module or a structured process that allow fellow participants to calibrate their own interpretations of how e-curriculum aligns to local standards and the Iowa Core. They might include support of a platform around curating open educational resources for the purpose of online learning or the means to enhance purchased e-curriculum with customizable interactives. Through a collaborative process, the statewide partners can help provide the means to develop these resources most efficiently.

### ***The statewide online learning partners should collaborate on common training and professional learning opportunities built around common best practices for K-12 online educators.***

As seen by state partner presentations, professional learning opportunities already exist. The Online Learning for Iowa Educators (OLLIE) series offers facilitated professional learning courses for credit, self-paced learning opportunities, a community of practice of educators, and a practicum for new blended and online instructors. This series has served over 1,000 teachers since its inception in 2010, all at low to no cost. However, 77 respondents replied that professional development for teachers to teach online was in their top three school support needs, indicating that some districts might not be aware or otherwise have access to the learning. What is more, professional learning has struggled without having the external revenue sources for instructors or the incentives for participants to take. Collaboration by the state partners can better extend these existing opportunities to make them available and accessible to current teachers, and a communication outreach strategy can better make awareness of what is available.

### ***The statewide online learning partners should coordinate services that help school districts develop and implement their own online learning opportunities.***

Survey respondents were often split in terms of their needs to develop their own online learning opportunities or programs. For example, while 27 respondents replied that more semester-based courses offered by their own district teachers was the highest priority, 30 respondents replied that it was the lowest. Many districts have provided anecdotal interest in developing their own blended learning programs, flipped learning courses, or fully online learning programs. New legislation with Senate File 475 offers additional avenues to offer courses and share them with other districts. Statewide partners can find ways to help district leaders meet these needs, be it through shared services, consultation and guidance, or structures that make the process possible.

## **Conclusion (If/Then)**

**If** statewide partners extend coordination of their services with renewed focus on how to benefit local K-12 online learning efforts and improve outreach to local schools,

**Then** schools can provide more online learning opportunities from different sources, including their own, and those opportunities will be of higher quality and result in increased student learning.

We thank you for the opportunity to initiate this important work. The statewide partners will continue to work together in a statewide partnership around these recommendations.

## **Sources Cited**

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Regional Educational Laboratory. (2015). *Online course use in Iowa and Wisconsin public high schools: The results of two statewide surveys*. Retrieved from [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/DigitalEducation/Online\\_Courses\\_Iowa\\_Wisconsin\\_REL\\_2015065.pdf](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/DigitalEducation/Online_Courses_Iowa_Wisconsin_REL_2015065.pdf)

# Appendix

## Current Landscape

To determine the current status of online learning offerings and services being provided, the task force invited six participants from among the statewide partners to present. This included each completing a current provider survey, and then facilitating a 15-min. presentation and discussion on their programs. Here are the six providers who were invited:

### ICCOOC

#### Iowa Community College Online Consortium (ICCOOC)

The ICCOC is a collaborative effort of seven community colleges, governed by an oversight committee among chief academic officers of each college. ICCOC courses are fully online and traditional in nature (i.e. distinct period of time with fellow participants, and not self-paced). In addition, the ICCOC provides student service assistance, including online tutoring, educational resources, library services, plagiarism detection, and more. Funding is provided by per-credit hour fees. Representatives from ICCOC identified that a better understanding of the online learning needs of K-12 schools “would be a great help as we look to better our online opportunities.”

### Kirkwood

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

#### Kirkwood Community College’s High School Distance Learning (HSDL) Program

Kirkwood Community College’s HSDL program provides both correspondence and online learning opportunities to high schools in Iowa. Unlike other community colleges which primarily offer concurrent enrollment courses, HSDL offers supplementary online courses that help students earn credit at their local high school. This includes a flexible enrollment period. HSDL currently serves over 400 unique students from more than 35 school districts. In 2017-18, students took more than 650 individual courses and had a completion rate of 81.3%. The program is mostly self-funded through a \$175 in-state tuition fee. HSDL representatives identified rural inequity in access to internet for online courses, as well as the resource-intensive requirements for ADA/Section

508 accessibility compliance, as chief challenges to offering or extending services. Also mentioned, Iowa Code Section 282.6 restricts the ability for students to pay for classes directly, meaning district can deny students access to a course.

### DMACC

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#### DMACC Online Career Academy

DMACC offers high school students the opportunity to enroll in college credit coursework through semester-based courses, with costs of the program being covered by the high school (done through the sharing agreement between the school and DMACC). This service takes advantage of Senior Year Plus legislation to offer these opportunities. DMACC representatives identified the chief constraint for delivery of service being simply the availability of resources to further extend their offerings.

### IOWA Learning Online

#### Iowa Learning Online (through the Iowa Department of Education)

Iowa Learning Online (ILO) is a comprehensive service of semester-based fully online courses that meet Offer and Teach requirements. This includes courses not available in a local curriculum or in areas of teacher shortages, as well as opportunities for credit advancement or recovery. Currently, 74% of Iowa schools have an affiliation with ILO, resulting in 1,334 enrollments during the 2017-18 school year. ILO is codified by Senate File 2284, Senate File 2131, and Senate File 475, and governed by the Director of the Department of Education and the State Board. The program currently is funded through student tuition and E-Rate funding. ILO engages in many

partnerships, both with community colleges (e.g. HSDL posts courses on their catalog) as well as the AEAs (e.g. professional learning for instructors). Recently, ILO has extended services to help districts utilize ILO e-curriculum to teach themselves at reduced costs. Representatives from ILO identified constraints such as minimal access to marketing opportunities and general awareness of high-quality online instruction, as well as specific limitations (e.g. availability of high quality Career and Technical Education online courses) as constraints to extending services.



### **Iowa Online AP Academy (IOAPA)**

IOAPA provides Iowa students with free access to online above-level courses when schools are unable to offer those courses on site. This includes both Advanced Placement (AP) courses for high school students and non-AP courses for middle school students. While the intent is for rural and under-resources school access, the courses are not exclusive to those populations. The courses have set deadlines, but allow students to move through them at their own pace. Enrollment has grown, as 2016-17 enrollment featured 570 students and 846 enrollments, and demand continues to outpace supply, as representatives noted funding constraints as a limit on serving more students.



### **AEA Learning Online**

AEA Learning Online is a collaborative of the nine Area Education Agencies, providing both online professional development for teachers and online learning services for K-12 schools to use with their students. This includes e-curriculum, technology hosting and support, program consultation, hosting the Online Learning for Iowa Educators professional development sequence and more. AEA Learning Online does not provide direct instruction to K-12 students online, though through their services, around 6,000 unique students per trimester are using their hosted learning management system and another 6,000 unique students are using their personalized learning system. The program is codified by Chapter 273, allowing the AEAs to enter into contracted services with school districts, and is governed by a Governing Council reporting to their Chief Administrators and their AEA Board of Directors. AEA Learning Online is primarily funded through tuition costs for their professional learning services and a school opt-in fee of 50 cents per student; they current do not receive an appropriation or “flow-through” money from the rest of the AEAs. Because of this, representatives from AEA Learning Online mentioned that it remains a small program in terms of staffing, relying on partnerships with other entities and school districts to extend services.