

Online Education Manager, AK

Agency: 350 Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Budget Period: 2009-11

Recommendation Summary Text (Short Description):

Superintendent Bergeson requests \$297,100 to hire an Online Education Manager. This position will have responsibilities in four major areas:

- 1) provide tools able to evaluate the quality of online courses to students, parents, teachers, principals and state officials;
- 2) conduct research and gather data necessary to support decision-making in the online education environment;
- 3) develop policy and a functional oversight process; and
- 4) promote partnerships with online education providers, the Digital Learning Commons and the State Board of Education.

Fiscal Detail

Operating Expenditures		FY 2010	FY 2011	Total
Online Education Manager	001-01	\$154,100	\$143,000	\$297,100
Total Cost		\$154,100	\$143,000	\$297,100

Staffing	FY 2010	FY 2011	Annual Avg.
Total FTEs Requested	1.5	1.5	1.5

Package Description

Background

Online learning is a growing sector in P-12 public education. Over 40 states deliver full-time, or augment traditional class time with, online courses for academic credit. In its policy paper, *Online Learning Policy Issues*, the Washington State Board of Education points to growth and retention data that call for the consideration of public educators.

A (national) survey conducted for a report, entitled *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning*, found that a fifth of online learning programs reported growth of more than 50% between the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years, and almost half of the programs reported growth of 25% or higher. The reported retention rates of students, however, were in the range of 60% to 95%, with many programs reporting in the 70-85% range.

Current Situation

OSPI's annual technology inventory survey reports that for the 2007-08 school year, 14,000 (1.4%) of state high school students are enrolled in an online course. *This figure doubles the number reported in the 2002-03 survey.* And, from a 40% penetration in 2002-03, 55% of districts have students enrolled in online courses today. Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) program data reveal a similar pattern of growth. The number of full-time students enrolled in learning activities that occur away from public school

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classrooms – an online course, school or program – and claimed for state basic education funding has jumped from 1,437 in 2006-07 to 5,666 in the 2007-08 school year.

However, comprehensive data that would document the full extent of teaching and learning taking place over the internet are missing. We work closely with the field and know, anecdotally, that there are many other students taking non-credit courses and using web-based learning resources to supplement classroom lessons. And we know these numbers are rising rapidly.

Who benefits by learning online?

- Students who live in **rural communities** and those who attend small schools **small schools**, which do not offer advanced classes or courses for college credit.
- Students who **learn better outside the classroom**.
- Students who **cannot attend a traditional class** – incarcerated students, teenage mothers, students with health problems.
- Students who need **more credits to graduate** on time.
- Students who have failed standard courses and need to **gain back credits** for graduation.

Here are the top three issues that impact the operating environment.

Oversight: Strategic direction, depth and consistent accountability are missing from the state's oversight role. As a result decisions taken at the local level are driving the development of online education – absent state standards, program guidelines or policy. OSPI concerns were echoed by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) auditors who reviewed the Alternative Learning Experience program in 2005. In their final report, the JLARC auditors point out the prevalence of online learning in Washington and the absence of oversight.

Data→Information→Knowledge: A survey and analysis of online learning and professional development across Washington school districts does not exist. Comprehensive, ongoing data collection and qualified observation are critical if we are to define the state's role in online education and make informed decisions about policy, governance, instructional best practice and effective course design.

Certification: The potential for uneven and missing certification credentials among online teachers is an issue educators and lawmakers must address. Districts have wide discretion relative to online instruction and it is possible that teachers who are not certified in Washington can work without the basic safeguards of state oversight. Industry best practice guidelines are unequivocal: teachers who teach online need additional training unique to that delivery system.

In part, the certification problem stems from current law – the areas of OSPI responsibility and oversight are not clear. The implications are many, not least of which

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is the fact that many online learning programs are operated by private sector vendors that contract directly with districts and schools. These vendors operate with minimal oversight.

Proposed Solution

We propose a new program at OSPI that provides leadership, support and accountability for online education by recruiting a manager to direct programmatic activities.

The Online Program Manager, with OSPI staff and online learning educators, would:

- 1) Create diagnostic tools able to evaluate the quality of online offerings for students, parents, teachers, principals and state officials;
- 2) Develop and distribute a comprehensive survey of online learning in Washington;
- 3) Compile current research on the advantages, drawbacks and outcomes of online education;
- 4) Identify best practices in online instruction and the development of learning environments that lead to high-performing students;
- 5) Develop recommendations based on data, input from state partners, and research and analysis in three key areas:
 - Strategic direction, oversight and policy.
 - Accountability at the state and district level.
 - Certification, instructional practice and online course design.
- 6) Lead the development of policy that meets the need for appropriate oversight of online education;
- 7) Develop a strategic collaboration with the Digital Learning Commons;
- 8) Work with key partners in online education to develop and implement a strategic communications plan that raises awareness about the issues, best practices and benefits of e-learning;
- 9) Address the access issue – make sure all learners have dependable access to online curricula aligned to state academic standards and integrated with Washington’s assessment system;
- 10) Identify high quality professional development opportunities and best practices for online educators; and
- 11) Identify course design techniques that create engaging, results-oriented online learning activities.

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Contact person

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Narrative Justification and Impact Statement

As noted above, the presence of online learning continues to expand across Washington. At this point in time, accountability for teacher certification and student outcomes is lacking, and state oversight of online course quality needs to be strengthened.

What undesired results will be reduced?

The risks and problems that districts incur as they contract e-learning vendor-by-vendor can be reduced by a state-level program that provides:

- Clear guidance on course quality and content;
- State-level oversight;
- Policies that safeguard educators and students; and
- Standards for course design and teacher certification.

Will efficiency increase? How?

Yes. We envision a turnkey program template that guides educators, step-by-step, through the process of bringing online courses into their learning environment. With program fundamentals in hand, district leaders will save the time and money it takes to put an effective, standards-based program in place at the school level.

Is this decision package essential to implement a strategy identified in the agency's strategic plan?

This funding would support two goals in the OSPI strategic plan:

- Access to high-quality educational opportunities for all students.
- Delivery of supplementary and advanced mathematics courses for high school students.

Does this decision package provide essential support to one of the Governor's priorities?

Yes, it supports the Governor's priority to improve K-12 education. As the number of students enrolled in online learning programs multiplies, it is critical that the state acts to support student performance with high quality course design, properly credentialed instruction, effective policy and clear accountabilities at the state and local level.

Impact on Clients and Services

If funded, this collaborative, program-building initiative, will resolve the issues of compliance, accountability, teacher certification and course quality that derail the best efforts of busy administrators and jeopardize student outcomes. In addition, the turnkey program template OSPI proposes will reduce the time and money it takes to build online learning programs at the school level.

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Impact on Other State Programs

OSPI welcomes the experience, expertise and field-based knowledge housed at the Digital Learning Commons. A strong and dynamic OSPI-DLC partnership positions the organization as a key designer of effective program strategies for online education in Washington. Among the partnerships OSPI will build, collaboration with the DLC has the best potential to extend and exemplify a state leadership role within the e-learning environment.

What alternatives were explored by the agency, and why was this alternative chosen?

Based on dialogue with the field, partners across P-12 education and ongoing research at the state and national level, OSPI believes the solution proposed here acts in the best interests of the learner, the community and the state.

What are the consequences of not funding this package?

- Accountability will continue to drift toward local-level disposition without state standards, program guidelines or policy.
- Decision-making will continue without student and program data.
- The certification of online teachers will remain independent of state oversight.

What is the relationship, if any, to the state's capital budget?

None.

What changes would be required to existing statutes, rules, or contracts, in order to implement the change?

We anticipate the need to write new or modify existing rules for online education in Washington.

Expenditure Calculations and Assumptions:

Expenditure assumptions are based on the salary and benefits for a program manager and a .5 FTE administrative assistant.

Object Detail

		FY 2010	FY 2011	Total
A	Salary and Wages	\$86,200	\$87,752	\$173,952
B	Employee Benefits	\$28,500	\$29,013	\$57,513
C	Contracts	\$0	\$0	\$0
E	Goods/Services	\$25,400	\$24,757	\$50,157
G	Travel	\$4,000	\$4,072	\$8,072
J	Equipment	\$10,000	\$0	\$10,000
N	Grants	\$0	\$0	\$0
	Interagency Reimbursement	\$0	\$0	\$0
	Other	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Objects		\$154,100	\$145,594	\$299,694

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Expenditures & FTEs by Program

Activity Inventory Item	Prog	Staffing			Operating Expenditures		
		FY 2010	FY 2011	Avg	FY 2010	FY 2011	Total
A009 Curriculum and Instruction – State Coordination	055	1.5	1.5	1.5	\$154,100	\$145,594	\$299,694
Total Activities		1.5	1.5	1.5	\$154,100	\$145,594	\$299,694

Six-Year Expenditure Estimates

Fund	09-11 Total	11-13 Total	13-15 Total
General Fund – State	\$299,694	\$299,097	\$309,961
Expenditure Total	\$299,694	\$299,097	\$309,961
FTEs	1	1	1

Distinction between one-time and ongoing costs:

There is a one-time cost for new equipment for FTEs of \$10,000.

Budget impacts in future biennia:

Ongoing costs include inflation.