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December 12, 2006

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Legislative Education Study Committee

**FR:** Peter van Moorsel

**RE: STAFF BRIEF: DISTANCE LEARNING INITIATIVES**

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The 2006 Interim Workplan of the Legislative Education Study Committee includes a presentation on the progress of the Public Education Department (PED) distance learning rule, and IDEAL-New Mexico (Innovative Digital Education and Learning in New Mexico). Another issue closely related to this presentation is the distance learning network proposed by Regional Education Cooperatives (RECs) #8 and #9, which aims to facilitate the exchange of courses and teaching services in participating school districts.

There are many advantages associated with distance learning, including expanded course offerings in rural school districts, increased options for at-risk and credit recovery students, and greater scheduling freedom for participants. However, the implementation of increasing numbers of distance learning programs has drawn attention to several issues, including the applicability of the compulsory attendance law, staffing, connectivity, alignment of curriculum with state standards, development of consistent terminology, and funding. Distance learning programs rely heavily on self-motivated students, or parents who monitor students' activities, certify attendance, and provide instructional support; they also introduce new governance and finance issues, since they have the capacity to enroll students beyond a district's borders.

**Issues:**

***PED Distance Learning Rule and Policy***

At the October LESC meeting, the committee heard a presentation by PED and the Higher Education Department (HED), regarding virtual schools in New Mexico. The presentation included a description of a proposed rule to address distance learning. The committee expressed

concern that some portions of the PED rule limited, rather than supported, some of the benefits of distance learning. Subsequently, PED held a public hearing on the rule on November 1 to elicit input on the rule. Specifically, some of the concerns from those providing input include:

- Barring several exceptions, the rule requires that “all distance learning classes shall be physically attended at a distance learning center.” This requirement elicited the concern that it would adversely affect students living far away from distance learning centers, as well as other students.
- The rule limits the number of distance courses a student is permitted to take each semester to four, only two of which may be asynchronous (self-paced); individuals providing input voiced their concerns that the rule would restrict students’ abilities to recover credits, pursue early graduation, or earn extra college credit while in high school. One solution that was suggested was to allow students to take as many classes as they are able to pass with a grade of “C” or better, thereby discouraging students from taking on an overwhelmingly demanding course load.
- The rule requires that districts make agreements among themselves regarding the reimbursement for cross-district enrollment in distance learning courses; however, school districts suggested that reimbursement to providers for distance learning courses should be clearly defined, and not left to negotiations between districts.
- Another concern is that requiring the use of the same grading policies for locally scheduled classes as for all distance learning classes could also be problematic, as some distance learning courses may be more rigorous than locally offered classes.

### ***IDEAL-NM (Innovative Digital Education and Learning in New Mexico)***

On October 27, 2006, the Governor’s office announced a plan to create a statewide learning program that invests in technology and new opportunities for New Mexicans to access school programs regardless of where they live in the state.

This program, called Innovative Digital Education and Learning in New Mexico (IDEAL-NM), lists as its main goal a coordinated and standardized statewide eLearning system and Cyber Academy, and aims to achieve this goal by leveraging the capacity of existing schools, higher education, and current statewide projects. Staff from HED, PED, and the New Mexico Learning Network (NMLN), a statewide collaboration of school districts, colleges, universities, and other government entities throughout New Mexico, have been developing IDEAL-NM, and indicate that it is composed of several major parts:

- At the center of IDEAL will be an eLearning service center, which acts as a technical support desk for eLearning instructors and site coordinators.
- NMLN provides an online catalog and schedule for eLearning courses, programs, schools, colleges, universities, governmental agencies, etc.
- IDEAL-NM will feature a common learning management system, which facilitates interaction and cooperation between students and their teachers via email, message boards, live web-conferencing, and chat.

- Consolidated hosting services make up another integral part of IDEAL-NM, as these services will support the learning management system.

HED and PED propose that the initial focus of IDEAL will be rural students in grades 6 through 12, but the ultimate goal is to grow to meet the demands of all students. The system would address many geographic, schedule, and administrative barriers to quality educational opportunities and plans to:

- enable schools to offer courses that would not have been possible due to small head counts;
- allow adults who work full-time to pursue a degree at their own pace; and
- enable companies to provide self-paced workforce development.

To finance IDEAL-NM, HED and PED request \$10.8 million in FY 08 and an additional \$28.0 million over the next five years to create a sustainable statewide eLearning system for New Mexico, including a statewide Cyber Academy; however, according to input provided at a meeting with the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) staff, the proposal presented by HED and PED lacked specificity in some areas. LFC concerns included:

- The operating costs of the service center, and that the costs faced by both users and providers of distance courses have not yet sufficiently been addressed.
- The method by which students participating in distance learning courses would be counted under the State Equalization Guarantee needs to be addressed.
- The IDEAL-NM proposal does not address the connectivity costs faced by individual school districts; in some rural districts these costs could be substantial.
- Projections of student, teacher, school, and district participation in IDEAL-NM are necessary; these numbers would be helpful in justifying the costs of the proposal.

### **REC #8 and REC #9 Distance Learning Network**

A distance learning initiative being developed in New Mexico on a smaller scale is a consortium between two RECs and their member districts, Alamogordo Public Schools, and five institutions of higher education to develop a distance learning network to serve rural school districts. The consortium's proposal for the network is attached to this brief, and includes a diagram depicting the configuration of the learning network, as well as the proposed budget.

- REC #8 is composed of Dexter Consolidated Schools, Hagerman Municipal Schools, Lake Arthur Municipal Schools, and Loving Municipal Schools, and REC #9 comprises Capitan Municipal Schools, Carrizozo Municipal Schools, Cloudcroft Municipal Schools, Corona Public Schools, Hondo Valley Public Schools, Ruidoso Municipal Schools, and Tularosa Municipal Schools.

- Alamogordo Public Schools and five institutions of higher education, New Mexico State University (NMSU)-Alamogordo, Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU)-Roswell, ENMU-Ruidoso, NMSU-Carlsbad, and New Mexico Junior College are also members of the consortium developing this network.
- The New Mexico Council for Higher Education Computing and Communication Services (CHECS) is the wireless telecommunications provider for the network. CHECS is a not-for-profit corporation in New Mexico whose members are professionals from the computing services divisions in every institution of higher education within the state.

Initially, the consortium proposes to develop a pilot distance learning network in rural New Mexico with a partnership between small, rural school districts, the two RECs and postsecondary institutions; the consortium intends to develop this pilot network into a distance learning model that will be replicated throughout the state utilizing partnerships of RECs, school districts, and postsecondary institutions. The goals of the consortium are to enable this distance learning network to serve rural districts by:

- providing synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities for classes not available to smaller schools;
- providing professional development for administrators, teachers, and support staff;
- supporting high school reform in rural schools by augmenting available curricula and increasing their rigor;
- assisting in credit recovery; and
- providing dual credit opportunities.

**Background:**

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and other authorities report that distance learning opportunities have developed explosively over recent years. According to *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning*, as of September 2006, 38 states have either state-led online education programs, state policies that govern district-level online learning programs, or both. One state in particular passed a law in 2006 creating an online learning experience requirement for high school graduation. In New Mexico, school districts and institutions of higher education are currently developing or delivering a variety of distance learning programs to public school-age students throughout the state.

Currently, the most-developed distance learning provider in New Mexico is the Cyber Academy at Rio Rancho Public Schools (RRPS):

- In 2005 and 2006, the Legislature appropriated a total of \$731,900 to PED for the Cyber Academy.
- RRPS reports that 178 students are currently enrolled in the Cyber Academy.

- The Cyber Academy has contracted the National Network of Digital Schools to provide curricula for asynchronous courses and related technology; an electronic system for tracking students; and instructional support and teacher professional development.

However, several other distance learning programs are active in New Mexico. Among them are:

- Raton’s Virtual High School, which has reported that it currently serves approximately 100 students, of whom 15 reside within Raton district boundaries.
- Cesar Chavez Charter School in Deming, which opened in October with 123 students. Of these, 33 are housed in the county’s Secure School, with a teacher going to the detention center for classes, and 25 are working online from San Felipe Pueblo.

**Presenters:**

Dr. Jim Holloway, Assistant Secretary, Rural Education Division, PED, and Ms. Veronica Chavez-Neuman, Chief Information Officer, HED, will provide a presentation on the IDEAL-NM funding request. Dr. Holloway will also provide an update on the revision of the PED distance learning rule and on potential legislation to regulate distance learning in New Mexico.

Mr. David Chavez, Superintendent, Loving Municipal Schools, and Ms. Sandy Gladden, Executive Director, REC #9, will present a proposal for a distance learning network incorporating two RECs and their member districts, Alamogordo Public Schools, and five institutions of higher education.

**Questions the committee may wish to consider:**

1. Will legislation be required to effectively regulate distance learning in New Mexico?
2. How have the concerns about portions of the PED rule been addressed?
3. How long will it take to fully implement IDEAL-NM?
4. What number of students, teachers, schools, and districts are expected to participate in IDEAL-NM in its first year of operation? In subsequent years?
5. What type of professional development is required of teachers to be able to teach using IDEAL-NM?
6. What will be the governance structure adopted for IDEAL-NM?
7. What implications, if any, will the Qwest settlement have on the implementation of distance learning programs in New Mexico?
8. What compatibility options exist between the proposed IDEAL-NM and REC distance learning networks?

9. Will IDEAL-NM or the REC distance learning network be able to utilize the Wire-NM infrastructure?
10. How can existing distance learning networks and programs be used to reduce costs in implementing IDEAL-NM?
11. How will school districts ensure that courses taught over the proposed REC distance learning network meet New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks?
12. What possibilities exist for expanding/replicating the REC distance learning network to other RECs throughout the state?
13. In the 2006 legislative session the LESC and the Public School Capital Outlay Oversight Task Force recommended legislation to fund the correction of educational technology deficiencies and the replacement of obsolete educational equipment in school districts.
  - a. How does IDEAL-NM supplement this initiative?
  - b. Will some of the money requested for IDEAL-NM also be used to correct educational technology deficiencies, replace obsolete equipment, and improve the connectivity of school districts?

Regional Education Cooperatives 8 and 9  
Presentation to Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC)  
December 12, 2006

**Overview:** A distance learning network is being developed by Pecos Valley Regional Education Cooperative (#8), Region IX Education Cooperative (#9), Alamogordo Public Schools and five post secondary institutions. The network is being established with wireless telecommunications provider connecting to CHECSNet. (Please see diagram.) The expected operational date is January, 2007 on a limited basis and to be fully operational for the 2007-2008 school year.

**Background:** Partners in the network include REC IX (Capitan, Carrizozo, Cloudcroft, Corona, Hondo Valley, Ruidoso and Tularosa school districts), NMSU-Alamogordo, ENMU-Roswell and ENMU-Ruidoso. The collaboration and network development has occurred over the past three years. NMSU has invested in the network with technical support. Pecos Valley REC (Dexter, Hagerman, Lake Arthur, and Loving) NMSU-Carlsbad and NMJC joined the consortium in November, 2006.

**Intent:** To develop a distance learning network to serve rural school districts by:

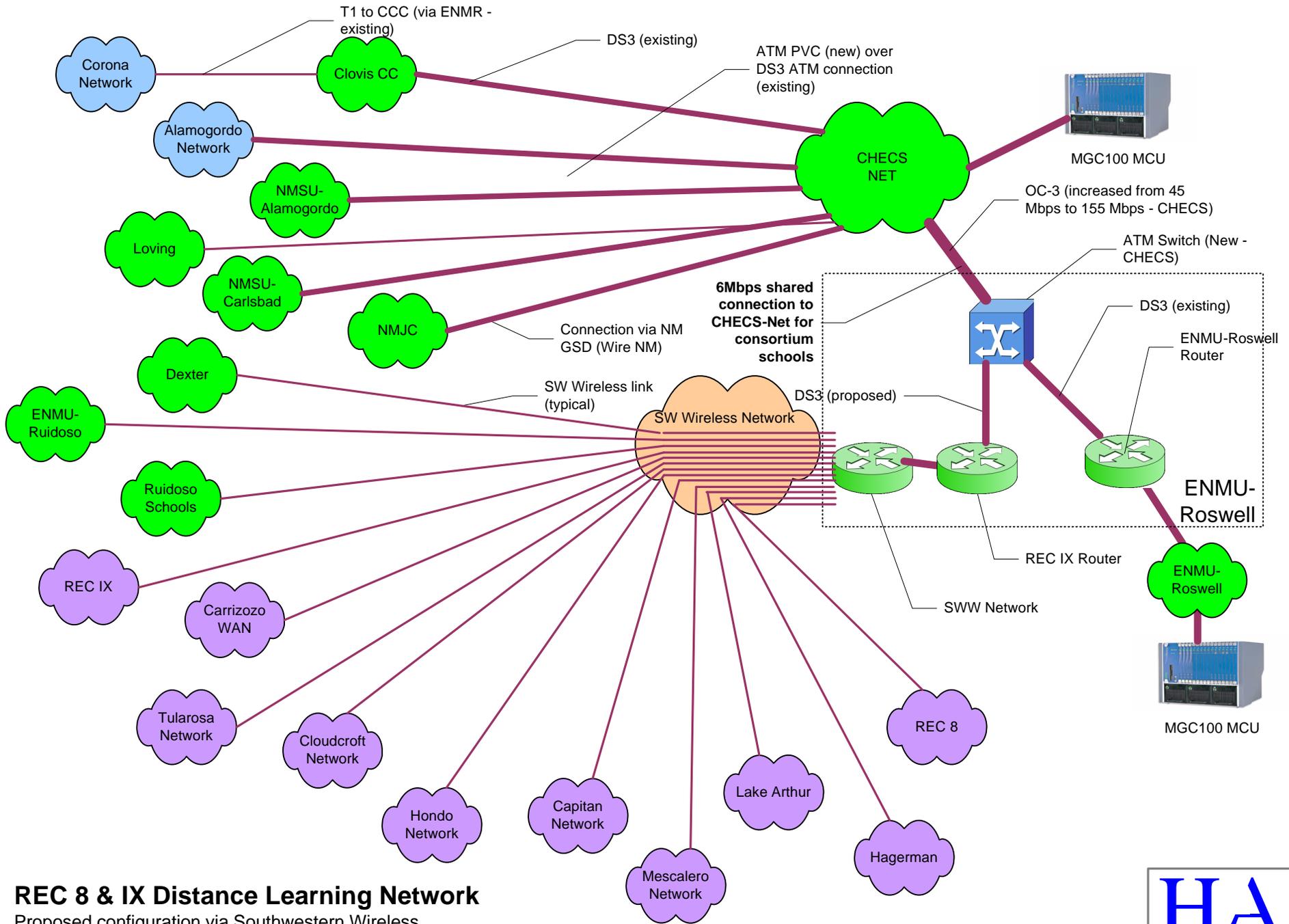
- providing synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities for classes not available under current settings
- providing professional development for administrators, teachers and support staff
- supporting high school reform in rural schools
- assisting in credit recovery
- providing dual credit opportunities in small, rural districts
- supporting Governor's high school initiative of having each high school graduate take a distance learning class.
- supporting Governor's eLearning initiative of having distance learning centers at each high school in the consortium.
- complimenting IDEAL by providing synchronous services
- coordinating services with New Mexico Learning Network
- providing services to areas not covered by Wire New Mexico or making better use of Wire New Mexico through existing connections (ENMU-Roswell and New Mexico Junior College)

**Proposal** 1) To develop a pilot distance learning network in rural New Mexico with a partnership between eleven small rural school districts, Alamogordo Public School District, REC VIII and REC IX, and post secondary institutions.

2) To develop a Rural Education model that could be replicated throughout the state utilizing partnerships of RECs, LEAs and post secondary institutions.

**Budget:** Request for hardware and installation; re-occurring funding for line and connect charges, staff, travel, training, limited hardware, etc. (Please see attached budget request)

**SOURCE:** Mr. Gary Cozzens, Regional Education Cooperative #9



## REC 8 & IX Distance Learning Network

Proposed configuration via Southwestern Wireless  
6 December 2006



**Distance Learning Network Budget**

**Recurring Funding**

**2007-2008 School Year**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Monthly Expense</b>	<b>Annual Fee</b>
CHECs Fees		
NOC Fee	\$140.00	\$1,680.00
Share of OC-3	\$870.00	\$10,440.00
Hub	\$265.00	\$3,180.00
Line Charge	\$1,250.00	\$15,000.00
Subtotal (See Note 1)	\$2,525.00	\$30,300.00
Wireless Network Costs		
ENMU-Ruidoso	\$600.00	\$7,200.00
LEAs (see Note 2)	\$3,300.00	\$39,600.00
Subtotal	\$3,900.00	\$46,800.00
Special Connections		
Corona	\$300.00	\$3,600.00
Alamogordo	\$450.00	\$5,400.00
Loving	\$300.00	\$3,600.00
Subtotal	\$1,050.00	\$12,600.00
Staff		
Program Mgr .75FTE	\$3,333.33	\$40,000.00
Tech .25FTE	\$833.33	\$10,000.00
Fiscal	\$833.33	\$10,000.00
Subtotal	\$5,000.00	\$60,000.00
Other		
Hardware (see Note 3)		\$50,000.00
Travel		\$3,000.00
Materials & Supplies		\$8,000.00
Annual Audit		\$400.00
Indirect (10%)		\$27,886.00
Professional Devel		\$60,000.00
CHECs Membership		\$760.00
Consultant		\$7,000.00
Subtotal		\$157,046.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$12,475.00</b>	<b>\$306,746.00</b>

Note 1: 9 secondaries, 2 RECs and ENMU-Ruidoso(2 parts)  $\$2,525/13 = \$195$  monthly