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June 22, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Education Study Committee

FR: Peter van Moorsel

**RE: STAFF REPORT: INNOVATIVE DIGITAL EDUCATION AND
LEARNING (IDEAL-NM)**

The 2009 Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) Interim Workplan includes a report on the status of the Innovative Digital Education and Learning-New Mexico (IDEAL-NM) initiative.

INTRODUCTION

In 2007 the LESC-endorsed *Cyber Academy Act* was enacted to create a statewide cyber academy. That same year, the Legislature appropriated funds to implement IDEAL-NM. Both of these initiatives represent significant steps toward providing New Mexicans with access to online learning resources. Cooperatively administered by the Public Education Department (PED) and the Higher Education Department (HED), these initiatives aim to:

- provide eLearning services to public schools, higher education institutions, and state agencies;
- reduce geographic and other barriers to educational opportunity statewide; and
- increase the computer literacy skills online learners need to participate in a global economy.

This report reviews the structure of IDEAL-NM, with particular emphasis on the first phase of the project, the creation of the New Mexico Cyber Academy (NMCA), and

provides updates regarding:

- the funding for IDEAL-NM and the statewide cyber academy, as well as PED's and HED's planned expenditure of FY 10 funding for the project;
- the number of students enrolled in cyber academy courses;
- the number of courses available for students of the cyber academy;
- the number of additional courses under development; and
- the training of online teachers.

IDEAL-NM AND NMCA FUNDING

Attachment 1: *IDEAL-NM FY 10 Budget* outlines budget allocations by category for PED and HED.

- For PED, the total budget of \$994,400 includes:
 - \$480,000, or almost half of the budget, for staff salaries and benefits;
 - \$250,000 for professional development (including eTeacher training) for teachers and web-based learning resources for students, as required by the *General Appropriation Act of 2009*;
 - almost \$150,000 for course development;
 - \$30,400 for program evaluation; and
 - \$70,000 to support a building lease and other office costs.
- For HED, the \$930,300 budget includes:
 - approximately \$380,000 for staff salaries and benefits;
 - \$450,000, or almost half of the budget, to support the Learning Management System contract; and
 - approximately \$97,000 for other costs including the facility lease, transportation, and IT supplies and services.

Since 2007, the Legislature has appropriated a total of approximately \$10.1 million to support the implementation of IDEAL-NM and the NMCA, including:

- \$7.4 million to HED:
 - \$1.0 million in the department's budget; and
 - \$6.4 million to implement the IDEAL-NM infrastructure.
- approximately \$2.67 million to PED:
 - approximately \$2.5 million for the department's operational costs;¹
 - \$120,000 for FY 08 to support regional education cooperative (REC) distance learning networks in RECs 3, 8, and 9²; and
 - \$50,000 for FY 08 to the Rio Rancho Cyber Academy.³

¹ The \$2.5 million includes \$500,000 for FY 08, \$1.0 million for FY 09, and \$994,400 for FY 10, of which \$250,000 is to provide professional development for teachers and web-based learning resources for students.

² REC #3 serves the northeast portion of the state, REC #8 serves Dexter, Hagerman, Lake Arthur and Loving, and REC #9 serves Capitan, Carrizozo, Cloudcroft, Corona, Hondo Valley, Ruidoso, and Tularosa.

IDEAL-NM STRUCTURE

The main goal of IDEAL-NM is to establish a common infrastructure for online learning for the project's three main components: P-12 education, higher education, and state agencies. The three main components of this goal are:

(1) A statewide eLearning services center: This center is the physical location for administrative staff for IDEAL-NM and the cyber academy, including the Executive Director, Chief Academic Officer, Course Development Coordinator, Chief Technology Officer, Help Desk Support Staff, Technical Support Specialists, and Special Projects/Management Staff. It is from this center that IDEAL-NM staff provide support for users of the statewide learning management and web-conferencing systems, including:

- administrative and technical help desk services for eLearning students, instructors, facilitators;
- academic services for students;
- course development;
- teacher training and professional development;
- scheduling and management of online courses; and
- continuing eLearning planning.

(2) A statewide eLearning system: This system is the infrastructure that supports all aspects of online learning that includes:

- a Learning Management System (LMS) that manages learning activities through the system's ability to catalog, register, deliver, and track learners and learning, accessible via a web-portal.

In August 2008, HED reported that has contracted with Blackboard, Inc. to provide a vender-hosted statewide LMS for all school districts, charter schools, institutions of higher education (IHEs), and state agencies. According to IDEAL-NM, the LMS contract includes licensed software and software maintenance, out-of-state hosting services, training of personnel and training materials, integration of Banner (a data management system used by IHEs), functional testing, and consulting services for 200,000 potential online users;

- a web-portal at www.IDEAL-NM.org that allows access to IDEAL-NM, and features links for P-12 online learning, higher education online learning, and state agency online training;
- a web-conferencing system that enables learners and instructors to interact face to face. IDEAL-NM reports that, because each program offers different

³ The 2007 Legislature appropriated a total of \$155,000 to the Rio Rancho Cyber Academy. Of this total, \$50,000 was for the implementation of IDEAL-NM, and \$105,000 was for the operation of the Rio Rancho Cyber Academy. In 2008, the Legislature appropriated \$63,500 to the Rio Rancho Cyber Academy.

capabilities, four types of web-conferencing software are included among the shared resources available through the Blackboard LMS;

- a help desk system that allows users to receive online user support. HED has purchased help desk software called SysAid from Ilient, a provider of IT management solutions. The software records calls to the help desk and creates status reports that track IDEAL-NM staff support; and
- hosting centers that are intended to be the physical locations of the technology to support online learning. However, PED and HED have not yet implemented these centers because they lack the funding to purchase and install them; and the IDEAL-NM learning management system remains hosted by the vendor, Blackboard, Inc., rather than at in-state sites.

(3) A cyber academy serving grades P-12 statewide. For this component, PED reports that:

- in school year 2007-2008, the cyber academy operated as a pilot program that offered 53 courses purchased from an online course vendor, and two courses developed in New Mexico. The pilot served 246 students from 17 districts;
- in school year 2008-2009 the cyber academy officially opened, and offered a larger selection of self-developed courses than was offered in the pilot;
- during school year 2008-2009, 1,282 students enrolled in a total of 1,506 courses and completed 1,120 courses;
- reports that the students who dropped out of cyber academy courses did so either because of poor attendance, lack of academic preparation, or lack of preparation for online learning;
- in fall 2008, students passed 80 percent of the courses that were completed, and in spring 2009, the passing rate of courses that were completed was 94 percent; and
- for the summer semester 2009, 213 students have enrolled in 304 courses. PED estimates that up to 1,500 students may enroll for cyber academy courses in fall 2009.

Course Development

According to PED, 45 courses have been developed, and an additional seven courses will be completely developed by fall 2009, for a total of 52 self-developed courses (see Attachment 2). PED adds that the average cost to develop a cyber academy course is approximately \$7,200, including the costs of:

- developing the course content;
- uploading the course content onto Blackboard;

- purchasing additional course content for inclusion in self-developed courses from the National Registry of Online Courses (NROC); and
- purchasing modular, interactive simulations to be used in courses.

IDEAL-NM cites two advantages to the statewide cyber academy’s developing, housing, and maintaining its own courses. One is that the cyber academy can use the same course in multiple semesters and school years without having to pay the fees charged by online course vendors. According to PED, once a course is developed, it would only require periodic revision to ensure that the course content is updated and other online features remain accurate and functional, at a cost of approximately \$1,200 every three years. Another advantage of course ownership is greater control over course content, allowing the cyber academy to ensure that the online courses are aligned with the state’s academic performance standards as required by state statute.

Course Enrollment Costs

One of the main costs of the cyber academy is the eTeacher’s salary. School districts do not pay their teachers extra for courses that they teach via the cyber academy. Rather, IDEAL-NM contracts with the eTeachers, who are paid a per-student fee for each semester-long course that they teach via the cyber academy.

According to IDEAL-NM, school districts must pay \$200 per semester seat (equivalent to one student enrolled in one semester-long class) to cover the eTeacher and other support costs. If a student drops the course within four weeks of the official class start date, 50 percent of the \$200 will be refunded to the school district. IDEAL-NM adds that further refunds are not provided because, like brick-and-mortar schools, IDEAL-NM must pay their contracted teachers even though some students may drop from courses.

In setting the cost of \$200 per semester seat, HED and PED based their estimate on the average returning teacher salary, the average number of classes taught per year, and the average number of students per class, as follows:

Average Returning Teacher Salary	\$59,000
Divided by the average number of classes taught per year (10)	\$5,900
Divided by the average number of students per class (30)	\$197
Estimated (Rounded) Cost	\$200

Quality and Training of Online Teachers

The requirement in the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) that all teachers of core academic areas be highly qualified applies to teachers of online courses as well as to teachers of traditional courses. Thus, the *Statewide Cyber Academy Act* requires that all online courses be taught by highly qualified teachers or, in the case of dual credit courses, by members of the faculty of accredited postsecondary educational institutions. According to IDEAL-NM, the cyber academy recruits highly qualified teachers statewide through its web portal and via announcements sent out to school districts. To be able to teach in the cyber academy, a prospective eTeacher must:

- be highly qualified to teach in the state of New Mexico with a teaching

- endorsement that corresponds to the content area being taught; and
- have experience as an online learner.

According to IDEAL-NM, a total of 64 new eTeachers were trained in FY 09, and the cyber academy teacher pool now comprises 99 teachers in total.

PED reports that eTeachers must complete the IDEAL-NM/Regional Educational Technology Assistance (RETA) eTeacher Training or equivalent training aligned with the online teaching standards developed by the North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) to prepare eTeachers in both the pedagogical aspects of quality online teaching and the technical aspects of teaching within the Blackboard LMS.

Following the initial eTeacher training, eTeachers must:

- engage in a minimum of 16 hours each year of professional development activities specific to online teaching; and
- submit an annual professional development report that summarizes their professional development activities and identifies how knowledge gained in those activities has been applied to their teaching.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND STATE AGENCY TRAINING

Most of IDEAL-NM's implementation has centered on P-12 education. However, some features of the other two components – higher education and state training – are currently in place.

Higher Education

Because institutions of higher education have used online education prior to the implementation of IDEAL-NM, they have developed libraries of online courses and programs of study. When fully implemented, IDEAL-NM will allow higher education and dual credit students to register for higher education courses at all institutions throughout the state via the IDEAL-NM web-portal.

- Currently, the higher education link of the IDEAL-NM web-portal provides a catalog and a schedule of online courses offered online, as well as links to the colleges and universities providing these courses, some of which currently deliver courses through the IDEAL Blackboard LMS.
- The course catalog identifies the higher education institution providing the online course and provides other course information, including prerequisites, the course schedule and duration, course level, credit status and number of credits, delivery method, and instructor.
- In addition to the course catalog, higher education link of the IDEAL-NM web portal provides information on available programs of study, listed by the type of program, including certificate, associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs, and identifies the college or university offering the program.

State Agency Training

IDEAL-NM calls for the development of online courses to be used by New Mexico governmental agencies for staff training. Among the advantages to this development are:

- reduced employee travel time and associated costs;
- expanded training opportunities; and
- self-paced instruction and flexible scheduling.

IDEAL-NM reports that there is currently no budget to develop online training courses for governmental agencies. However, IDEAL-NM adds that interns from the University of New Mexico's Organizational Learning and Information Technology program are currently developing courses in the following subjects: the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Sexual Harassment, Detecting Child Abuse and Neglect, Bloodborne Pathogens, and Rulemaking.

In addition, several state agencies have expressed interest in developing online training courses to be delivered in the IDEAL-NM environment, among them:

- PED;
- HED;
- the Board of Nursing;
- the Corrections Department;
- the Department of Workforce Solutions;
- the Department of Health;
- the Department of Homeland Security;
- the Department of Public Safety;
- the Environment Department;
- the Human Services Department.
- the Regulation and Licensing Department;
- the State Personnel Office; and
- the Taxation and Revenue Department.

Policy Option - Grades Served

The grade levels served by the cyber academy raise an issue that was first reported in August 2008. The NMCA IDEAL-NM aims to provide eLearning services students in grades P-12, and its web-portal includes a P-12 online learning link. However, the *Statewide Cyber Academy Act* requires that the statewide cyber academy provide distance learning courses only for grades 6 through 12.

In order to authorize the statewide cyber academy to develop and provide courses for students in pre-kindergarten through grade 5, the committee may wish to endorse legislation expanding the statewide cyber academy to serve the students in these grades.

IDEAL-NM FY10 Budget		
	PED	HED
Budget Allocation:	\$ 994,400	\$ 930,300
200 Category (Salaries & Benefits)	\$ 480,000	\$ 383,000
Executive Director (Term)	\$ 100,000	
Chief Academic Officer Director (Term)	\$ 83,649	
Student Services Coordinator (Temp)	\$ 44,683	
Business Specialist (Temp)	\$ 44,683	
Administrative Assistant (Term)	\$ 34,097	
Course Dev Coordinator (Temp)	\$ 60,000	
Chief Technology Officer (Perm)		\$ 77,000
Help Desk Support (1 Temp)		\$ 42,200
Technical Support Specialists (2 Term)		\$ 94,676
Special Projects/Managment (2 Temps)		\$ 80,500
Benefits	\$ 110,134	\$ 88,313
300 Category (Contractual Services)	\$ 444,400	\$ 450,000
Agency Adult Training-CRS Dev.	\$ 15,000	
Professional Development & Learning Resources for Students	\$ -	
<i>REC IGAs</i>	\$ 110,000	
<i>eTeacher Training</i>	\$ 50,000	
<i>Regional Support Services/Outreach/Training (REC 10)</i>	\$ 40,000	
<i>Multimedia Resources</i>	\$ 50,000	
<i>SubTotal</i>	<u>\$ 250,000</u>	
Course Development	\$ -	
<i>Course Developer Contracts</i>	\$ 123,000	
<i>Course Enhancement Contracts</i>	\$ 12,750	
<i>Course Developer Training</i>	\$ 3,000	
<i>Quality Assurance Reviews</i>	\$ 10,250	
<i>SubTotal</i>	<u>\$ 149,000</u>	
Program Evaluation	\$ 30,400	
BB Contract Obligations	\$ -	\$ 235,867
BB Hosting	\$ -	\$ 213,474
Other IT Contractual Srvs.	\$ -	\$ 659
400 Category (Other)	\$ 70,000	\$ 97,300
Transportation	\$ -	\$ 8,000
Facility Lease	\$ 52,000	\$ 49,600
Other (Office Supplies, Copy/Printing Services)	\$ 18,000	\$ -
IT Supplies/Services (Cell phones, Internet, email)	\$ -	\$ 26,500
Other IT Services	\$ -	\$ 13,200
Total Budget	\$ 994,400	\$ 930,300
Over/(Short)	\$ -	\$ -
1 Perm, 5 Term, 6 Temps		
Remaining Spec. Appropriation (\$6.4M), BB Contract	0	\$ 499,274

**Online Courses Developed and Offered
by the New Mexico Cyber Academy**

ACT/SAT Preparation (Reading & Writing)
Algebra I
Algebra II
Astronomy
Art Appreciation
Biology
Career Exploration
Chemistry
Consumer math
Creative Art
Creative Writing
Digital Photography
Economics
Earth Science (Middle School)
English I
English II
English III
English IV
Entrepreneurship
Environmental Science
Financial Literacy
Fitness Fundamentals
Fractal Math
French I
Geometry
Grammar & Composition
Health and Personal Wellness
Introduction to Cell Biology
Language Arts 8 (Middle School)
Life Science (Middle School)
Math Refresher
Media Literacy
Nanoscience
New Mexico History
Physics
Physics (Honors)
Pre-Algebra
Pre-Calculus
Psychology
Spanish I
Spanish II
Spanish III
U.S. Government
U.S. History & Geography
World History & Geography

Courses Currently Under Development

Business marketing
Calculus
Trigonometry
Computer Fundamentals
French II
Geology
Spanish IV